



1000FARMS



Reframing research relationships: How participatory video helped us rethink farmer participation

Participatory research finds its voice through stories told by farmers

Tricot trials are participatory and invite farmers to evaluate crop varieties on their own farms. Thousands of farmers are engaged across diverse regions to test crop varieties, providing feedback on traits and their preferences. The data collected informs breeding decisions so that they contribute to more farmer-centred outcomes.

Even so, participating farmers may still experience tricot as extractive and unidirectional, rather than a joint learning process. While tricot democratizes variety selection, key aspects of the approach are shaped by researchers, with limited space for farmers to influence decision-making processes.

Unearthing the true potential of the tricot approach

As part of a dedicated research activity on understanding incentives and motivations to participate in citizen science, the 1000FARMS team began asking: how can we engage tricot farmers in a way that makes data collection less researcher-centred?

Participatory video offered a compelling way to address this question. In May 2024, we organized our first participatory video workshop in Rwanda, where 1000FARMS researchers and partners from One Acre Fund were trained in participatory video techniques. We then took the tool to the field. The results of collaboration with tricot farmer were striking - honest, nuanced,

and often surprising. Inspired by this, we adapted the method for Nigeria and Uganda, tailoring the process to each local context.

In Nigeria and Uganda, participatory video created space for farmers - especially women - to take an active role in telling their tricot stories. We realized that participatory video is not only a different way of doing research, in the sense of obtaining responses to research questions; it is a new way of building relationships with farmers. As one Nigerian research colleague said: "Seeing farmers take ownership of the storytelling process, confidently asking questions and making decisions about what to capture, reinforced the importance of partnership in research." Farmers were very positive about the engagement and enjoyed the ability to express themselves and draw on their experience in the field. One farmer noted: "With videos and pictures, we can show what we cannot express in fluent English."

In total, more than 25 farmers, researchers, and partners were trained and actively involved in the participatory video process. Across Rwanda, Nigeria, and Uganda, three community videos were produced, using participatory editing techniques. The videos highlighted key themes such as participation in citizen science being viewed as a form of community service, a space for networking, and a source of recognition. The reflections and learnings from this process are now informing the design of future 1000FARMS participatory strategies.

What is participation for?

As tricot and other on-farm testing approaches scale across breeding programs in CGIAR, it is essential to ensure that farmer participation remains meaningful and relational, and not just instrumental. Participatory video reframed our relationships with farmers by shifting the role of the researcher from information extractor to that of listener and collaborator. It allowed farmers to raise topics often missed by standard surveys - such as social dynamics, aspirations, and frustrations - while giving them pride and ownership in the research process and the work that they do.

The insights generated by participatory video not only enriched our understanding of farmer motivations but also challenged our assumptions about participation itself. This shift from "about farmers" to "with farmers" is critical for building trust, improving relevance, and ultimately co-creating better agricultural innovations. "If you do your research like this, you are always welcome to come back to my farm," declared a farmer from Rwanda - the ultimate recognition of participatory video's true value.

Participatory video empowers farmers to tell their own stories, in their own voices. What started as a small, open-ended experiment in Rwanda evolved into a meaningful initiative with applications in

Nigeria and Uganda. The experience helped both researchers and farmers to build empathy and connect around tricot as a shared journey.

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Nigerian research colleague

The experience also helped us reimagine what citizen science can be - not just a method for gathering data, but a platform for dialogue and shared meaning. It reminded us that participation is not only about inclusion in research, but about ownership, respect, and voice. For 1000FARMS and beyond, participatory video offers a powerful model to ensure that farmer-centred research remains truly farmer-led.



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