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ROOTS AT THE TREETOP: CONNECTING KNOWLEDGE FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO POLICY ARENAS – A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

MATHEUS A. ZANELLA, JUDITH ROSENDAHL, JES WEIGELT
Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies – IASS, Germany
matheus.zanella@iass-potsdam.de

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Abstract

Land has reemerged at the core of the rural development agenda, carrying a broader debate on governance, and more precisely, what is and how to attain pro-poor land governance. In many countries, a rich body of progressive land legislation already exists, the questions remains, how these regulations are put into practice. Legislation enforcement are often severely affected by several constrains, including government performance, information asymmetries, and power imbalances. As a result, it is not rare to find blatant gaps between legislation and the degree to which it is implemented. Local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that work for and with poor rural groups have been trying different strategies to cope with this context.

Under the call of building knowledge bridges between the grassroots level and international arenas, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have committed to a research initiative aiming at document, analyze and communicate cases of pro-poor resource governance practices promoted by CSOs in six countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, and India. This represents a typical case of co-production of knowledge though transdisciplinarity, influenced by principles of participatory research. This paper describes and analyzes a practical application of these two guiding approaches in a collaboration that proposes to connect knowledge from CSOs to policy arenas. It concludes discussing the critical points found during this process and suggesting some implications for current research agendas on pro-poor resource governance.

Keywords: land governance, participatory research, transdisciplinarity.

1. Introduction

Land has reemerged at the core of the rural development agenda (Cotula, Vermeulen, Leonard, & Keeley, 2010; Deininger et al., 2010), carrying a broader debate on governance (Palmer, Fricska, & Wehrmann, 2009), and more precisely, what is and how to attain pro-poor land governance (Borras & Franco, 2010; Mann & Smaller, 2010; Zoomers, 2011). Recent international initiatives to develop and assess regulations addressing responsible land governance which includes elements of transparency of access and tenure exemplify this shift taking place within the development debate. Frameworks such as the World Bank´s Land Governance Assessment Framework – LGAF (Deininger, Selod, & Burns, 2012) and principles and standards such as those recorded in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security – VGs (Committee on World Food Security, 2012) are examples of these efforts, but certainly do not remain unaccompanied.

In many countries, a rich body of progressive land legislation already exists, which intends to make livelihoods of resources users more food secure, less vulnerable and contribute to sustainable resource use (Rights and Resources Initiative - RRI, 2012). The questions remains, how these regulations are put into practice. The access to land and securement of tenure are surely influenced by institutions – formal and informal societal rules – but rules alone do not define who wins the game. The conditions in which rules are put into practice are severely affected by several constrains, including government performance, information asymmetries, and power imbalances. As a result, it is not rare to find blatant gaps between legislation and the degree to which it is implemented, rising serious implications about the real capacity legislation has to change social practice (Bardhan, 2000).

In this context, local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that work for and with poor rural groups have been trying different strategies to cope with this disconnection between progressive land legislation and weak policy enforcement. By working closely with poor rural groups on developing and implementing poverty alleviation projects – which many have an important land component – CSOs are placed in a good position when it comes to understand the local context and background which might be restricting or diverting implementation of land legislation addressing access, tenure, and transparency (Fraser, Dougill, Mabee, Reed, & McAlpine, 2006; Pokorny, Prabhu, McDougall, & Bauch, 2004). Even if in some situations the understanding of the local context is restricted by particular world views or ideologies, CSOs know local actors, their organizations, and in many cases the formal and informal institutions. Even more importantly, by pursuing a local political agenda and actively engaging in political processes, CSOs have a firsthand experience in power disputes, which again place these organizations in a favorable position to understand the real bargaining power of the different actors groups.

Moreover, the privileged position of CSOs regarding the local context vis-à-vis external observers not only implies a better comprehension of the local context, but also a better understanding on how to operate in these contexts. In other words, CSOs might not only know why the mentioned evident gap between progressive land legislation and weak policy enforcement is found in their localities, but also might have solid ideas on how to overcome this pervasive situation. This is of significant importance particularly regarding the implementation of poverty alleviation and, or, food security projects in adverse and insecure land contexts often found in poor rural areas. In short, these organizations are central knowledge carries of the struggle poor rural people regularly face to improve tenure security, land access and transparency.

Therefore, building knowledge bridges between the grassroots level and international arenas is extremely useful to make progress towards better land governance. Under this call, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have committed to an innovative research initiative titled: "Pro-poor Resource Governance under Changing Climates" (Pro-poorGov). The main purpose of this collaborative research project is to document, analyze and communicate cases of pro-poor resource governance practices promoted by CSOs in six countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, and India.

A better understanding of processes and strategies to cope with the lack of enforcement of land policies requires engagement of local and international organizations in a genuine horizontal partnership. This represents a typical case of co-production of knowledge though transdisciplinary research approaches (Wiesmann et al., 2008). And giving the specific concern of this research initiative in addressing land governance in a pro-poor fashion, it is influenced by principles of participatory research (Chambers, 2007), particularly regarding the aim of bringing communities into the policy debate for empowerment and social transformation.

This paper describes and analyzes a practical application of these two guiding approaches in an international research collaboration that proposes to connect knowledge from CSOs to policy arenas. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the main elements of transdisciplinarity and participatory research approaches. Then, it describes the steps we followed to apply these elements in this particular research collaboration, including the role of each partner in the initiative. Section 3, results, presents our experiences and reflections during the implementation of this research approach. The final section discusses the critical points found during this process and suggests some implications of this approach for current research agendas on pro-poor resource governance.

2. Methods

To understand the interaction between scientific knowledge and knowledge generated in other contexts is one of the main issues of attention addressed by transdisciplinary approaches. Due to the fact that transdisciplinarity can be proposed as a way for enabling social transformations, it shares important elements with the array of methods and approaches labeled under participatory research terminology. This section briefly reviews these two lines of thought from a theoretical perspective. Later, it describes how we addressed these concerns on a practical basis, through clarifying the research steps taken in this collaborative endeavor.

2.1 Transdisciplinarity

Even though we are far from a consensual understanding of the terminology transdisciplinarity, some common elements are found in the different conceptualization proposed around the term (Jahn, Bergmann, & Keil, 2012). The most important distinctive constituent of transdisciplinarity refers to the concept of *integration*. After reviewing a number of contributions revolving around this approach in the past 40 years, Jahn et al. conclude that "transdisciplinarity is an extension of interdisciplinary forms of the problem-specific integration of knowledge and methods" (2012, p.2). While the idea of interdisciplinarity refers to the combination of different disciplines in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a giving problem, transdisciplinarity extends the interdisciplinary perspective including non-scientific knowledge.

Therefore, as indicated by Wiesmann et al., transdisciplinarity "acknowledge[s] that knowledge also exists and is produced in societal field other science" (Wiesmann et al., 2008, p. 435). And not only does it recognizes this pluralistic view of knowledge, but it also tries to integrate this knowledge through the incorporation of non-scientific actors into research procedures. Pohl et al. describes this incorporation of different types of actors into research as a process of co-production of knowledge, "a collaborative endeavor of academic and non-academic actors" (Pohl et al., 2010, p. 269), where the roles of researchers, practitioners, and experts are intentionally blurred.

If integration is seen as the main "cognitive challenge of transdisciplinarity" (Jahn et al., 2012, p.3), a second element shared by the different views of transdisciplinarity refers to the term *complexity*. More precisely, since transdisciplinarity is seen as "problem oriented research" (Hirsch Hadorn, Bradley, Pohl, Rist, & Wiesmann, 2006), problem complexity is indeed the justification for approaching issues through transdisciplinarity. In simpler words, addressing complex societal problems through the glasses

of a given disciplines inhibits the capture of a full picture of complexity. And the same takes place if complex societal problems are seen only through the glasses of science. *Complexity* demands *integration*.

As stated by Nowotny (2000), this new contract between science and society (non academic stakeholders) moves the legitimacy of science from reliability to socially robustness. She uses this term to denote knowledge that has also validity outside laboratory and that is achieved through contextualization and involvement of an extended group of experts. One implication of this shift, according to Nowotny, is that socially robust knowledge is less likely to be contested.

This leads to a third important element present in transdisciplinarity studies, *mutual learning,* seen in many cases as the ultimate goal of these approaches. The rationale behind mutual learning reproduces the concern of placing scientific and non scientific knowledge on equal footing, but it goes a bit further by clarifying that all actors engaged in the transdisciplinary investigation are both agents and subjects of research. Thus, it represents another motive for breaking the separation of roles between researcher and researched.

Referring to governance of natural resources, some authors go even further, proposing that social learning in transdisciplinarity is a mean for negotiating social transformations in terms of changing the "norms, rules and power relations that govern the use of natural resources" (Rist, Chidambaranathan, Escobar, Wiesmann, & Zimmermann, 2007, p.23). According to Hirsch Hadorn et al. (2006), this concern with social transformations is even more evident in what was described as a Southern perspective of transdisciplinarity, deeply influenced by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970). This critical line of thought states clearly that education, and therefore learning processes, should be served for transforming social and political structures that keep vulnerable people oppressed.

The idea proposed by transdisciplinarity of transforming social reality through learning processes is even more evident in the extensive and pluralistic methodological work developed around the term participatory research, shortly discussed in the following subsection.

2.2 Participatory research approaches

To propose a single definition of participatory research diminishes the pluralistic nature of the wide array of methods, approaches, theories and ideas that have been propagating in the past three decades comprised under this label. According to Robert Chambers – one of the main proponents of participatory approaches – the term comprises a creative and diversified family of methodologies that shares a main concern: the integration of poor and marginalized people as agents of the research processes, instead of mere object (Chambers, 1994).

Chambers distinguishes three main core elements of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) – an influential participatory method with an extensive history of application in different contexts – i) methods, ii) behavior and attitudes, and iii) sharing (Chambers, 2007). Even though this categorization was developed to understand what defines PRA, it is also applicable to many other types of the participatory family. Methods refer to the diverse, innovative, and flexible practical tools – visuals, tangibles, groups – used to facilitate communication between different actors participating in the research activities. Sharing is the term used to refer to the issue of accepting pluralism, diversity and flexible ownership of knowledge. But it is perhaps the issue of behavior and attitudes that best distinguishes participatory research from other traditional approaches.

Similarly with transdisciplinarity, participatory research recognizes local people as knowledgeable persons and demands a horizontal relationship between scientific and non scientific actors. Thus, it redefines the "location of power in the various stages of the research process" (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p.1667-1668), by sharing the control of the research processes with local people. This is done not only with the objective of having a better understanding of local motives, but also with an explicit aim of empowering local, marginalized and subordinated people, "enabling them to express and enhance their knowledge and take action" (Chambers, 2007, p. 3).

This can be demonstrated by a sentence that marks the diffusion of participatory research in many situations: participatory research is about knowledge for action. The role of researchers in this regards is clear. Instead of acting as the sole carriers of knowledge, instructors or diffusers, researchers must facilitate processes of knowledge sharing and learning, so "local people empower themselves and power relations are transformed" (Chambers, 2007, p.19).

The commonality with transdisciplinary is evident. The three main distinctive elements identified in transdisciplinarity studies – integration, complexity and mutual learning – could straightforwardly be applied to understand participatory research. However, if a distinction between those two approaches is insisted, one could observe that participatory research places more attention on the role of social transformation envisioned by the integration of local perspectives into learning processes, particularly by highlighting the goal of local empowerment.

2.3 Practical application in the research project

To understand the main ideas around these terms is certainly not the most puzzling step in making transdisciplinarity and participatory research. The real challenge is how these ideas are converted into practice and how they are incorporated in research design, implementation of activities, and evaluation. This subsection describes how we operationalized these considerations. For the sake of clarity, we

describe this process providing detailed information on seven research phases: I) identification of partner organizations; II) identification of cases; III) definition of research questions / boundaries of the case; IV) definition of analytical frameworks; V) data collection; VI) elaboration of analysis; and VII) discussion and communication.

As with many initiatives, the starting point of the research was the identification of potential organizations interested in joining the collaboration (I). Two steps were taken in this regards. IASS research staff elaborated guidelines for identifying the Partner Organization (POs) and these guidelines were clarified to the Country Program Managers (CPMs) or Country Program Officers (CPOs) of IFAD respectively responsible for the targeted countries. Besides IFAD officers, other contacts were made with persons previously known by IASS from past research experiences.

The guidelines stated that potential POs were CSOs that: i) have relevant and extensive experience in working in cooperation with poor rural populations, ii) are well recognized and positively evaluated in their area of action, iii) could be interested in the topic of research and in working in collaboration with IASS, iv) preferable have previously collaborated with IFAD. It was explained that these guidelines should serve as loose recommendations and there was a large degree of flexibility in suggesting potential POs. IFAD officers and others made one to three suggestions per country and IASS research staff approached individually the suggested CSOs establishing the first contact. In all cases, CSOs demonstrated interest in the initiative and in some cases where more than one CSO was suggested, to proceed with an extended invitation to more than one partner was decided, meaning that a consortium of different CSOs was formed. Table 1 presents the list of partners involved in the initiative and a very brief description of each organization.

TABLE 1 HERE

After the selection of POs, the second phase consisted of selecting the cases for study (II). A similar procedure as with the identification of partners was taken. IASS staff elaborated recommendations that were presented for the CSOs as loose guidelines. Again, a high degree of flexibility was made clear to CSOs, and the ultimate decision belonged to the local organizations. Furthermore, rather than instructing CSOs on case decision, the guidelines served as locators of the specific selected case inside the wider topic of research. Cases should: i) have a clear relation of governance of natural resources – understood intentionally broadly as the norms and practices that define the rules of games when it comes to natural resource rights (access, use, transfer, etc); ii) address issues of adaptation to changing environments and reduction of vulnerabilities, and iii) preferably be a case that has not been extensively

documented before. In most cases, CSOs suggested only one option, while in others two or more were given. In the latter case a decision for the final selection was made through dialogue.

The definition of the research questions that set the boundaries of the case (III) was a key activity in the research collaboration. Since this is a process that requires a deeper dialogue on the different understandings around a given situation, two approaches were taken. The first consisted in organizing a pilot workshop with two CSOs only (Brazil and India) at IASS headquarters, in Potsdam, Germany, at the end of September 2012. This workshop served as true transdisciplinarity exercise, since not only staff from IASS and the two organizations from Brazil and India were invited, but also a group of academic, practitioners, policy-makers from a diverse set or institutions, such as the IFAD, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), European Universities, and the German Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ), among others. The main purpose of this event was to experiment how such diverse group could reach a consensual decision on the boundaries of the two cases through elaborating a set of research questions to be addressed in the case studies. With the assistance of different working group methods, the group elaborated a set of around six questions for each case that were taken for further refinement by the CSOs in a later stage. With small modifications, these questions formed the boundaries for the cases of Brazil and India.

A simpler, but similar exercise was considered in the second approach, used in the definition of the research questions in the cases of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Bolivia and Ecuador. Even though the pilot workshop in Potsdam was highly evaluated by the participants, it proved to be a time and resource consuming activity. Therefore the second approach consisted of a visit of IASS research staff to the CSOs in their localities, composed of a short field visit (one week) and several internal dialogues with the organization, in order to reach consensus on the research questions. Also in these cases, a set of around six questions was jointly defined.

In many cases, the election of the analytical frameworks (IV) used in research comes consecutively after the definition of the boundaries of the cases. In this initiative, it came in parallel with the definition of the research questions, mostly due to timing, but also because of methodological reasons discussed in the results section of this article. In practice, IASS researchers have suggested the usage of two main analytical tools: i) an adapted Institutional Change Framework based on New Institutionalism theoretical ground (Ensminger, 1992; Haller, 2010), complemented by elements of the ii) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework – SLF (Scoones, 1998) – popularized by the United Kingdom´s Department for International Development – DFID (Solesbury, 2003). However, it was made clear to CSOs that the two main analytical tools should serve as orientation for the field work and the analysis, and not as single answers to the addressed problems – another point further discussed in the results section of this article.

The Institutional Change framework analyses change in institutions in the context of interactions between external and internal factors of a local setting. External factors, such as social and physical environments influence relative prices, driving changes in internal factors, such as institutions, ideologies and organizations. The framework emphasizes the role of different actor groups´ bargaining power in molding institutions – the rules for land governance. Additionally, the SLF is used as a complementary tool to compose the different capitals households have access to and to address vulnerability to external stressors, such as climate change. When joining both analytical tools, it is predicted that climate change will aggravate the already existing vulnerability of poor rural people who depend on natural resources for their livelihood. Institutional changes based on market and state involvement shape new interests with winners and losers with respect to access to resources and its management. In this regard, climate change hits as an additional factor on this already transformed and weakened context, but it is not the forefront source of social vulnerability of poor rural people.

The last three stages of the research initiative, data collection (V), analysis (VI) and discussion and communication (VII) are still under execution, therefore only some preliminary information can be here described. Regarding data collection (V), the procedure is that both teams from IASS and from CSOs participate in this activity. Local organizations indicate personal for assisting field work. In some cases, those are part of their own staff, while in other situations external consultants are being hired. However, IASS researchers are also taking part in many field work activities, in order to facilitate a second view of issues and their effective participation in data analysis.

And similarly with data collection, data analysis (VI) is also scheduled to be a joint exercise between IASS researchers and CSO staff. The proposal is that starting from the analytical tools, the two teams engage in a dialogue towards the elaboration of two main products: i) individual reports for each case study – coordinated by the respective local CSOs and ii) a final report that addresses, compares and analyses all case studies – coordinated by IASS staff.

Finally, in order to discuss and communicate (VII) the results of this research initiative with external audiences – a central activity in transdisciplinarity research – three main activities are being proposed. The first comprises local workshops, organized either in the regional capitals where the cases are located or the national capitals of the countries, where a broad range of audience will be targeted. These workshops should serve not only as opportunities for presenting and discussing results, but also as occasions for building bridges between the local CSOs and decision-makers, fostering what participatory research methods comment as social transformations through approximating both publics. The second groups of activities are publications. We consider diffusion publications directed to audiences in the respective localities where CSOs operates and articles targeted at scientific journals. Last, but not least, the third activity relates to a final workshop with the presence of all CSOs involved in the research

initiative. By presenting and discussing their experiences with each other, it is expected that processes of mutual learning be triggered.

3. Results

In order to deeper investigate how the theoretical components of transdisciplinarity and participatory research approaches influenced the practical implementation of the IFAD-IASS ProPoorGov project, this section presents our experiences and reflections generated during the execution of this initiative. Three main points are explored: i) the appropriateness of the using transdisciplinarity and participatory approaches to investigate pro-poor governance and climate change; ii) the appropriateness using these two approaches in a joint collaboration with local CSOs; and iii) how far the concepts proposed by these two approaches have reached the execution of the IASS-IFAD project in practical terms.

3.1 Transdisciplinarity, participatory research and governance

The first point is clearly straightforward. We observe evident advantages of addressing such a complex issue as governance through the incorporation of elements from transdisciplinarity and participatory thinking into research activities. Governance, broadly understood as "the norms and rules of interactions between actor groups involved in natural resource use, and the resulting power relationships between these groups" (Rist et al., 2007, p.23-24) is clearly an extremely complex issue. As indicated in the Institutional Framework of Ensminger (1992) – proposed as one of the analytical tools used in the research initiative – governance outcomes are dependent not only of external stressors such as demographic, technological and environmental change, but also on internal actors, institutions, organization and power dynamics (Haller, 2010).

We see two reasons why we observe transdisciplinarity and participatory thinking as ways forward in understanding this complexity. One is that even though discipline specialization assist the understanding of the different elements that affect governance outcomes, the concepts, methods and principles of a single discipline is clearly not enough to capture a comprehensive understanding of a given governance system. It is certainly through the integration of the different perspectives disciplines bring that part of governance complexity can be addressed. This is the old argument in favor of interdisciplinarity (Morillo, Bordons, & Gómez, 2003), reloaded.

The novelty relates to the second reason why we observe transdisciplinarity and participatory research meaningful for understanding governance. Governance is not only a complex, but a contested

issue. In contexts where vested interests and strong power imbalances are presents, different views about the governance systems may arise when investigating a particular situation. For some actors groups, the access and use of a given natural resource might be equally distributed, while to others, the opposite might be the case. The use of resources for some might be seen as sustainable, while for others it is unsustainable. To address governance through the integration of knowledge from different actors other than scientific ones inserts local actors in a process where the ownership of the understanding is shared, potentially enhancing its acceptance. Thus, it does not represent any longer an external reading of the situation brought from "reliable" science, but exactly the case discussed by Nowotny as socially robust knowledge (Nowotny, 2000).

3.2 Transdisciplinarity, participatory research and local CSOs

As pointed out by Hirsch Hadorn et al. (2006), the insights from participatory research have profoundly influenced the way local CSOs work in many countries, particularly those organizations working with rural poor people. This is clearly the case of the eight CSOs part of the IASS-IFAD Pro-poorGov project. Since from the first contact with these organizations – and even more after IASS researchers met them in person – it was palpable that these CSOs share a common sense in terms of the three points Chambers summarized as the principles of PRA and other participatory research and actions methodologies (Chambers, 2007). The local organizations pursue a horizontal behavior towards poor people they work with (learning as much as teaching), they use creative and innovative methods for information management, and they demonstrate open interest for sharing and accepting pluralistic views of knowledge.

To approach these organizations without having these points as guiding principles of the relationship around the project would be a complete contradiction, particularly the issue of researcher attitudes. In this regard, we observe that the thinking around transdisciplinarity and participatory research is being reproduced at two levels. One relates to the local or first level, meaning the relationship between local CSOs and poor rural people they work. The second level refers to the level of this research collaboration, the relationship between IASS research staff, IFAD officers and CSOs staff. In the same way the potential opportunities and achievements of transdisciplinarity and participatory research are found, challenges and difficulties arise. One worth mentioning relates to the necessity to clearly communicate, in a transparent and comprehensive way, the final intentions with the research collaboration, a point commented in the discussion section of this paper.

3.3 Transdisciplinarity, participatory research and practical implementation

After presenting some general results from the IASS-IFAD ProPoorGov in a general basis, we now move to describe how far we observe that transdisciplinarity and participatory research influenced execution of the IASS-IFAD project in practical terms.

As expected and different from standard scientific endeavors, the integration of CSOs into the research process was conducted from the very start of the research design. It clearly started after CSOs were approached (phase I) and the different cases were being identified (phase II). In our view, local organizations had the opportunity of bringing their priorities and perspective for study, since they were invited to suggest potential cases. One has to admit that this identification was limited by the research topic – pro-poor resource governance and climate change – and more precisely by the guidelines elaborated by IASS research staff for case selection.

However, two things speak in favor of considering this step as one with almost complete transfer of research control to the CSOs. First, the recommendations were extremely simple guidelines, which did not go further than just reproducing the title of the research initiative in clearer terms and they were explicitly presented as very flexible to the demands previously hold by CSOs. Second, to choose a broad and generic research title was intentionally decided to keep the initiative open for suggestions on specific cases and problems that CSOs themselves identify as priorities. In this regard, the selection of cases was intentionally commissioned to the local organizations due to the assumption that no one better than themselves know what deserves to be analyzed under the frame of the research initiative. Moreover, it was clear that CSOs have their own political agendas and that it was highly likely that the selection of cases would fit their interest in feeding these into policy processes. Although this introduces a significant "gatekeeping" element into the research (to be discussed below), we allowed for this selection process in order to configure the research initiative as a supporter of social transformations towards pro-poor resource governance.

Regarding the elaboration of the research questions and the definition of the boundaries of the cases (phase III), two approaches were experimented as described in the previous section of this article. The first approach, a pilot-workshop with CSOs from Brazil and India and participants from different professional spheres to jointly elaborate the questions proved to be a truly valid, but equal intricate exercise. The final evaluation of the workshop noticed that preparations as well as the dialogue process itself were very time-consuming and resources-intensive, a similar challenge found in other transdisciplinary experiments (Pohl et al., 2010). The option for a simpler exercise for the other four cases had mostly practical reasons. Although the objective of elaborating consensual boundaries was achieved,

interesting insights that could be originated in the transdisciplinarity workshop were not observed in the second and simpler approach.

The issue of choosing the analytical frameworks is of foremost importance in observing how transdisciplinarity and participatory principles are operationalized into practice (phase IV). One question that may arise is why to choose analytical frameworks at all? Or why not be led just by the empirical findings and address analytical questions only through grounded approaches? We advance three reasons to explain why it was decided to choose an analytical framework and why these in particular. First, being a research project, the IASS-IFAD ProPoorGov aims for more than just documentation of CSOs experiences. Documentation is certainly an important step, however this initiative seeks to go deeper into the different cases than merely documenting the knowledge – important as this step is. It also aims to bring critical reflection and to foster social learning and changes. More than just reproduction would be needed in these cases and one of the objectives of analytical framework is to facilitate data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Second an analytical framework is an important step in facilitating comparability between cases; another exercise that seeks to foster learning and critical reflection. And in order to allow comparability, broad and comprehensive analytical frameworks, applicable to different context without turning to be meaningless, were searched. Both the Institutional Change Framework and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework fulfill these conditions. While the first assist the collection and interpretation of data on historical and dynamic changes, and on power relations, the other includes focus on defining vulnerabilities to shocks and trends.

Another point worth of attention relates to the data collection phase (V). A relevant question would be why CSOs and IASS are participating in field work? Why not totally commission these data activities to those that know the local conditions better, meaning CSOs, and/or why not let these activities to those that are knowledgeable on field work methods, meaning the IASS researchers? As Pohl et al. comment, one of the consequences of transdisciplinary research is that the "corresponding roles of academic and non-academic actors are blurred" (2010, p.269). Putting scientific knowledge and non-scientific knowledge at the same level means that different engaged actors are able of collecting complementary data for the case study. This answer the second part of the question, since it eliminates the superior control researchers have in terms of possessing knowledge on data collection methods. At the same time, the decision to not completely reject the participation of IASS researchers in data collection has similar reasons. It offers a second, potentially less biased and alternative view on local issues, but also permits researchers to accumulate sufficient information of the local context, allowing them to effectively participate in the interpretation and analysis of the data (phase VI).

Finally, enabling processes of social transformation and empowerment requires communication and dialogue with external actors. It requires that local groups be able to vocalize their requests and

construct alliances and strategies for social change (for a critical reflection on what this implies, see Medina, Pokorny, and Campbell (2009)). The three discussion and communication activities (phase VII) proposed in the IFAD-IASS project are supposed to facilitate these processes. It is still a matter of subsequent follow-up to evaluate how far this will be achieved.

4. Discussion

The final section discusses the critical points found during the process of implementing this research approach and suggests some implications of this methodological twist for current research agendas on pro-poor resource governance. It built three main conclusions:

1.   *How much control is ceded to local organizations is a negotiated outcome*: as Cornwall and Jewkes have pointed out, in participatory research "control over the research is rarely devolved completely onto the 'community'; nor do 'communities' always want it" (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p.1672). Researchers face several challenges when trying to concede full control of research to local organizations. One of the most striking examples is that it requires extensive dialogue and consulting, a time and resource consuming activity. It implies that shortcuts about simple decisions are usually taken, something than can be seen either as authoritarian or as facilitating decisions, depending on the interpretation.

This is precisely the case of the IFAD-IASS collaboration. This initiative has a clear coordination – IASS – and although we are highly inspired by the principles of transdisciplinarity and participatory research, this is unmistakably a non-ceded role. Nevertheless, flexibility is being on of the most important elements when approaching local organizations. This can be demonstrated, for instance, in the process used for case selection. Guidelines were elaborated by the research coordination, but these were highly flexible and local organizations had indeed the final choice of selecting what was supposed to be studied.

A similar negotiated outcome was achieved when selecting the analytical frameworks. In this step, it was noticed that local CSOs in fact implicitly accepted the researcher role played by IASS, meaning that they expected that IASS suggested or even indicate the analytical tools to be used. For us, it was the case of finding the balance between playing this role, but at the same time allowing significant flexibility in terms of adapting and complementing with other tools from different theoretical schools. It is clearly a negotiated balance between ceding total control to CSOs or assuming the possibility of having, in the end, six completely unrelated and incomparable cases.

2.   Different expectations can inhibit trust building: for being and working close with local populations, CSOs are clearly in advantageous positions to understand the local context, compared to scientists that might be knowledgeable of using analytical tools, but rather distant to the problematic, at least in the beginning of the scientists-CSO collaboration. Nevertheless, involving CSOs in research results in additional attention to critically and reflectively question their understanding of the local context and even their own actions. Certainly CSOs are very much concerned with their intentions and impacts in local contexts and they are aware of critically reflection about those. Nevertheless, in many situations, CSOs either do not have the resources (time and personnel) or are busily involved in other priorities (planning advocacy or empowerment activities, acting in the field, etc.) rather than elaborating deep criticism of the context and their interventions. Bringing these actors into research activities could be seen as a window of opportunity CSOs use to solve these restrictions.

However, scientific documentation and critical reflection might not be an urgent priority of the CSOs and, furthermore, they might see activities towards influencing national and international policies as not too relevant or unachievable in the short term. Local CSOs might rather seek empowerment or improvement of life of as many beneficiaries on the ground, and they have already an understanding of how to achieve this. In these cases, the research can be identified only as a possibility to "scientifically" prove that the work they do is successful, meaning an opportunity for gathering more argumentation in their political battles. For instance, they might strive for validation by a research institute for assure their legitimacy and acquire external funding.

These are different expectations, which if not transparently communicated and discussed, may inhibits trust building processes. The imprecision of the main objectives of transdisciplinarity (mutual learning) and participatory research (social transformation, empowerment) certainly does not help to clarify the final intentions of these types of research initiatives and special cautious is suggested when approaching this issue. The danger of forcing reflective criticism about their actions is even more evident in the next point.

3.   Potential unintended side-effects: research for disempowerment? Earlier sections elaborate on the result that the "boundaries of the case" are negotiated between the different research partners. From the point of view of the researcher, this implied our quest to put the experiences made by CSOs in a broader context. This occurred, for example, by arguing that neighboring communities that are not co-operating with the local CSOs should also be included in the research activities, as a matter of generating comparable evidence of intervention impacts. Potentially, this might lead to research outcomes that put the approach taken by our civil society partners into question. This might, in turn, undermine their credibility in arguing with external actors support for particular approaches to address land governance.

Moreover, decreased credibility might translate into reducing their degree of influence in policy processes. Given the fact that CSOs are often a – if not the – key "service provider" to many isolated poor rural communities, the negotiated boundaries of the case might then also have disempowering effects. In the power-laden field of land governance, this would be highly detrimental outcome. Hence, the question of how to address this dilemma requires more attention in transdisciplinary research on land governance.

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Table 1. CSOs Project Partners

	Name	Short description
Bangladesh	BRAC	BRAC is a development organization dedicated to alleviate poverty by empowering the poor. Founded in Bangladesh in 1972, BRAC now works in 70,000 villages and 2,000 slums. Their program includes, amongst others, agriculture and food security, microfinance, education, health, legal empowerment and social enterprises. More concretely, the case study is being carried out in collaboration with the BRAC´s Research and Evaluation Division (RED). From 1975 on, it evolved as a multi-disciplinary independent research unit within the framework of the organization. The division has been playing an important role in designing BRAC`s development interventions, monitoring progress, documenting achievements, and undertaking impact assessment studies. RED also has a number of field research stations countrywide to facilitate data collection. www.brac.net
Bolivia	Fundación Tierra	Fundación Tierra is a Bolivian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to discuss ideas and develop proposals for the rural sustainable development of indigenous, natives and peasant groups. With more than 20 years of experience, Fundación Tierra works through action research and aims to influence policy making in Bolivia in favour of marginalized and excluded rural populations. It supports indigenous, natives and peasant groups by building capacities in management, negotiation, participation and policy incidence. Fundación Tierra research areas includes agrarian issues, food security, indigenous rights, democracy and local governance and the applied action research methodologies favours strong involvement of communities at the local level. www.ftierra.org Fundación Tierra is being supported by two research units linked to Bolivian universities. These are:
	AGRUCO	*Centro Universitario Agroecología Universidad Cochabamba* – www.agruco.org
	CIDES	*Postgrado en Ciencias del Desarrollo, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés* – www.cides.edu.bo
Brazil	PATAC	PATAC is a Brazilian CSO operating in the semi-arid regions of the Paraíba State, Northeast Brazil. PATAC has been promoting an alternative model for rural development based on agroecological approaches and soil and water conservation practices. They work under the paradigm of "coexistence with the semiarid", in contrast with the strategies of "combat the dry", taking a more holistic perspective on the interactions between family farming and natural aspects of the semi-arid landscape. It tries to explore the usage of local and original biodiversity, adapted to the conditions of the environment, and favours small-scale, low cost technologies to conserve and storage water, the scarcest resource in the region. Methods of interventions favour strongly participative, bottom-up project design and implementation, trying to reinforce community and local knowledge instead of bringing external solutions. http://patacparaiba.blogspot.de/p/patac.html
Burkina Faso	GRAF	GRAF (*Groupe de Recherche et d´Action sur le Foncier*) is a network of persons with different profiles working on or being interested in soil issues. The organization was founded in 2001 and is a member of the LandNet West Africa. GRAF aims at establishing networks of persons working in research, teaching, spreading information, and establishing a platform for exchange. Activities include the capitalization of experiences, education and training,

		research, and publications. Themes GRAF deals with are land conflicts, land acquisitions, delegated rights, decentralization, natural resources and further more. www.graf-bf.org
Ecuador	SIPAE	SIPAE (*Sistema de Investigación de la Problemática Agraria en Ecuador*) is an Ecuadorian research network based in Quito working on agrarian policies at the local and national levels. SIPAE conducts research through producing analyses and fostering social dialogues on ideas and political proposals, connecting scientific investigation and the academic environment of the University of Quito with social movements dealing with rural and agrarian problems. Therefore, SIPAE aims for social and agrarian change through the production of meaningful and theoretical structured proposals that advances policies in benefit of a more balanced and sustainable rural society. SIPAE vision states "to support a socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture for the promotion and defence of food security and collective, economic, social, cultural, and labour rights". www.sipae.com
India	Seva Mandir	Founded in 1968, Seva Mandir is an Indian non-profit organization that has been working for 40 years with the rural, predominantly, tribal population in Udaipur district of Southern Rajasthan. Seva Mandir's work centres on efforts to strengthen the sense of collectivity and cooperation among communities with the goal of improving social equity and increasing resilience to climate change impacts and crisis. The organization is present in 626 villages and 56 urban settlements in southern Rajasthan. www.sevamandir.org

Source: authors´ field data and organizations' websites.