Farmer- and Farmers' Organisation-led
Research and Innovation on Agroecology (FORI)

DEVELOPING SKILLS & EVOLVING PARTNERSHIPS

Report on the

Qualitative Mid-Term Survey in the FORI program
(October 2024 -February 2025)

September 2025

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Acronym	Meaning
FORI	Farmer- and Farmers' Organisation-led Research and Innovation on Agroecology for Sustainable Food Systems
FO / FOs	Farmers' Organisation / Farmers' Organisations
AA / AAs	Agri-Agency / Agri-Agencies
EU	European Union
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
GERDAL	Groupe d'Expérimentation et de Recherche : Développement et Actions Localisées
CIRAD	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement
GFAiR	The Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation
AIS	Agricultural Innovation System
CNOP-CAM	Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes au Cameroun
TTGAU	Tanzania Tree Growers Association
UPA DI	UPA Développement International
IRAD	Institut de Recherche Agricole pour le Développement, Cameroon
CEFFEL	Conseil Expérimentation Formation en Fruits et Légumes, Madagascar
PFO	Pacific Farmer Organisations
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
GTA	Gender-Transformative Approach

Quotes from the participants of the FORI Atelier in Gembloux, 2023

*"One of the challenges was **to overturn the idea of conventional research**. For most farmers' organizations and farmers, their experience of research is that they own the land, and companies or academics come to use their land and tell them what to do. […] At the start of the FORI project, for a time, the farmers' organizations and farmers waited for instructions from [FO] technicians […]. Reversing this tendency is a constant challenge." (p.51)*

*"We know that researchers have this duty to evolve and have their own research mandate. When we approach them for research topics, do they not sometimes impose their point of view so that it aligns with their research topic? **How can producers change this balance of power** so that researchers do not take the upper hand?" (p.56)*

*"In practice, there are always biases and conflicts of interest. […] Each actor must take a certain step back, and there must be **an understanding of the other's position** in this process. Otherwise, there is a risk that action research becomes a process of instrumentalization. (p.56)*

Documented in:

Dietsch, L. (2025). Capitalisation transversale des expériences de mise en oeuvre de projets de recherche action financés dans le cadre du programme FORI. Groupe d'Expérimentation et de Recherche : Développement et Actions Localisées (GERDAL); AgriCord.

Executive summary

This survey report captures key insights into and from farmer organization (FO)-led participatory action research as experienced in the FORI programme. At its core, FORI aims to empower farmers to engage in knowledge co-creation and co-innovation, ensuring that research is not simply conducted for farmers but by and with them. This survey analysis complements other important capitalisation processes emanating from the FORI implementation, including the GERDAL capitalisation document. These capitalisation documents contribute to the growing body of knowledge on participatory and farmer and farmers' organisation-led research.

What Sets Farmers' Organisation-Led Research Apart

Farmers' organisation-led research distinguishes itself from conventional research models through ownership and co-creation, placing farmers and their organizations at the heart of the process. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, technologies and new agricultural practices or assisting partners without epistemological authority or decision-making power in the key points of research and process, FOs actively lead the process as an equal partner. FOs facilitate the dialogue and collaboration between their farmer members and research, decide on research priorities and co-formulate research questions. This ensures that co-research and its results have direct relevance to their farmer members. This approach creates also a tangible link between research outcomes and FO service provision, embedding research results into advisory, training, and production support activities. Central to this model is trust and equal partnership. Trust between farmers, researchers, and agri-agencies serves as the foundation for collaboration and mutual accountability.

Unique Challenges

Working in this participatory co-creation mode brings its own set of challenges. Differing priorities and shifting power balances between farmers, researchers, and other actors must be carefully navigated. Questions around data collection and quality are recurring topics of discussion. Furthermore, the debate over what constitutes "good" research extends beyond agronomic performance metrics to include social, economic, and organizational dimensions. This requires all stakeholders to rethink research norms and standards and move towards a new paradigm on how research is done and knowledge created.

Lessons Learned from FORI

FORI implementers report that attitudes and mindsets, self-confidence, as well as self-awareness are crucial ingredients for successful joint initiatives. Finding researchers who are willing and able to adopt a facilitative role in knowledge co-creation is not self-evident, but when a good match is found, researchers can become powerful enablers—and they themselves gain valuable learning opportunities. FO staff and agri-agencies act as key facilitators, with systematic assessment tools laying a strong basis for discussing and prioritizing research questions.

Gender and youth inclusion have been recurring themes, with at least one project moving beyond mainstreaming to adopt gender-transformative approaches. Implementers also highlight that the initial time investment required is significant, as trust and consensus-building require continuous discussions, transparent communication and careful coordination of the process and decision-making. Research designs must remain adaptable, evolving together with the realities on the ground.

One important insight concerns data quality. If research arrangements – protocols, experimentations and monitoring systems do not consider the realities, results risk being unreliable. The main task of farmers is to run their farming businesses and action research process must be compatible with that reality. Support mechanisms for data collection are therefore essential, while initial data analysis and interpretation remain the core competence of researchers. Joint validation processes of findings and results, considering farmers' own observations, are new and highly valued by participants. Program participants stress the need for practical, hands-on data analysis and evaluation methods that empower farmers and farmers' organisations to assess progress in tangible ways, complementing statistical or laboratory analysis. FOs are well-placed to translate research outcomes into actionable practices for their members and disseminate results organically through integration into FO service provisions. Also, FO staff report that their ability to facilitate dialogue among multiple stakeholders, beyond research partners, has improved significantly.

Emerging Changes

The program is gradually contributing to reshaping the epistemic framework of agricultural research. Power relations, resource flows, and notions of "good research" are being renegotiated. Farmers and FOs are becoming more confident and self-aware, fully engaging in and leading action research. In the process, they are building a repertoire of new skills. Supporting agri-agencies act as facilitators rather than managers, with FO staff connecting this cooperation to broader strategic dimensions such as production system design, financial management, business planning, and networking.

Researchers are equally evolving and developing new skills – particularly so-called soft skills. They recognize that the action research or farmer or farmers' organisation-led research process requires skills and mindsets that are not necessarily developed during academic studies. The skills and attributes frequently mentioned include patience, communicative intelligence, accessibility, and a pragmatic attitude. Their physical and virtual presence builds trust, while their validation of farmers' practices provides a source of pride and renewed ownership. Over time, researchers shift from experts to partners, equipping FOs with tools for evidence generation and thereby strengthening communities in influence and decision making.

Reflections and Outlook

FO-led research is not just a technical process but a transformative one, shaking up established epistemic frameworks and pushing towards contextually relevant research. There may be no single "correct" model of roles and responsibilities; rather, arrangements must be flexible and suited to each context. The guiding principle is that farming communities should be engaged in ways they desire, in ways that make them more autonomous, and in ways that leave them with *more* (e.g. skills, resources, intellectual property, solutions) than was extracted (knowledge and data) from them.

Facilitating organizations must position themselves from the perspective of farming communities while managing expectations and safeguarding resources. Programmes like FORI strengthen the legitimacy of FOs as research partners, giving them long-overdue recognition as drivers of innovation. Ultimately, this work should be seen as part of a larger effort to support farmers and their organizations in becoming not only innovative but also economically viable, sustainable, equitable, and resilient. Supporting actors are encouraged to embed FO-led participatory research into their holistic strategies for rural development.

1 Introduction

AgriCord is an alliance of 13 agri-agencies, which are non-governmental organizations for development co-operation with structural links to the farmers' and rural members' organisations and agricultural cooperatives in their home countries. Agri-agencies support capacity development of farmers' organisations across continents in longer-term partnership based on the strategies and priorities of these organisations.

The FORI program

Since January 1st, 2022, AgriCord implements the "*Farmers Organisations Leading Research & Innovation on Agroecology for Sustainable Food Systems* (FORI)" initiative. The initiative is funded by the European Union (EU) and the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) for the period of 2022-2026. **The goal of the program is to secure a transition towards resilient, productive, and sustainable agroecological agri-food systems through farmer-led innovation and research**. Farmers and their organizations are central in the transition to agroecology-based sustainable food systems. To fulfil this role, they need to be supported to be at the forefront of research and innovation arising from their experiences and the daily challenges they face.

FORI is strengthening farmers' capacity to innovate, to experiment, and to co-produce knowledge through its five interlinked components: (i) Component 1 – Advocacy and lobbying; (ii) Component 2 – Cross-cutting methodological development and support, capacity building and capitalization / systematization; (iii) Component 3 – Overall coordination; (iv) Component 4- Action Research; and (v) Component 5 – small grants for ad-hoc projects.

Goals of action research sub-component

At the heart of component 4, and the focus of the program, are thirteen (13) action-research projects in seventeen (17) countries. These projects are implemented at the local level with strong linkages to the subnational and national levels through the farmers' organisation structures. The farmers' organisations provide legitimate, effective and efficient infrastructure to scale practices and innovations, and to work on the enabling environment for the transition towards agroecology.

Overall, despite differences in technical focus and methodological approach, all the projects strengthen local, subnational and national farmers organizations' capacity to design and implement a farmer-led, iterative action-research on agroecology that builds on farmers' knowledge, competencies and experiences and promotes functional partnerships between farmers, FOs, AAs, researchers and other stakeholders at the local and national levels.

The central issue common to all the projects is the support for farmers to overcome challenges related to the agroecological transition. This transition challenge must be addressed from two sides described below, and tackle overarching issues in their local and sectoral expressions:

First, the side of 'traditionally' practiced agriculture. Family farmers, with production systems that can be considered traditional, often have extremely limited financial resources and therefore difficulty accessing the tools and means of the Green Revolution, which include improved seed material, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and so on. These systems tend to be less productive than their "conventional" counterpart. Here, agroecological practices present a big opportunity by improving the productivity of farms. Agroecological practices are accessible to

these farming communities due to lower investment barriers and can be incentivizing for their cost-saving and productivity increasing potential. For the FORI program, this is the typical profile of its action research projects.

Second, the challenges faced by farmers who have entered 'conventional' production models rooted in the Green Revolution, and who are nearing the limits of what this production model can do for them. These farmers often suffer the consequences of intensified conventional farming regimes - soil depletion, susceptibility to pests and diseases, increasingly expensive and inaccessible inputs, and negative effects on the health of their communities and environment.

Through component 1 and component 5, led by the continental and regional farmers' organisations, the experiences arising from the action research projects, as well as their member consultations and policy studies are also contributing to the regional, continental and global reflections on agroecological transition, and agricultural research agenda and methodologies, as well as policies related to that.

2 Purpose of this document

FO RI program stands for continuous learning and knowledge co-creation and co-innovation. After two years of implementation, a first stocktaking exercise was conducted and the AgriCord program management team wanted to get a view on how the program has strengthened the capacities and competencies of various actors involved. A web-based survey was carried out amongst implementing partners to gather qualitative data on these questions.

The survey collected…

a) feedback from farmers' organisations (FOs), agri-agencies (AA), researchers and FOs staff on the skills and knowledge acquired so far through the research process
b) data on the added value of AAs and AgriCord in the implementation
c) data on the challenges and lessons learned by the actors
d) recommendations for the improvement of the action research process

Also, earlier in 2023, a workshop was held among FORI participants in Gembloux. Laurent Dietsch (2024) documented and described those discussions in a document from here on referred to as 'GERDAL capitalisation document'.

This document here combines the qualitative data from the online survey, the GERDAL capitalisation document findings and the technical project reports to extract and synthesize insights on the approach of the FORI program.

The qualitative survey was co-designed by the program management staff of the AgriCord secretariat and an consultant tasked by the EU with a stocktaking exercise for the FORI program. Responses were collected via Google Forms in three languages (English, French, Spanish) during a period starting mid-November 2024 until late December 2024.

For more on the survey methodology and respondents, see Annex.

3 The particularities of farmer-led action research

The FORI program set-up is based on the idea of equal collaboration among farmers, researchers, local communities, and farmers' organizations, creating an environment conducive for knowledge co-creation and co-innovation. The FORI projects also aim to ensure inclusivity and participation from all demographics, including women and young people.

While more than half of the survey respondents were involved in research projects in the past, 40% of the respondents did not have any research experience before their participation in the FORI program.

This means that research projects in general and farmer-led research in particular were new to them. To build common understanding of the program approach, action research and co-innovation, the program started with an inception phase for the implementing partners and stakeholders.

The action-research and co-innovation systems expert Bernard Triomphe from CIRAD provided coaching and feedback during the inception phase to the project partners. Some projects also benefitted from direct methodological support by Laurent Dietsch from GERDAL. the aforementioned capitalisation document (Dietsch, 2024) and was also shared with all FORI action research projects and validated together in virtual sessions. In addition, the AgriCord program management team organized a series of webinars in which topics such as agroecology principles and partnership principles for co-research and innovation were presented by experts such as Oliver Oliveros, Agroecology Coalition and Alessandro Mescchinelli, GFAiR.

3.1 Key differences

There are significant differences between conventional research setups and a farmer-led approach, and for many respondents, an understanding for these differences has developed gradually over the course of the implementation. Awareness-raising and the methodological support described above, was an important activity at the start of the program and has been a continuous trajectory throughout the implementation. These activities address not only participants without prior research experience but also those who already participated in research and held pre-conceived ideas e.g. about their role in research processes or how their relationship to other actors would look like. Table 1 in the Annex provides a summary of these differences.

Respondents with previous research experience observed a clear difference between traditional research approaches and the participatory action research approach of the FORI program. Three recurring main themes that distinguish the approaches were brought up by participants.

First, the theme of ownership and co-creation. The most distinct aspect of this research approach as defined by respondents is its co-construction and strong involvement of non-academic actors and as a result of this, its practical focus. The following two quotes summarize the discourse.

"[In Action Research] the process and the results belong to everyone. Here, no one can claim credit for success or failure - even sequential results are shared."

- FO staff CNOP-CAM, Cameroon

"A key difference was the level of community and stakeholder engagement. My past research was more researcher-driven, with minimal/no involvement from local farmers or stakeholders. However, the FORI project emphasized collaborative research, involving farmers, farmers' organisation, research institutions and local communities throughout the entire process. (…) While previous research focused mainly on generating results for academic knowledge, the FORI project prioritized the practical application of research to improve farmers' livelihoods and build climate resilience."

-FO staff TTGAU, Tanzania

Second, the impact on the FO's service provision. Leading and coordinating action research has helped FOs to expand and strengthen technical extension and scale up agroecological practices. FO extensionists and researchers have trained lead/relay farmers, who pass on skills to their peers. This peer-to-peer model has increased adoption because farmers trust what they see and learn from neighbours.

As one FO staff member in Tanzania explained:

"(FO RI project) has contributed to providing extension services to members as lead farmers are trained."

An agri-agency staff member (Afdi) in Mali pointed out:

"The participatory approach reinforces the appropriation of results by producers. Action research is a powerful tool for demonstrating the viability of agroecological practices and encouraging their adoption."

Third, the centrality of trust. One maybe unexpected observation is that farmer-led action research strengthens the relationship between farmers' organizations and their members. Unlike conventional research, where farmers often feel sidelined, the full participatory process creates space for deep dialogue and feedback loops.

As one respondent (CNOP-CAM) from Cameroon put it:

"One thing we believe to be essential in FORI's contribution is the strengthening of trust between the CNOP-CAM umbrella organization and its grassroots members, who have understood that they have an attentive ear and are members of an organization that has the capacity to respond.

Trust grows when farmers see their insights translated into action. Over time, these cycles of joint learning and reflection reinforce accountability and legitimacy within farmers' organization as well as research partners. Action research positions farmers as co-researchers and decision-makers rather than beneficiaries.

3.2 Challenges and needs

Across diverse contexts and continents, farmers' organisation and farmer-led action research faced a **wide range of structural and external challenges** that shaped implementation and outcomes. In some cases, land rights disputes—such as conflicts triggered by the privatisation of formerly cooperative-held land in the Philippines—undermined trust and collaboration. Gender and generational barriers, evident in projects in Burkina Faso and Tanzania, limited the active participation of women and youth despite their central role in farming, requiring deliberate strategies to foster inclusion.

Weak infrastructure in rural areas, including poor roads, high transport costs, inadequate storage, and unreliable energy, created logistical delays and reduced the efficiency of trials and slowed down dissemination of results. Organisational capacity gaps within farmers' organisations ranging from administrative systems to technical skills constrained sometimes effective coordination. Chronic financial shortages at farmers' organisation and farmer levels mirrored broader sector-wide difficulties.

Insecurity in countries such as Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, and Mali restricted movement and made fieldwork hazardous, while environmental stresses—droughts, erratic rainfall, and lack of irrigation—frequently disrupted or destroyed experimental plots. These overlapping pressures demand constant adaptation and influence how projects can be designed, implemented, and scaled.

In some projects, the geographic spread of experimental sites created additional logistical and resource challenges. For instance, in contexts such as the Pacific Islands, the cost and effort of mobility made participatory action research particularly resource intensive. These settings required creative solutions, such as involving students to assist with monitoring tasks and ensuring that technical support was consistently available to farmers.

Beyond these external factors, the particularities of farmer-led research, its goals and setup can lead to their own set of challenges. Some of them are related to the countries they are implemented in, to constraints of the agricultural sector at large, or to organized producer groups in general, but a some of them are specific to the methodology as such. This section summarizes the different types of challenges that were reported. A shortened table can be found in Table 2 of the Annex.

Differing priorities and need for new power balances

A successful action research process led by farmers' organizations and farmers inevitably shifts power relations between farmers, researchers, and technical staff. These shifts are essential for creating a more democratic, inclusive, and effective research environment.

A major shift relates to recognition of different knowledge systems. **Researchers** and farmers' organization staff must let go of epistemic authority and accept that farmers' experiential knowledge is valid and necessary to the research and innovation processes.

Within FO RI program one of the **key strategies for mitigating power imbalances** in farmer-led action research is the intentional **selection of farmers' organizations and members who demonstrate a strong intrinsic motivation** to engage in participatory co-research and capacity development and co-innovation on agroecology. By prioritizing organizations that were willing and somewhat prepared to take on leadership roles, the thorough

selection and induction process set a foundation for meaningful ownership of farmers' organizations of co-research.

Farmers' organizations' technical staff might be more accustomed to acting as service providers or troubleshooters. In co-research and innovation processes, farmers' organization staff need to take on facilitative rather than directive roles and create space and empower farmers to lead discussions and experiments. Technical staff become capacity builders, mentors, and knowledge brokers, working to strengthen their own as well as farmers' analytical, organizational, and advocacy skills. This shift requires humility, patience, and a willingness to adapt one's role based on farmers' evolving needs. Being involved in action research process might have wider impact on how farmers' organization provides technical and economical services to its members by changing the mindset of technical staff. Some survey responses give indications to this extent, but the program timeframe is too short to evaluate impacts on the overall service provision of farmers' organizations, yet.

An important strategy to shift power dynamics is to grant farmers' organizations control over the research budget. That proved to be a crucial lever in rebalancing power, as it enabled them to contract researchers who are open to collaborative methodologies and willing to work as partners rather than experts and leading authorities of the process. Also, it allowed budgeting sufficient staff time at the farmers' organization to lead, facilitate, and coordinate the process. This financial and strategic autonomy ensured that research questions reflect farmers' priorities, and it also fostered accountability between all actors.

Moreover, in many projects, there were some **compensations to farmers who contributed land or resources** for research purposes through direct support or by hosting trials farmers' organization owned plots. This acknowledges the resource contributions of farmers and removes financial barriers to participation. These strategies together shift the action research model within FO RI toward one based on mutual respect, shared responsibility, and long-term value for the farming community.

Some respondents referred to **difficulties in identifying research partners interested in farmers' organization led action research**. These difficulties can stem from conflicting interests and priorities between farmers, researchers, and farmers' organizations, which are common in action research and co-innovation processes due to differing roles, incentives, and perspectives. These issues were also reflected in several survey responses.

Respondents from CNOP/UNCPM in Mali:

"How to get researchers to work with producers on producers' own concerns? How to get research to accept that producers are the bearers of action, and that researchers must support them rather than replace them?"

Farmers typically prioritize practicality, immediate benefits, and risk reduction. Their expectations for co-research and innovation are focused on improving yields, incomes, and resilience in the short to medium term. **Researchers tend to prioritize** scientific rigor, publication, and theoretical advancement. Researchers' timelines are usually longer, and success may be defined in terms of academic outputs rather than immediate practical adaptability, as a researcher's career normally advances based on publications and teaching responsibilities. The number of farmers adopting practices based on their research results is not normally amongst

their key performance indicators. On the other hand, **farmers' organizations might tend to an even wider set of priorities including** advocacy, institutional strengthening, service provision, and representing collective interests.

Clashing schedules can hinder progress in action research and co-innovation processes. Farmers operate in tight seasonal cycles and have limited time for experimentation unless they are sufficiently compensated or relatively confident in a positive outcome. The schedule of researchers follows another set of cycles which do not necessarily align with agricultural calendars or local rhythms. At the same time, farmers' organizations may be under-resourced and overstretched, affecting their ability to support prolonged engagement or provide facilitation at the time needed.

Several respondents also pointed out that a single researcher was sometimes unable to cover the full scope of activities required, particularly where sites were dispersed over large distances. This underlines the **need for adequate staffing** and, in some cases, the delegation of responsibilities to additional facilitators, students, or FO staff to maintain continuity in monitoring and support.

Finally, the success of co-research is highly relational. The "chemistry" between researchers, farmers, and FO staff plays a decisive role in whether collaboration thrives. In some contexts, heavy facilitation by FOs and agri-agencies was required to build trust and maintain engagement. These relationships take time and consistent effort to nurture, reminding us that **participatory research is as much a social process as a technical one**.

Data collection & quality

Data collection is a crucial part of any type of research, and in action research processes and co-innovation, transparent data ownership needs to be carefully discussed right from the beginning and agreed upon among the actors.

In the FORI program, farmers participate in designing monitoring system and were often also responsible for regular monitoring. In some cases, these responsibilities were taken up by FO-staff and/or researchers / research assistance. When farmers played the central role in data collection, they received methodological training by farmers' organization staff and researchers in the initial phase when experiments were conceived and set up.

However, producers were prone to forget elements after a while which makes support for **continuous monitoring necessary to ensure data quality**. As farmers have their regular farming businesses to attend to, they may struggle to find time during busy agricultural seasons to consistently follow protocols and data collection practices. In some cases farmers abandoned experiments due to time and labour pressure.

Finally, **with growing scale of experiments**, it was sometimes challenging to mobilize additional trainers who could explain protocols and data collection procedures to new farmers that were interested in participating in the co-research.

These challenges in data collection point out to a need to **reflect about how much and which parts of the data collection should be the responsibility of farmers**; and what part of it may be more suitable for other actors in the process. Assigning farmers the primary role of data collectors or monitors might seem practical and participatory, as well as cheap. But this practice might, sometimes, unintentionally limit their agency and reinforce traditional power imbalances if it does respond to farmers' own genuine need to strengthen their competencies in structured

and systematic experimentation and documenting observations. The most important thing is farmers' role in validating what will be monitored and how, rather than them doing it.

Also, **scientific monitoring tools may not always capture how farmers perceive and interpret changes in their fields**. When their observational insights are sidelined in favor of standardized data formats, valuable experiential knowledge is lost and the conventional epistemic system reinforced. The data collection should be designed to ensure that in addition to standardized data, observations of farmers are given sufficient attention in the process.

As is the case in some FO RI projects, the **staff of farmers' organizations assume a more active role** in managing monitoring protocols, allowing farmers to engage in more strategic and knowledge-sharing functions. This reinforces internal capacities at farmers' organization for future research initiatives and for strengthening technical extension.

Expanding the idea of research: beyond agronomy to socio-economics

Beyond the challenges of methodology and data management, the scope of research questions themselves deserves attention. While FO-led research has so far been strong on agronomic experimentation, **there is a growing need to expand inquiry into the socio-economic dimensions** that influence adoption and sustainability of innovations.

Our experience with FORI's action research projects shows that first and current efforts focus heavily on agronomic challenges, while socio-economic dimensions remain underexplored. Yet, if we take the underlying principles of agroecology seriously, dimensions such as market dynamics, consumer preferences, and access to finance are not just complementary, but should increasingly be addressed in action research efforts.

This gap revealed itself to us for example through the challenges encountered when introducing new crops or varieties. Farmers' hesitation often has less to do with agronomic performance and more with socio-economic uncertainty: Will there be a market? Will consumers accept the product? How profitable can these novel production systems be? In some cases, unrealistic expectations around yield or demand can lead to disappointment and even rejection of action research results or of agroecological approaches altogether.

Such scenarios erode trust in the research process, making future adaptation and collaboration more difficult. There is arguably much to gain from systematic FO-led action research into socio-economic questions in the future. By doing so, farmers' organizations can better manage expectations, adapt trial designs, and co-create strategies that reflect both the biophysical and socio-economic realities of farming communities.

4 What did farmers, researchers and FO staff learn?

Many of the most significant learnings in the FORI projects went beyond the acquisition of technical skills. Participants emphasized that **attitudes, self-confidence, and self-awareness** were often the first areas of change and also the foundation for all subsequent competence development. For many farmers, taking part in research and innovation processes was a new experience that required courage and trust. It often took time before they felt confident enough to share their knowledge, observations, and practices openly with farmers' organization staff and researchers. Some were initially suspicious about how their data would be used or whether their contributions would truly be valued. This underlines that **co-research is as much about changing mindsets and relationships as it is about producing data**.

Farmers' organizations played a critical role in creating safe spaces for dialogue and helping members build confidence. As trust grew, farmers began to speak more freely, challenge assumptions, and take ownership of experiments. For staff of farmers' organizations, the learning process was equally transformative. Many organizations found that success depended not only on technical expertise but also on **adopting a facilitative mindset** — to actively empower farmers to take the lead.

The development of new competences was also required from researchers. Respondents noted that it was sometimes **difficult to find researchers** familiar with action research or willing to work in a genuinely collaborative way. Early phases of the projects were marked by the need to align expectations and cultivate mutual respect. Farmers' organizations frequently acted as intermediaries, ensuring that farmers' agency, needs, and experiential knowledge were recognized and valued.

Taken together, these processes led to significant growth for all involved. Respondents — producers, researchers, agri-agencies, and farmers' organizations' staff — consistently reported that their **skills, confidence, and collaborative capacities had evolved** since the start of their FO RI projects. This evolution spanned the entire research cycle: from problem identification, through the setup of protocols, validation of results and innovations, to the dissemination of insights and reshaping of extension systems.

4.1 Defining problems and research topics

All the respondents found it beneficial to define research topics through a participatory process involving farmers, research experts and local partners, putting the needs of farmers at the centre.

Researchers found that the process was a chance to learn and to enrich their own perspective. For some it was the first time to thoroughly discuss wider challenges within farming and research and experimentation with farmers. Some researchers expressed their surprise that some farmers already conducted their own research and experimentations to improve production. Some researchers acknowledged that farmers have simply more practical knowledge on farming practices than they do, and that practical knowledge is indispensable in researching agroecology. Working with farmers motivated researchers to conduct experiments under real-life conditions.

One of the researchers described the process of problem identification:

"As the constellation [...] grew to include more farmworkers [...], our experiential knowledge, strengthened by data from the project, provided additional insights into other causes of problem and challenge identification."

The most notable response from researchers was to **characterize farmers as genuine co-research partners with valid opinions** as opposed to being an object in the experimental setup or someone that is expected to adopt the results after researchers have finished their work.

A researcher from Cameroon wrote:

"In this type of project, I have learnt that the producer is a partner who has a say. So, I consult him now just as I would do with a colleague."

Other researchers expressed that **pre-existing skills of farmers can be honed and leveraged**, as a researcher from the Philippines describes:

"I gained a deeper understanding of how farmers, farmworkers, and farm cooperative staff spatially assess their farms, with many demonstrating sharp observation skills and critical thinking in the field. I incorporated in their training design GPS mapping and photo voicing, trained them in more field soil sampling and ecological assessment, among other trainings, to help corroborate their analysis and evaluation and to highlight their strengths in the field."

Taken together, these accounts emphasize that action-research processes require time, space and coordination. **Active listening** is a key competence in the process. This requires time, space and careful coordination. Active listening emerges as a key competence: problems should not be assumed or pre-defined but surfaced through dialogue that uses language farmers understand and can engage with. This **translation of abstract theoretical concepts into everyday language** is a skill researchers must deliberately develop when engaging in action research.

Facilitating communication between different actors participating in the action research, as well as coordinating the different activities is where farmers' organizations' **extensionists and technicians have played an important role** in FO RI projects. They help to create trust and open up space for dialogue, as they have already an existing relationship with member farmers to whom they provide different services.

An FO-staff member from the Philippines expressed:

"Yes, I have learned new approaches, including the importance of addressing social aspects through proper coordination and communication with team members, partners, and the FORI team. Through this Participatory Action Research Project, I have gained the ability to listen to and value everyone's perspectives, ideas, opinions, suggestions. I recognize now that each person brings unique insights into the challenges and problems faced. This includes understanding myself and expressing my suggestion, feelings and needs which I did not do before the implementation of the project."

Building on this focus on dialogue and trust-building, many respondents also pointed to **the value of using systematic assessment tools**. The agri-agencies in the action research projects introduced systematized and holistic assessment tools that informed the discourse on the definition of research topics. A FO-staff member of in Tanzania responded:

"I encountered practical challenges […]. Through this project, I learned to take a more inclusive and systematic approach to problem-solving. […Listing scenarios, tools and practices…] This experience has greatly expanded my ability to address complex agricultural and environmental challenges in a holistic and effective manner while prioritizing farmers challenges.

By linking FO-level analysis with members' needs, **these tools ensure that organizational decisions remain relevant and responsive to farmers' everyday realities**. Their regular application helps FOs to understand their situation, identify issues they want to address, set out a roadmap and implement their actions systematically. These tools are usually not geared towards scientific applications, but FOs highlight that they are crucial to understand their situation which then in turn informs their research priorities. As a result, with farmers at the centre of the process, the prioritized issues move beyond questions with purely academic value and to address questions relevant to the livelihood of the participants and on the systems they are seeking to transform.

Inclusivity as key dimension of research

As seen above, inclusivity at the stage of the problem definition is a frequent topic in the responses collected which extends into the issue of gender and youth inclusion.

The respondents generally state that the projects enhance their gender sensitivity starting at the problem definition and seeking to find a gender balanced setup in the different phases of research process. There seems to be a **growing understanding that women and youth have specific needs that must be addressed**. Also, that they have experiences that differ from that of most male farmers. Resulting from those differing lived realities, they have alternative opinions and insights to consider. The inclusion of women and youth ultimately serves the long-term sustainability of agriculture and farming communities. A farmer and FO-member of UNAPOB responded:

"I learned that defining research topics must be centred on the needs of communities, particularly those of women and youth. It is essential to consider their experiences and challenges. This way we can formulate relevant research questions that can lead to practical and sustainable solutions. This also ensures that the research outcomes have a positive impact on local development."

The survey responses also show that gender-transformative approaches are not yet applied in most project. However, the projects **successfully mainstream gender inclusion** and awareness into existing institutional and societal and agricultural settings. Gender Mainstreaming (GM) involves the integration of gender as a transversal issue in different activities. This lays **a foundation for systemic change**.

A **gender-transformative approach (GTA)** in agricultural development goes beyond addressing immediate needs of women or merely ensuring their inclusion in activities and FO governance. It aims to challenge and dismantle the deep-rooted cultural, societal and family systems of power and inequality that perpetuate gender disparities. Unlike women-centered approaches, which primarily focus on meeting the practical needs of women, or gender mainstreaming, which incorporates gender considerations into existing structures, a transformative approach seeks systemic change by addressing power imbalances, cultural norms, and structural barriers.

For inclusion to be meaningful and lasting, it often needs to begin at **the household level**. Decisions about land use, labor allocation, and resource investment are usually made within families, and these dynamics strongly influence who participates in trials, who benefits from innovations, and whose knowledge shapes the research agenda. By engaging households as a whole - women, men, and youth — action research can create a shared understanding of challenges and foster joint decision-making from the outset. This not only improves the relevance and adoption of agroecological practices but also lays the groundwork for stronger participation in farmers' organizations and community initiatives. Dedicated action research that explores household decision-making processes, intra-household labor divisions, and resource control can provide crucial insights to design interventions that are socially sustainable and transformative.

The agri-agency We Effect has employed GTA from the onset of the sunflower project in Tanzania. We Effect staff explained in their responses:

"This process [identifying research priorities] has involved employing gender-transformative approaches that engage diverse community voices—particularly women and marginalized groups—to ensure that research topics are inclusive and address underlying social norms. […][To] critically analyse existing agricultural challenges with a gender lens and incorporate local experiential knowledge to prioritize topics that can lead to tangible improvements in sunflower productivity and sustainability along the value chain."

This project stands as progressive example for the use of gender transformative approaches, showing a path for future programming.

4.2 Defining protocols, and conducting experiments

The focus of most FORI action research projects is on agricultural, production practices. This type of agricultural research relies on systematic experimentation to develop new knowledge, improve farming techniques, and address challenges like climate change impacts, pests, and soil degradation. Proper protocol setting and experimental design are crucial for ensuring reliable, reproducible, and scientifically valid results.

Research protocols must be established in a participatory process and structured together with the different actors to ensure that they are accessible and understandable while responding to the needs and research priorities of producers. The process includes clarifying objectives, methodologies and establishing measurable indicators. One member of UNCPM in Mali summarized the process:

"The protocol was drawn up by the farmers, the FO technicians and the research team, and all the data mentioned in the research protocols took the farmers' opinions into account and were validated by the farmers."

This process takes several iterations. **The respondents of the survey highlighted the time-investments necessary to build consensus among** farmers, FO staff and researchers. Participatory co-creation processes simply take more time than conventional protocol setting due to the number and diversity of people involved. A staff member of the agri-agency UPA DI said about their experience in Haiti:

"Defining research protocols requires a great deal of time, discussion and clarification, in order to arrive at protocols that satisfy all stakeholders."

Also, the setup of the experimentation sites takes more time. As structured experiments in agricultural research follow a defined methodology to test hypotheses, evaluate agricultural practices, and generate reliable data, they are carefully designed to ensure accuracy, reproducibility, and meaningful conclusions. With more actors involved, sufficient time and support needs to be given to agree upon and communicate criteria and setup, establish clear and structured experiments, including site selection, crop trials, and testing of agroecological practices.

Related to this, a researcher from Tanzania advocates for simplicity where possible:

"Farmers do not need complex trial designs; there should be few things to compare."

While time investments are necessary, naturally there are constraints to the amount of time that each actor can dedicate to the process. For researchers, the prospect of spending much time and in-situ presence to run a participatory research process with all its implications might not be feasible. This is where FO staff members play a crucial role, bridging between farmers and researchers and providing more regular support to farmers with their experimentations.

The time invested, translates into improvements in the process. Respondents reported for example that they learned to optimize the allocation of resources to run protocols and set up experiments. Such efficiency is important because financial and human resources are typical bottlenecks, not only in action research but in general. Prior assessments, well-defined research topics and frequent communication lay the groundwork for efficient and effective allocation of resources. An FO-staff member of Farmcoop in the Philippines said:

"Additionally, I have learned to consider the various environmental factors that impact the implementation of this project. […] I also learned to work in a team and plan together strategically on budgeting prioritizations and planning on the next steps."

Several respondents noted that as their action research project advanced, **the research evolved throughout the process** based on new knowledge, observations, financial resources, and environmental conditions. Producers face new challenges in their daily farming activities. Attempts to solve a problem might lead to new problems, and therefore new research themes. Action research topics tend to evolve over time. As a farmer and member of CNOP-CAM puts it:

"Assessments help us identify initial research themes, which may evolve as action research progresses to address new needs that arise during experimentation. This requires both resources and the availability of action research stakeholders."

This testimony reflects the expectation of farmers that other partners are available and responsive to changing priorities. Refinement and adaptation of the co-research process must be based on feedback from farmers and researchers and adaptability is required. As one researcher puts it:

"The major skill I learned and honed is the practice of adaptability, adjusting approaches and how I train on the spot as we test out protocols, experimentations, and documentation in the field."

This adaptability is central to keeping research relevant, but it also raises an important question about how to balance evolving farmer priorities with the need to maintain methodological rigor.

These experiences also highlight an inherent challenge: action research must balance two sometimes competing priorities —scientific validity of results on one side and rootedness in practice on the other. Researchers are concerned with methodological soundness, reproducibility, and data quality, while farmers emphasize feasibility, immediate applicability, and risk reduction. These priorities can occasionally pull in different directions, creating pressure to either simplify protocols at the expense of rigor or to over-engineer them in ways that alienate farmers. "Good" action research, as several respondents suggested, is about integration: designing protocols that uphold scientific standards while remaining feasible, understandable, and meaningful for farmers. When done well, scientific quality and practical relevance reinforce each other.

4.3 Collecting and analysing data

In projects where data collection is expected to be carried out by famers primarily, it can become a main challenge. The challenge with farmers carrying out the data collection in experimental settings is the **consistency of data collection and detailed record keeping**. FO-technical staff can play a key role in supporting the data collection. To ensure robust and reliable data, external support from researchers, from FOs and/or agri-agency personnel seems to be necessary in most cases. A staff member of TARI in Tanzania reflects:

"Data collection by farmers is a bit challenging and requires repeated training."

They continued:

"Some farmers quickly forget what they have been trained in and need respected training and data collection supervisions."

Reports and feedback from other projects align with this account. The need for close follow up with the implementing farmers was highlighted throughout projects' technical reports and the survey. This includes training and monitoring. A staff member at Cresol AA from Brazil said:

"It is essential to be close to participants to provide ongoing support, as recording progress can be challenging due to the complexity of the practices and unfamiliarity with recording methodologies."

A particular challenge is to convey to farmers and make them fully understand why consistent data collection has such a high priority.

"The daily or weekly data collection is a new practice that still seems difficult for producers to accept" said a researcher from IRAD, Cameroon.

The choice of words in the response above points at a potential area of tension between farmers and researchers caused by their diverging interests. A farmer produces first - it is their livelihood and income generating activity. Participating in scientific research comes second.

This is not to say that a farmer cannot be a competent co-researcher. The earlier account from the Philippines for example demonstrated the opposite, confirming that the farmers in the project display strong critical thinking skills which were leveraged for the research process. It is simply to remind everyone that for a farmer their farming and economic responsibilities outweigh responsibilities related to research and experimentation. For example, during periods of high labour demand, experiments might be tended to with less attention and diligence than required.

What this means is that the distribution of roles and responsibilities in participatory action research must fit the realities of farmers' lives and production cycles. Co-research cannot simply transfer the full responsibility for rigorous data collection to producers without considering their workload, opportunity costs, and seasonal pressures.

Potential issues can arise for different reasons: the research topic may not actually be a priority for farmers, protocols and recording tools might be overly complex or time-consuming, or the

schedule might be too tight to align with farmers' agricultural calendar. These factors can all contribute to incomplete data sets, lower engagement, or even abandonment of trials.

To address these risks, roles and tasks can be more flexibly distributed, with FO staff, researchers, or other support actors taking over some of the more demanding data collection or processing steps. This does not make the process less participatory, but rather better tailored to farmers' strengths and constraints. Simplifying setups, sharpening problem definitions, and adopting pragmatic approaches to data collection are key strategies to maintain participation while still ensuring scientific quality.

While the data collection has been shouldered by farmers, FO-staff and researchers together, the **initial data analysis and interpretation remains still a core competence of researchers** in many of the FORI action research settings. Novelty is however that all actors, including farmers, are involved in the discussion of the findings and that results are validated jointly. The action research in Burkina Faso reported:

> "The data *is* analysed by the research institution and shared with the FOs *and farmers* for examination and validation".

By actively engaging in data collection and validation, farmers' organizations build competencies that go beyond the project cycle. These skills enable them to deliver more responsive extension services, support informed decision-making among their members, and pursue their advocacy mandate with greater credibility through evidence-based positions. We therefore recommend ensuring strong FO involvement in data-related tasks - not only because of their proximity and trust-based relationships with farmers, but also because it strengthens their institutional capacities and moves them toward greater autonomy in leading future research and development initiatives.

These benefits are visible in projects where FO staff actively participated in data collection, processing, and analysis. In the Tanzanian Building Resilience with Trees Project, for instance, staff reported significant skill improvements: organizing raw data systematically, ensuring clean datasets by applying consistent formats and quality checks, and learning to use tools such as Excel spreadsheets and digital Kobo tools. They also applied basic statistical methods to identify trends and patterns in crop performance and soil quality data, such as comparing biochar-treated plots with control plots to assess differences in productivity. They enhanced their competencies in recognizing patterns in data - skills that are crucial for the technical extension services of the FOs.

Another competency area that has been strengthened is gender analysis. Gender-disaggregated results analysis has **contributed to enhanced gender sensitivity** in the projects. Several responses emphasized the importance of assessing research outcomes by gender to evaluate how different farming practices affect both men and women. This sensitivity at project scale over time impacts organizational norms by influencing how services are designed, how leadership opportunities are distributed, and how FOs future-proof themselves by being more inclusive and representative of their entire membership base.

However, **better practical data evaluation methods based on observation** need to be developed. The respondents pointed out that farmers preferred hands-on observation rather than complex statistical analysis. Competences are needed to better capture and systematically document such vernacular observations. Also, better ways to integrate them with scientific methods are needed. Farmers' traditional assessment techniques were generally considered

valuable in the process of validating research findings but their systematic and full integration into the validation process was not self-evident. The skills and knowledge required during academic studies and the conventional research methodologies do not necessarily arm researchers with such skill set. It is therefore positive to see new innovative methodologies emerging in some of the projects for farmers to corroborate research results.

"To conduct genuine farmer-led research, it is crucial to incorporate the methods farmers use to observe, analyse, and evaluate data (…) how farmers, farmworkers, and farm cooperative staff spatially assess their farms. (…) So, I incorporated in their training [methods], to help corroborate their analysis (…). But I am still honing how to integrate the indigenous, farmer and academic science into this transdisciplinary research."

- *Researcher working with FarmCoop, the Philippines*

In sum, data collection and analysis in FO-led action research are not merely technical tasks but opportunities to strengthen farmer agency, build organizational capacity, and align scientific rigor with farmers' realities — laying a foundation for more inclusive and resilient research systems.

4.4 Sharing and promoting research findings

Sharing and promoting research findings is not an isolated step in FO-led action research — it is already **deeply embedded in the everyday functioning of farmers' organizations**. Within the FO ecosystem, dissemination happens organically through existing structures such as technical extension services, member assemblies, and informal farmer networks. This means that research results do not only inform individual farmer practices but also feed into organizational decision-making, service provision, and advocacy efforts. FOs act as both knowledge brokers and spaces of discourse, where co-research findings are debated, refined, and carried beyond the organizational boundaries into broader community conversations.

FO-staff members described that it is easy and logical to integrate dissemination of results and innovations into their regular service provision. In this way, findings become part of routine member support activities and spread further through peer-to-peer exchanges among farmers. This built-in diffusion mechanism makes sharing results an effective driver of practice change and organizational learning.

Project partners repeatedly emphasized that this kind of knowledge-sharing is not just a technical step but also a social process that motivates members and reinforces collective engagement. A staff member of the agri-agency UPA DI describes that the results sharing has a strong motivating function for the FO membership – on one hand to continue the action research, and on the other to adopt new practices:

"Sharing the results of action research is essential and motivating. Indeed, the women and men farmers who took part in the surveys and research activities want to know the results, and to take part in training on the new techniques that were tested, so that they can try them out in turn."

This step of the process is therefore quite important to sustain momentum, kickstart adaptation and extend the base of adopters.

It is of utmost importance to communicate in an accessible way and translate the knowledge and practices tested into simple, practical language and learning materials for farmers. An FO-staff member of Kasem Garden Association in the Solmon Islands summarized what it takes to prepare an effective and informed communication:

"Data organization and cleaning, statistical analysis, visualizing data, interpreting results, evaluating data quality, and communication. Mastering these skills can give directives to make the most informed decisions and effective communication to stakeholders."

A staff member of the agri-agency Cresol AA pointed out that is does not suffice to simply present the results to farmers, time and effort needs to go into explanations:

"The dissemination and promotion of research results not only involves sharing data but also communicating the impact and practical relevance of the findings."

To achieve this, FORI projects have experimented with a variety of methods to reach audiences with findings and practices:

1) Workshops and community meetings
2) Field days and on demonstration plots
3) Use of visual aids such as posters, infographics, and photos. Visual aids have proven highly effective in communicating information to farmers, e.g. in Madagascar where CEFFEL, supported by the agri-agency Fert, created foldable posters that give step-by-step visual guidelines for different agroecological practices - such as biofertilizer production, application of biopesticides and so on.
4) Through social networks and social media (incl. community radio)
    a. Storytelling: A story can be a powerful vehicle to convey messages and information. The agri-agency We Effect has promoted the project's gender-transformative achievements by highlighting real-life success stories such as the impact of model couples and male champions in enhancing women's participation.
    b. Farmer networks: Farmers quickly shared research results in villages, even beyond the direct membership of the FOs.
5) Through dissemination during/for policy and advocacy work: A specific form of communication is the dissemination of results for policy and decision-making purposes. Some participants learned to write policy briefs to influence decision-makers at local and national levels.
6) By intentionally integrating women and youth in the process of results sharing. An FO-staff member from Burkina Faso wrote:

"I have realised that involving stakeholders, including women and young people, in disseminating the results can increase their relevance and encourage the recommendations to be adopted. This helps to raise awareness of agricultural issues and encourage concrete action within communities."

Beyond reaching farmers, the process of sharing results has itself been a learning opportunity for FO staff. Many respondents reported that their **ability to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder spaces had grown significantly** bringing together researchers, farmers, and partner organizations. They felt now better equipped to identify the relevant partners and stakeholders, to facilitate the discussions, to share insights and disseminate findings in a collaborative environment.

Growing collaboration has also encouraged greater openness, including a willingness to share and reflect on results that did not meet expectations — a crucial step toward a more honest and iterative learning culture. A staff member of CNOP-CAM in Cameroun said:

"FORI has fostered the development of CNOP-CAM's collaborative framework for sharing knowledge and skills, for establishing links, for brainstorming and implementing concerted solutions, for sharing good and even less good results."

Overall, the responses from the project partners show a strengthening of multiple skills and competences which are all necessary in the dissemination process. One FO staff member from Tanzania summarized how these different competences came together during their participation in the Building Resilience with Trees project:

"During my participation in the "Building Resilience with Trees" project, I developed valuable skills in sharing and promoting research results, particularly in engaging farmers, stakeholders, and the broader community. I learned to simplify complex research findings, translating them into actionable language that could be easily understood by farmers and local stakeholders. I also gained proficiency in creating visual aids such as charts, graphs, and infographics, which helped to make data more accessible and engaging during presentations. My public speaking and presentation skills improved as I communicated findings to diverse audiences, including farmers, policymakers, and partners. I also learned how to organize and facilitate workshops and community meetings to share results and gather feedback. Additionally, I gained experience using digital tools like Kobo and social media platforms to reach a broader audience with the research outcomes. Lastly, I enhanced my ability to write concise reports and policy briefs that summarized key findings and provided clear recommendations for stakeholders. These skills have equipped me to effectively share and promote research, ensuring its impact is widespread and meaningful."

5 Evolving roles in action research

Participatory action research does more than generate new knowledge. It **reshapes the roles, relationships, and mindsets of everyone involved**. By bringing farmers, FO staff, agri-agencies, and researchers into shared processes of inquiry and decision-making, it challenges pre-existing assumptions about who holds authority, whose knowledge counts, what qualifies as research, and who decides how resources are allocated. These changes unsettle established epistemic frameworks and power relations (e.g., who sets research agendas or gets compensated for contributions), broaden epistemic frameworks (what counts as valid evidence or a "good" research result), and shift attitudes toward mutual respect and fair collaboration.

Of particular interest are the ways that participants' relationships and self-perceptions evolve over time: farmers gain confidence to speak in multi-stakeholder spaces, researchers learn to value situated and experiential knowledge, and agri-agencies take on facilitative rather than project management roles. These shifts do not happen overnight but gradually emerge as trust builds and co-creation deepens. Although a full assessment of these changes belongs at the program's conclusion, tendencies are already visible. The following sub-sections explore how roles and relationships have evolved among farmers and FO staff, agri-agencies, and researchers — and what these shifts mean for the future of agroecological research and innovation.

5.1 Farmers and FO-staff

Perhaps the most significant change observed among farmers and FO staff through the FORI projects has been a shift in attitudes and self-awareness. The same as trust, confidence is difficult to quantify but its evolutions can be observed in the responses. Farmers have gained confidence and are more vocal and outgoing towards the other partners of the research process as well as in multistakeholder meetings, steering committees and on other types of formal and informal occasions. This change can be attributed to the growing appreciation in their own knowledge and

new sets of skills and competences which assures farmers and FO staff that they are on par with the research counterparts.

A farmer and member of CNOP-CAM reflected about the impact of action research on their peers:

"The action research project has enabled us to strengthen our capacity for planning, project governance, management of steering committees, monitoring of technical committees and focal points, interaction with partners and supervision of project coordination, associative leadership in the field to find solutions to shortcomings in consultation meetings and field visits."

This growth in human and social capital and shifting mindsets and power relations level the playing field and closes the gap between the different stakeholders and partners. May it be gaps in knowledge, skills or communication. The same farmer continued to describe the impacts:

"Action research strengthens our capacity to learn, to take into account the knowledge and know-how of other players, as well as scientific and endogenous information on agroecology. It also increases our capacity for active exchange, sharing and systematization."

5.2 Agri-agencies

From the **individual farmers' standpoint**, the role of agri-agencies was primarily described in broad, practical terms. Respondents emphasized agri-agencies contribution to the development and implementation of action plans, to capacity-building and financial management support. Agri-agencies were often seen useful in the establishment of project steering committees and administrative structures. Farmers also recognized the role of agri-agencies in financing activities and creating pertinent linkages with other organizations at both national and regional levels.

The evolution of the farmer–agri-agency relationship was perceived as positive. Farmers consistently reported an increase in mutual trust, noting that agri-agencies had become more efficient in responding to their needs and priorities.

Importantly, they observed that the relationship with researchers had also become more closely aligned over time, with goals becoming clearer and better understood by all parties involved. These responses shows that agri-agencies go beyond offering technical or financial contributions in the action research process: they serve as intermediaries who strengthen the relational and strategic coherence between farmers, researchers, and other stakeholders through facilitation and mediation.

Responses from farmer organization (FO) staff were more detailed and specific. FO staff highlighted the following areas of agri-agency support:

- Methodological support and toolkits that helped to structure processes and operationalize them.
- Financing of staff positions and assistance with recruitment, enabling organizations to attract and retain qualified personnel.

- International expertise mobilized for research on specific crops, giving FOs access to specialized knowledge.
- Training and resources to sustain the action research process over time.
- Administrative, planning, and compliance support, particularly to sustain operations and access additional funding.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting support, as well as continuous learning.
- Event support, including both logistical arrangements and financial backing.
- Supporting production of communication and media products.
- Proximity and distance advisory services, ensuring continuous technical guidance.
- Networking support, which connected FOs with organizations in the countries of the AAs and internationally.

Taken together, these elements show that FO staff link agri-agencies to many strategic objectives that go beyond FORI action research project. The support described covers the full spectrum of organizational development, from internal capacity building to outward-facing engagement with stakeholders and funders.

The survey also pointed to a **maturing relationship between agri-agencies and FOs** as organizational capacity increased. The partnerships evolved in some cases into joint resource mobilization efforts that expanded the scope of interventions. For instance, in Tanzania, TTGAU—supported by the Finnish agri-agency FFD—was able to secure additional financing that helped to consolidate and start the scaling up of the results and innovations emerging from FORI action research. This demonstrates a strengthening of a collaborative model, where FOs and agri-agencies co-design and co-implement larger-scale projects.

Another important indicator of FO and agri-agency collaboration evolution is the continued involvement of agri-agencies in new initiatives beyond FORI. FOs are actively involving their partner AAs in proposals for new projects financed by different donors, reflecting a strong level of trust and recognition of the value they add.

The inherent flexibility of the AgriCord alliance structure can be a critical success factor for agile program implementation. For example, during the FORI program, Farmcoop in the Philippines transitioned from one agri-agency partner to another. This change enabled better alignment between the FO's needs and the type of support and advisory services provided, ultimately resulting in more effective collaboration. Such examples highlight the importance of adaptability in partnership arrangements, ensuring that FO-specific needs are adequately matched with the right expertise and institutional support.

The findings support a few interpretations:

1. **Outcomes & processes**

   Farmers' broad descriptions and FO staff's more detailed accounts illustrate two complementary ways of viewing the role of agri-agencies. Farmers emphasize the tangible outcomes like plans, committees, or financing, while staff focus on the processes and mechanisms such as methodological tools, M&E, and compliance. This duality underscores the multi-layered nature of agri-agency contributions: they matter both for the immediate, visible improvements at the grassroots level and for the equally crucial organizational strengthening.

2. **Trust and alignment as cornerstones**

   The repeated emphasis on mutual trust and alignment of goals and agri-agency support for FO strategic priorities in the survey responses is not incidental. These qualities form the foundation for sustainable collaboration. The fact that respondents highlighted them suggests that successful partnerships are not measured solely in terms of outputs delivered but also in the quality of the working relationship. Trust enables flexibility, allows for joint problem-solving, and opens the door to co-creation of new initiatives.

3. **Transition toward co-implementation**

   The progression from support to joint project design and resource mobilization reflects a broader trajectory of capacity building. Over time, as FOs become stronger, agri-agencies increasingly play the role of strategic partners rather than external advisors.

4. **Flexibility as design principle**

   The example of Farmcoop demonstrates that rigid partnership structures can be limiting, while flexibility allows for recalibration and better alignment. A system that accommodates change of partners when pertinent ensures that FO needs remain central. This principle could be more widely adopted in future program design, recognizing that partnerships evolve and may require adjustment.

5. **Expanding networks and leveraging knowledge**

   Finally, the facilitation role of agri-agencies in linking FOs with technical experts, stakeholders, and networks is particularly significant. Such connections expand the horizon of FOs beyond their immediate context, enabling knowledge exchange, innovation uptake, and broader collaboration. Over time, this networking function may prove as valuable as direct technical support, especially in positioning FOs as recognized actors in international value chains and policy dialogues.

A final note and observation on the responses: It was difficult to disentangle messages that were exclusively about either action research or advisory service provision because the partnership of agri-agencies and FOs partnerships extends beyond single issues. Therefore many responses from farmers and FOs integrated and merged several aspects of their relationship with the agri-agencies.

5.3 Researchers

Many projects initially struggled to find research partners willing and able to engage in participatory approaches. This reflects a broader challenge: **much of the research community is not yet fully attuned to this paradigm**. Incentives are also lacking as conventional academic systems tend to reward production of peer reviewed publications, theoretical rigor, and controlled experimental setups more than collaboration with farmers or solving practical, context-specific problems. Several respondents noted that it was difficult to find researchers who understood the ethos of farmer-led action research or had the incentives to dedicate significant time to participatory processes.

Where partnerships did take root, they often required an epistemic shift away from the idea of producing universally valid results toward generating knowledge that is situated, practical, and meaningful to farming communities. Validity in this setting lies less in replicability under

controlled conditions and more in usefulness and applicability for farmers. Instead of adhering strictly to fixed hypothesis-testing models, researchers and FOs learned to work in more iterative cycles, adjusting protocols as new observations emerged. This shift opened the door for co-creation of knowledge that integrates scientific rigor with experiential insights, ultimately producing outcomes that are both credible and actionable.

Across the survey responses, both farmers and FO staff consistently described the evolution of their relationships with researchers in positive and appreciative terms. The most frequently cited **enabling factors** included the patience and cultural awareness of researchers and other soft skills, their ability to communicate in accessible ways, and their willingness to remain present and reachable, often through regular field visits and active participation in chat groups. Respondents highlighted how these qualities allowed trust to grow and helped building a collaborative and human partnership.

A FO staff member from the Philippines shared how significant the relationship can be on personal levels:

"I shared a deeply impactful and collaborative relationship with the researcher, whose guidance and mentorship profoundly shaped my understanding of agroecological practices and sustainable farming methods."

This testimony shows that the contribution of researchers can go beyond research-related activities, and at times extend into mentorship, empowerment, and the affirmation of cultural identity.

Farmers described the role of researchers primarily in terms of direct interactions and tangible activities. They emphasized the value of visits, training sessions on agroecological practices, and dialogues, which provided space to exchange knowledge and build capacity. Many noted the role of researchers in raising awareness about the paradigmatic shift from conventional to agroecological practices, an area where technical expertise was crucial for framing alternatives and demonstrating their practical benefits.

Farmers also highlighted the regularity of monitoring and dialogue, including the innovative use of WhatsApp groups for continued communication. This created channels for ongoing problem-solving and knowledge sharing. The provision of foundation seeds further illustrated researchers' role as facilitators of experimentation and innovation. Additionally, farmers pointed to specific technical contributions, such as the identification of plants and ingredients, analysis of active components, and formulation of products such as bio-fertilizers and pesticides —all of which enriched local knowledge systems with scientific validation.

The responses of farmer convey that they see researchers ideally as guides and enablers who helped making new practices and approaches both accessible and meaningful, while staying close to communities in everyday, practical ways.

FO staff provided more detailed accounts of how researchers supported them across the research cycle. They described a continuous guidance process that covered all stages: from developing protocols for data collection and setting up experimental designs to the mapping of sites and the interpretation of results. Crucially, staff emphasized the methodological support that equipped them to carry out key scientific methods themselves. For example, several respondents noted

training in soil sampling procedures and evaluation techniques, enabling FOs to independently generate and assess reliable data.

Beyond technical methods, FO staff recognized researchers' role in capacity building, through training sessions on jointly identified thematic priorities in agroecology and presentations of findings in accessible formats. In some cases, researchers went further, offering recommendations for optimizing production planning, such as itineraries for seed multiplication. These forms of support helped link experimental results directly to practical management decisions, ensuring that research outputs were not only valid but also actionable for FOs and farmers.

Some answers revealed the personal dimension of these collaborations. A few staff members described close personal ties with researchers, where discussions extended into leadership development, confidence building, and affirmation of indigenous or tribal identities. While such experiences were exceptional rather than widespread within this survey, they illustrate the transformative potential of research partnerships when they move beyond technical exchange toward a holistic empowerment process.

A theme emerging from the survey was the way researchers helped to bridge conventional scientific methods with endogenous farming systems. By validating and building on traditional practices such as seed saving and the use of native plants within formal research frameworks, researchers contributed to a renewed sense of pride and ownership among farming communities. FO staff reported that this integration highlighted the relevance of traditional practices for addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, food security, and health concerns.

The responses and reports from the projects allow for some interpretations:

1. **From experts to partners**

   The survey points to a significant shift in how researchers are perceived: from external experts to genuine partners. The adoption of participatory action research methods created opportunities for joint learning, mutual respect, and equal collaboration. As relationships deepened, researchers were not perceived as externals who tried to extract something from them but as co-creators of solutions, working side by side with FOs, AAs and farmers.

2. **The centrality of communication and presence**

   The qualities most appreciated by respondents - patience, cultural awareness, and availability - underline that effective collaboration depends as much on interpersonal skills as on scientific expertise. By investing time in dialogue, being reachable through informal channels, and showing cultural sensitivity, researchers laid the groundwork for trust and cooperation. This reflects a key lesson: in farmer-led research, relational skills are as critical as technical competence.

3. **Capacity building for autonomy**

   Researchers played a pivotal role in equipping FOs with methodological tools that enabled them to work with evidence and generate evidence systematically. This marks an important trajectory: moving from dependency on external expertise toward greater FO autonomy in research design and execution but also in regular service provision. The skills

gained such as soil analysis or trial design, can become lasting assets within the repertoire of the organizations beyond the duration of the program.

4. **The transformative potential of integrating farmer knowledge**

   By marrying traditional practices with more conventional scientific processes, the researchers not only broadened the knowledge base but also strengthened community identity and cohesion of the farmers. This dual recognition (scientific and cultural) fosters both innovation and empowerment offering pathways for sustainable practices rooted in local realities. A farmer in the Philippines at Farmcoop wrote:

   "The researcher played a significant role in helping me embrace my identity as a member of the tribe. valuing of our culture and traditions, emphasizing the importance of indigenous practices in addressing modern challenges (…). This strengthened my sense of pride (…). I am grateful that the researcher recognized and valued our culture the farming practices we have in Sibulan and the native plants we have, incorporating them into the projects (…) showcasing how our traditions contribute to meaningful and sustainable development."

Overall, farmers and FO-staff valued the developing relationships and interaction with researchers. Farmers highlighted the accessibility and practical guidance by researchers as enabling factors, while FO staff appreciated the depth of methodological support. Beyond technical contributions, researchers acted at times as mentors, communicators, and facilitators of knowledge integration.

In general, researchers evolved from being perceived as external experts towards trusted partners and co-creators of innovation. The individual personality and skills of researchers are a key enabling factor and can impact farmers and FOs in more holistic ways, demonstrating that research in this context is not only about producing data but also about strengthening communities.

At the same time, the experiences point to the resource-intensive nature of participatory research, reminding us that genuine collaboration requires sustained investment including sufficient budgets for people, time, and trust-building. When these elements are in place, researchers, agri-agencies, FOs, and farmers become a powerful and more holistic assemblage driving agroecological transformations and lasting rural capacity development.

6 Reflections

The Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) has the potential to transform food systems by connecting diverse actors and co-creating knowledge that fosters sustainability and resilience. Yet, as Daum et al. (2025) note, much of today's knowledge production remains concentrated within formal research and education institutions, with limited engagement of farmers and private sector actors. Fragmentation between research, extension services, and farmers hinders collaborative learning and slows the adaptive diffusion of innovations.

Bridging these gaps also means **confronting the power and epistemic architecture of innovation systems**. Participatory, FO-led research redistributes decision rights over agenda setting, budgets, methods, data ownership, and the tempo of work and asks whose knowledge anchors the definition of a "good" result. Giving FOs control over research budgets, compensating farmers who host trials, and agreeing early on data-sharing and validation protocols can rebalance relationships.

At the same time, **contextual usefulness of research results** increasingly takes precedence over universal validity. What matters most is whether findings are meaningful and actionable for farmers and FOs in their own contexts. This shift is accompanied by a re-evaluation of roles between the actors involved — a process that should be welcomed as it strengthens mutual respect and shared ownership of outcomes. Without these changes, participatory projects risk reproducing the hierarchies they aim to dismantle; with them, trust grows, risks to farmers are minimized, and results travel through FO networks into practice and policy.

The FO RI program demonstrates **how this gap can be bridged**. By putting farmers' organizations (FOs) at the centre of research and innovation, it strengthens linkages across the AIS and creates spaces where co-creation of knowledge becomes possible. The program shows that farmer-led research, supported by agri-agencies and researchers, can generate practical results, stimulate peer-to-peer diffusion, and increase ownership of agroecological innovations. When farmers are involved from the outset to identify priority issues and shape experiments, research becomes more relevant and more likely to be adopted. As one participant of the FORI workshop in Gembloux (Dietsch, 2025) observed: "In action-research, it's about really positioning ourselves from farmers' perspective."

However, this **approach also reveals its own boundaries**. Not all problems are suited for participatory research, particularly where no prior technical references exist. In such cases, as another workshop participant cautioned, *"we cannot test from scratch on farmers' fields and make them bear the risks of research."* Balancing scientific rigor with farmer safety and capacity remains therefore a crucial consideration. Also, most FO RI action research projects focused still on agricultural production rather than economic, social or organisational innovations. There are some projects, such as the one lead by PFO, in which the multistakeholder co-innovation system is addressing all aspects of the value chain.

The lessons from our surveys, workshops, and reporting highlight **what is needed to unlock the full potential of FO-led research**. Capacity building remains a cornerstone: managers, researchers, and trainers require stronger skills in project management, participatory methods, and translating complex concepts into accessible language. FOs need support to document their own research, improve data quality, and act as innovation brokers. Longer time frames are essential to accommodate cycles of awareness, adaptation, and scaling, while resources must be flexible enough to respond to evolving project needs. Building trust between research institutions

and FOs, aligning research agendas with farmers' priorities, and finding fairer ways of distributing tasks and benefits amongst partners, strengthening the link between research outcomes and policy implementation are all critical. Gender and youth inclusion must be intentionally addressed to ensure that co-research benefits all members of the farming community.

Through the FO RI program, FOs have not only gained technical competence but also strengthened their **legitimacy as research partners**. Such recognition is still often absent in publications and policy fora. Documenting and sharing their results publicly will be key to consolidating this role and shaping future agendas. The program's results so far reaffirm that co-created knowledge is not just an approach, but a strategy for systemic change and opening of new paradigms.

Looking forward, the aim is to **further scale these efforts**: Scaling up by changing institutional structures, laws and policies for lasting and broader impacts. Scaling out and wide by expanding co-research and co-innovation approaches and results to more farmers and more locations. Scaling deep by transforming cultural norms, beliefs, values and relationships. Farmers' organisations are key actors in driving and delivering these impacts. They are well placed to scale through their service deliver in continuous, collaborative and itinerant processes, in which innovations are contextualized, used and embedded into farming communities' practices and societal dynamics.

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Annex

Table 1: Key differences between conventional and farmer-led research approaches as described by program participants

Conventional research	Farmer-led research approach in the FORI program
Top-down approach: Research is driven by experts or institutions.	**Farmer-led approach**: Farmers define research topics and conduct trials on their own plots.
Limited farmer engagement: Farmers may only participate as test subjects.	**High farmer engagement**: Farmers are involved in experiment design, implementation, and evaluation.
Controlled environments: Experiments are often conducted in research stations.	**On-farm trials**: Research takes place in real-life farming conditions.
Standardized methodologies: Focuses on generating broad, generalizable findings.	**Localized, adaptive research**: Research is tailored to local needs and realities.
Academically driven: Primary goal is generating results for academic knowledge .	**Practical application**: Research is designed for real-world impact and farmer decision-making, ensuring findings align with their socio-economic realities.
Limited gender and youth inclusion	**Diverse inclusion**: Women, youth, and various farmer groups actively participate.

Table 2: Challenges in participatory action research

Category	Sub-Themes / Examples
Structural & Contextual Barriers	• Land rights disputes (e.g. Philippines) • Gender & generational barriers (Burkina Faso, Tanzania) • Weak infrastructure: roads, storage, energy • Financial shortages & limited working capital • Insecurity & conflict (Haiti, DRC, Mali, Burkina Faso) • Environmental stress: drought, erratic rainfall, lack of irrigation
Power Balances & Priorities	• Farmers: practicality, short-term yields, resilience • Researchers: scientific rigor, publications, long timelines • Farmers' organisations (FOs): advocacy, institutional strengthening • Misaligned schedules (agricultural vs. academic cycles) • Mitigation strategy: FO budget control, selection of motivated partners
New Competences	• Farmers: building self-confidence and trust • FO staff: facilitation, coordination, participatory research skills • Researchers: humility, willingness to collaborate, practical application of methods • Shared challenge: bridging academic and experiential knowledge
Data Collection & Quality	• Farmers lack time during busy seasons • Protocols forgotten or dropped • Burden on farmers as sole data collectors • Need for FO/researcher support and monitoring • Risk of experiential knowledge being lost to standardized tools • Opportunity: FO staff strengthen institutional monitoring skills
Introducing New Crops/Varieties	• Farmer hesitation due to livelihood risks • Unrealistic expectations of yield or market potential • Consumer acceptance issues (taste, culture, appearance) • Risk of disillusionment → abandonment of trials • Need for early market analysis and participatory trial design

Methodology

The survey was circulated among all implementing program partners of the thirteen (13) research projects: member and staff members of farmers' organization, researchers, and staff members of agri-agency. Convenience- and self-selection sampling methods were employed.

Pre-existing capacities and implementation context (geographic, institutional, socio-cultural, economic) vary significantly between respondents which makes the qualitative dataset very diverse but also representative of the composition of the FORI program.

The questionnaire follows a structured design with a fixed set of questions, which branch out depending on the role of the respondent. This design allows for comparable and consistent questions but takes the role of the respondent into account. A total of 31 responses were submitted, sufficiently covering the width of the program (data from 12/13 projects).

Potential biases are self-selection and non-response bias. The feedback of respondents might differ from those who did not participate in the survey. We observed that producers are less likely to respond to surveys than researchers and staff members which may be explained by differences in familiarity with questionnaires, connectivity and motivation. Most farmer respondents were likely assisted by FO staff or researchers in the process by filling in the survey form based on the oral responses of farmers.

The qualitative data was extracted to Excel, grouped, coded and summarised by the AgriCord secretariat staff. Project reports were used to contextualize and complement the information. The resulting descriptions, analysis and reflections were then enriched by the GERDAL capitalization document which already contained quotes, descriptions and insights from the participants of the program.

RESPONDENTS

Table 1 summarises how many respondents participated in the survey per action research project. A total of 31 respondents took part in the survey. The highest number of respondents was recorded in Burkina Faso, while the DRC project did not participate in the survey.

Table 3: Respondents by project and country (n=31)

#	Short title	Country	Respondents (31)
1	Onion value chain, Burkina Faso (Oignon Agroecol)	Burkina	5
2	Vegetable seed production, Mali (Maraich-agroecol)	Mali	4
3	Rice production and marketing, Casamance, Senegal (Rizpaysan)	Senegal	3
4	Local chicken farming Cameroun (POULOCAL)	Cameroun	4
5	Innovative food systems, Imbo region, Burundi (Inn-Agroecol Imbo)	Burundi	1
6	Innovative agroecological practices, North Kivu, RDC (Inn-Agroecol Kivu)	DRC	0
7	Agroecological transition of highland vegetable production, Madagascar (RAITRA)	Madagascar	2

8	Sunflower value chain and gender, Arusha, Tanzania (Sunflower)	Tanzania	3
9	Building resilience with trees, Tanzania (Resilience & trees)	Tanzania	2
10	Saving the Banana farms, Mindanao, Philippines (Saving Bananas)	Philippines	4
11	Sustainable Breadfruit value chains, Pacific Islands (Sustain Breadfruit)	Pacific Islands (Fiji, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tonga)	1
12	Diversifying coffee and cocoa-based agroforestry systems, Haiti (AYITI)	Haiti	1
13	Agroecological transition of horticultural and fruit farms, Brazil and Uruguay (Convers Agroecol)	Brazil & Uruguay	1

Composition of respondents

Figure 1 presents the respondents' roles and their gender group. Most respondents are staff of FOs followed by staff of agri-agencies (AA), researchers and producers' members.

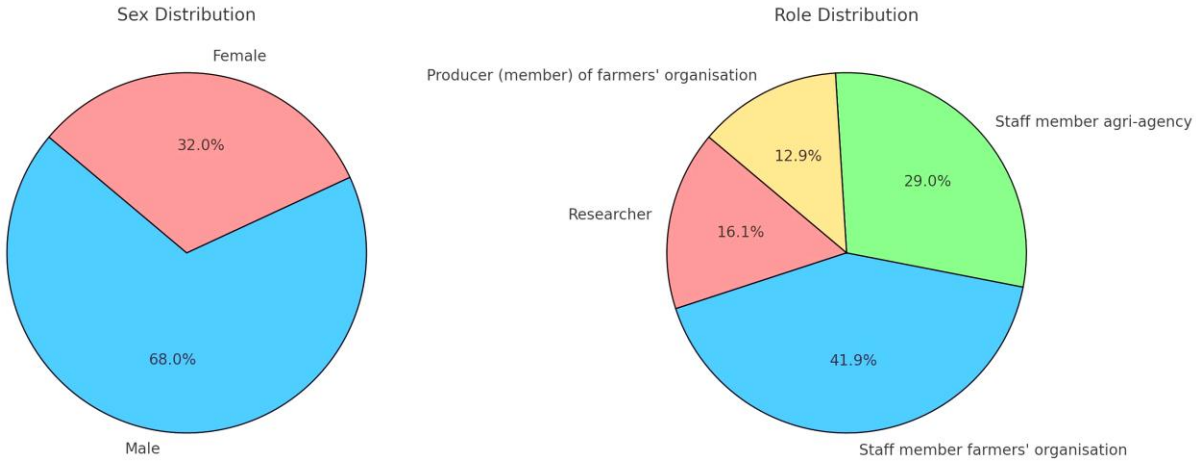

Figure 1: Sex and roles of respondents

Table 4 - Survey questionnaire

Respondent	
	First Name / Prénom / Nombre
	Surname / Nom de famille/ Apellido
	Sex / Sexe/ Sexo
	Organisation / Organisation / Organización
	Country / Pays / País
	Name of the FORI project / Nom du projet FORI/ Nombre del proyecto FORI
	Informed consent (purpose of survey, storage, access and use of data)
S. Skills/capacities acquired and lessons learned in FORI	
Open	S1 Through your participation in the research project, did you learn new ways to define your challenges and problems? Please describe: S1 Grâce à votre participation au projet de recherche, avez-vous appris de nouvelles façons de définir vos défis et vos problèmes ? Veuillez les décrire : S1 Gracias a su participación en el proyecto de investigación, ¿ha aprendido nuevas formas de definir sus retos y problemas? Descríbalos, por favor:
Open	S2 Through your participation in the research project, what skills did you learn about defining research topics? Please describe: S2 Grâce à votre participation au projet de recherche, qu'avez-vous appris sur la définition des thèmes de recherche ? Veuillez les décrire : S2 ¿Qué aprendió sobre la definición de temas de investigación gracias a su participación en el proyecto de investigación? Descríbalo:
Open	S3 Through your participation in the research project, what skills did you learn about defining protocols, carrying out experiments and data collection? Please describe: S3 Grâce à votre participation au projet de recherche, qu'avez-vous appris sur la définition des protocoles, la mise en oeuvre des expérimentations et la collecte des données? Veuillez décrire : S3 Gracias a su participación en el proyecto de investigación, ¿qué ha aprendido sobre la definición de protocolos, la realización de experimentos y la recopilación de datos? Describa
Open	S4 Through your participation in the research project, what skills did you learn about analyzing and evaluating data? Please describe: S4 Grâce à votre participation au projet de recherche, qu'avez-vous appris sur l'analyse et l'évaluation des données? Veuillez décrire S4 Gracias a tu participación en el proyecto de investigación, ¿qué has aprendido sobre el análisis y la evaluación de datos? Descríbalo:
Open	S5 Through your participation in the research project, what skills did you learn about the sharing and promotion of research results? Please describe: S5 Grâce à votre participation au projet de recherche, qu'avez-vous appris sur le partage et la promotion des résultats de la recherche? Veuillez décrire: S5 Gracias a su participación en el proyecto de investigación, ¿qué ha aprendido sobre la difusión y promoción de los resultados de la investigación? Descríbalo:
Open	S6 Did you learn any other new skills or knowledge about research and experimentations? S6 Avez-vous acquis d'autres compétences ou connaissances en matière de recherche et d'expérimentation ?

	S6 ¿Aprendió otras habilidades o conocimientos nuevos sobre investigación y experimentación?
Multiple Choice	S7 Were you ever involved with some type of research project before? S7 Avez-vous déjà participé à un projet de recherche par le passé? S7 ¿Ha participado antes en algún tipo de proyecto de investigación?
Open	S8 If you were previously involved in research projects, what are the differences that you identified between your previous research/experimentation experience and the FORI project? Please describe: S8 Si vous avez déjà participé à des projets de recherche par le passé, quelles sont les différences que vous avez identifiées entre votre expérience de recherche/expérimentation précédente et le projet FORI ? Veuillez les décrire : S8 Si ha participado anteriormente en proyectos de investigación, ¿cuáles son las diferencias que ha identificado entre su experiencia previa de investigación/experimentación y el proyecto FORI? Descríbalas:
Open	S9 What were the main challenges your organisation encountered in your project S9 Quels ont été les principaux défis rencontrés par votre organisation dans le cadre de votre projet ? S9 ¿Cuáles fueron los principales retos a los que se enfrentó su organización en el marco de su proyecto?
Open	S10 What lessons have you learned from the action research process so far? S10 Quelles enseignements avez-vous tiré du processus de recherche action jusqu'ici? S10 ¿Qué lecciones ha aprendido hasta ahora del proceso de investigación en acción?
Multiple Choice	S11 Your role in the project implementation/ Votre rôle dans la mise en œuvre du projet / Su rol en la ejecución del proyecto
A. Producer & FO-staff	
Open	A1 How did the agri-agency support your farmers' organisation in the whole action research process? A1 Comment l'agri-agence a-t-elle soutenu votre organisation d'agriculteurs dans l'ensemble du processus de recherche-action? A1 ¿Cómo apoyó la agencia agraria a su organización de agricultores en todo el proceso de investigación-acción?
Open	A2 What other forms of support do agri-agencies provide to your farmers' organization (beyond the action research in the FORI project)? A2 Quelles autres formes de soutien les Agri-agences apportent-elles à votre organisation d'agriculteurs (en dehors de la recherche-action dans le cadre du projet FORI)? A2 ¿Qué otras formas de apoyo ofrecen las agri-agencias a su organización de productores (más allá de la investigación-acción en el proyecto FORI)?
Open	A3 How did the researchers support you throughout the research process? A3 Comment les chercheurs vous ont-ils soutenu tout au long du processus de recherche ? A3 ¿Cómo le apoyaron los investigadores a lo largo del proceso de investigación?

Open	A4 How has your relationship with the agri-agencies and researchers evolved? A4 Comment vos relations avec les agences agricoles et les chercheurs ont-elles évolué ? A4 ¿Cómo ha evolucionado su relación con las Agriagencias y los investigadores?
Open	A5 Do you think it is relevant for farmers' organisations to take the lead in research? What are the strengths of farmers' organisations in conducting research? A5 Pensez-vous qu'il est pertinent que les organisations d'agriculteurs prennent le lead de la recherche ? Quels sont les points forts des organisations d'agriculteurs en matière de recherche ? A5 ¿Considera pertinente que las organizaciones de productores tomen la iniciativa en materia de investigación? ¿Cuáles son los puntos fuertes de las organizaciones de agricultores a la hora de investigar?
Multiple Choice Grid	A6 Are action research approaches and agroecology better incorporated in the strategy of your farmers' organization than before the project start? A6 Les approches de recherche-action et l'agroécologie sont-elles mieux intégrées dans la stratégie de votre organisation paysanne qu'avant le démarrage du projet ? A6 ¿Están los enfoques de la investigación-acción y la agroecología mejor incorporados en la estrategia de su organización de productores que antes del inicio del proyecto?
Open	A7 If applicable, how have you integrated agroecology issues and the action research approach into your development plan/strategies? A7 Le cas échéant, comment avez-vous intégré les questions d'agroécologie et l'approche de la recherche-action dans votre plan/stratégie de développement ? A7 Si procede, ¿cómo ha integrado las cuestiones agroecológicas y el enfoque de la investigación-acción en su plan/estrategias de desarrollo?
Open	A8 Do you have the capacity to run experiments autonomously with your members even after completion of this program? Is there any form of support that you need to continue this research initiative? A8 Avez-vous la capacité de continuer à mener des expérimentations de manière autonome avec vos membres même à la fin du program ? Avez-vous besoin d'un soutien quelconque pour poursuivre cette initiative de recherche? A8 ¿Tiene capacidad para llevar a cabo experimentos de forma autónoma con sus miembros incluso después de finalizar este programa? ¿Necesita algún tipo de apoyo para continuar con esta investigación?
Open	A9 How many staff members or lead farmers have been trained to train other members of the FO in experimentations and action research on agroecology? *Skip this question if you are not a staff member of the farmers' organisation* A9 Combien de membres du personnel ou d'agriculteurs leader ont été formés pour former d'autres membres de l'OP à l'expérimentation et à la recherche-action dans le domaine de l'agroécologie ? *Passez cette question si vous n'êtes pas membre du personnel de l'organisation d'agriculteurs.* A9 ¿Cuántos miembros del personal o agricultores líderes han recibido formación para formar a otros miembros de la OP en experimentos e investigación-acción sobre agroecología? *Omita esta pregunta si no es miembro del personal de la organización de productores*

Open	A10 How has the FORI project contributed to the development of your FO services to members? A10 Comment le projet FORI a-t-il contribué au développement des services de votre OP aux membres ? A10 ¿Cómo ha contribuido el proyecto FORI al desarrollo de sus servicios FO a los miembros?
Open	A11 Do you have any comments or suggestions for improvements of the research process? A11 Avez-vous des commentaires ou des suggestions pour améliorer le processus de recherche? A11 ¿Tiene algún comentario o sugerencia para mejorar el proceso de investigación?
Open	A12 Which lessons learnt or good practices do you plan to replicate or upscale? A12 Quels sont les enseignements tirés ou les bonnes pratiques que vous envisagez de reproduire ou de mettre à l'echelle? A12 ¿Qué lecciones aprendidas o buenas prácticas tiene previsto reproducir o ampliar?
B. Agri-Agency staff	
Open	B1 Describe the support you (and your agri-agency) have provided to FOs and their members in this project. B1 Décrivez le soutien que vous (et votre Agri-agence) avez apporté aux OP et à leurs membres dans le cadre de ce projet. B1 Describa el apoyo que usted (y su Agriagencia) ha prestado a las organizaciones de productores y a sus miembros en este proyecto.
Open	B2 How have your relationships with the farmers and academic / institutional research partners evolved? B2 Comment ont évolué vos relations avec les agriculteurs et les partenaires de recherche ? B2 ¿Cómo han evolucionado sus relaciones con los agricultores y los socios de investigación académicos / institucionales?
Multiple Choice Grid	B3 Are action research approaches and agroecology better incorporated in the AA strategy and practices than before the project start? B3 Les approches de recherche-action et l'agroécologie sont-elles mieux intégrées dans la stratégie et les pratiques de l'AA qu'avant le démarrage du projet ? B3 ¿Están los enfoques de la investigación-acción y la agroecología mejor incorporados en la estrategia y las prácticas de la Agriagencia que antes del inicio del proyecto?
Open	B4 Does your agri-agency have the capacity to continue this action research initiative after this program? Is there any form of support that you need to continue this research initiative? B4 Votre Agri-agence a-t-elle la capacité de poursuivre cette initiative de recherche-action après ce program ? Avez-vous besoin d'un soutien quelconque pour poursuivre cette initiative de recherche? B4 ¿Tiene su Agriagencia capacidad para continuar esta iniciativa de investigación-acción después de este programa? ¿Necesita algún tipo de apoyo para continuar con esta iniciativa de investigación?
Open	B5 Do you have any comments or suggestions for improvements of the research process? B5 Avez-vous des commentaires ou des suggestions pour améliorer le processus de recherche ?

	B5 ¿Tiene algún comentario o sugerencia para mejorar el proceso de investigación?
Open	B6 Did you identify any lessons learnt or good practices from the project to replicate or upscale at the agri-agency-level? Please describe if yes. B6 Avez-vous identifié des leçons ou des bonnes pratiques du projet à reproduire ou à mettre à l'echelle au niveau de l'agri-agence? Si oui, veuillez les décrire. B6 ¿Ha identificado lecciones aprendidas o buenas prácticas del proyecto que puedan reproducirse o ampliarse a nivel de las Agriagencias? En caso afirmativo, descríbalas. B7 How did the AgriCord program management support you in the implementation of your project? B7 Comment l'unitié de gestion de programs de AgriCord vous a-t-elle aidé dans la mise en œuvre de votre projet? B7 ¿Cómo le apoyó la dirección del programa AgriCord en la ejecución de su proyecto?
C. Researcher	
Open	C1 Describe the support you have provided to FOs and their members in this project C1 Décrivez le soutien que vous avez apporté aux organisations agricoles et à leurs membres dans le cadre de ce projet. C1 Describa el apoyo que ha prestado a las OP y a sus miembros en este proyecto
Open	C2 How have your relationships with the farmers, FO-staff and agri-agencies evolved? C2 Comment vos relations avec les agriculteurs, le personnel des organisations d'agriculteurs et les agri-agences ont-elles évolué ? C2 ¿Cómo han evolucionado sus relaciones con los agricultores, el personal de las OP y las Agriagencias?
Open	C3 Do you have any comments or suggestions for improvements of the research process? C3 Avez-vous des commentaires ou des suggestions pour améliorer le processus de recherche ? C3 ¿Tiene algún comentario o sugerencia para mejorar el proceso de investigación?
Open	C4 Did you identify any lessons learnt or good practices to replicate or upscale in your research activities? Please describe if yes. C4 Avez-vous identifié des enseignements ou des bonnes pratiques à reproduire ou à mettre à l'échelle dans le cadre de vos activités de recherche ? si oui, veuillez les décrire. C4 ¿Ha identificado lecciones aprendidas o buenas prácticas del proyecto que puedan reproducirse o ampliarse a nivel de sus investigaciones? En caso afirmativo, descríbalas.

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Developing Skills & Evolving Partnerships -
Report on the Qualitative Mid-term Survey in the FORI program

Version 1

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