



Reconnaissance Sociale et Réglementaire de l'Innovation Variétale  
par la sélection participative pour les agricultures biologique et paysanne

### **Final Report review**

Partners: National Institute for Agronomic Research- Sciences for Action and Development  
Department, Landscape Unit (INRA-SAD Paysage) and Fondation Sciences Citoyennes  
(FSC)

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Programme REPERE  
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The evolution of our agricultural and food system affects many aspects of our everyday life. The project "Social and Regulatory Recognition of varietal innovation through participatory breeding in organic and peasant agriculture" (ReSoRIV) was aiming at illustrating the collective innovation on seeds in a common action linking peasants and researchers. The "seeds world" is mainly owned by increasingly specialized companies, which dominate the economic sector and promote an intensive and "precision" farming model. The image of food goods has been normalized and the regulatory system set out its contours. Single peasant initiatives have created a collective dynamic in the past dozen years to strengthen innovation at the farms. The aim is to breed plants that are adapted to various regions and practices and to propose a high-quality and varied food supply. Recognition of seeds stemming from participatory research, and disposing of their own technical, social and economical frame of reference, has consequences at all levels, from scientific activities to regulatory interrogations. The ReSoRIV project was built and conducted with a constant focus on meetings and procedures that would favor the dialogue between actors. ReSoRIV's objective was to develop a framework with an agro-ecological strong vision thanks to adapted and adaptable seeds.

Varietal innovation from participatory plant breeding for organic and peasant agriculture involves peasants, researchers and sometimes actors from the sector of economical and cultural valorization of innovation. It is based on a strong and ethical conception of what should be a sustainable agriculture fed by fundamental organic farming principles and concerned by a socially, fair and environmentally acceptable economic development. Its main steps are carried out under the conditions of the agricultural production in the field, which targets both, the market and the seeds reproduction, and which are co-defined with all partners involved. The project ReSoRIV is designed as a dialogue platform to explore regulatory pathways (existing or to be built) compatible with the biological, genetically or cultural nature of varieties and seed created on farms.

The project gathered a group of researchers, civil society organizations, and peasants, who has been involved in research projects with common goals since 10 years: developing their activities about dynamic management on farms, and promoting the recognition of farmers' seeds.

The project consisted also in exploring a controversy about research and regulation on farmers' seed.

### **Project expectations**

- To question decision-makers on regulation and orientation of research about experienced difficulties with farmers' seed and participatory plant breeding. On farm breeding is a marginalized innovation process which faces difficulties concerning:
  - o The recognition of participatory research;
  - o The regulatory status of participatory plant breeding, the plant populations/varieties creation, and farmers' rights to grow these populations or varieties. The aim of the project was not to change the seed laws within the short term, but to bring information for the current ongoing European and national seed laws revision;
- To define research priorities and means to implement seed regulation and to sustain on farm plant breeding and seed production;

- To produce recommendations for the French Ministry of Ecology to involve more civil society organizations in the governance of research.

### **Project activities**

- **Creation of communication supports** (reports, graphical charter)

This part of the work consisted in collecting information from actor's experiences and ongoing research programs and creating short pedagogical documents with the same graphical charter. A considerable work has been made to think and summarize this information in order to communicate outside the partners' group, as for instance towards decision-makers and the broader public. Around twenty sheets were created to describe concepts, programs, and main results. These summaries are available on the website of Fondation Sciences Citoyennes <http://sciencescitoyennes.org/fiches-de-synthese-sur-la-selection-en-recherche-participative/>

- **The kick off workshop of the project**

The kick off meeting took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 in Paris. Partners (INRA-SAD and FSC) and sub-contractors (Institut Technique de l'Agriculture Biologique-ITAB and Réseau Semences Pyansannes-RSP) of the ReSoRIV project, for a total of 20 participants, attended the meeting. The partners reviewed in detail the whole project, agreed on its specific goals and determined the strategies to undergo (concrete organization scheme, e.g. the frame for the organization of the "green class"). The meeting was about agreeing on the milestones of the project, and clarifying the positions and questions of the different partners, so as to establish a joint strategy to adopt concerning actors (known for long time) whose positions are not all shared by the consortium.

- **The « institutional » workshop**

This workshop took place on the 22<sup>th</sup> November 2012 at the CNAM (Centre National des Arts et Métiers) in Paris. A wider group of actors concerned by the research and the seed laws attended this meeting discuss with them the objectives of the project, its process and goals, and to establish common basis for the organization of the project's main event, the "green class".

There were almost 20 participants, coming from different backgrounds and representing most important actors in the field, namely: GNIS- National Alliance of Seeds and Plants, GEVES- French Group for the Study and Inspection of Varieties and Seeds, INRA, Ministry of Ecology and Agriculture, CNAM-National Center of Arts and Profession, FSC, RSP, BEDE-Biodiversity, Exchanges and Diffusion of Experiences, CNRS-Center for Scientific Research, HCB-High Committee for Biotechnology, FRB-Foundation for the Research on Biodiversity.

In spite of a certain tension due to different approaches to and analyses of the problem, the day was characterized by an atmosphere of mutual listening from actors who partly knew each others from working with and towards different authorities. The creation of this new place of exchange, (co-organized by the INRA institution and the association Fondation Sciences Citoyennes), offered the opportunity to question and discuss the positions in a rather informal way. Post-workshop feedbacks were thus mainly positive.

- **The « green class »**

The highlight of the project was the so called « green class », a whole-day meeting for political and institutional decision-makers. It aimed at reuniting research and regulation actors on seeds outside of their offices, and outside of overrun grounds. This meeting on a farmers place with his fields and

plants aimed at giving place for the senses: vision, touch, sense of smell and taste with the farm-made, organic meals. The bet was about provoking an encounter in the place of use, in discovering the real growing conditions of farmers' seeds. Thus the form of the meeting, by avoiding academic standards and by inviting peasants doing participatory breeding in their fields, permitted rather free and unusual exchanges.

The "green class" took place on the Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013, on the farm "Les Petits Chapelais" in Chavagne, near Rennes city. It mobilized 60 people and was a success for the organizers (FSC, INRA SAD Paysage, ITAB, RSP) and the participants.

Different institutional structures were represented: INRA, AgroCampus Ouest, Chamber of Agriculture of Ille-et-Vilaine, Regional direction of Water and Forests, Municipality of Rennes, Regional council of higher education and research-ASOSc program, GNIS, Ministry of Ecology-Office of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture-Office of Seeds, Foundation of France, Foundation for the Research on Biodiversity, GEVES-CTPS, ITAB-Technical Institute of Organic Agriculture.

The participants were welcomed with a gourmet breakfast made with farm products, after which they were invited to visit different stands in the fields to discover ongoing research programs on participatory selection on farmers' seeds. In the afternoon, the participants could attend a workshop on research and a workshop on regulation. The participants were asked to define the current lock-in in these fields, to think about the way of establishing priorities and to suggest solutions in terms of means and organizational innovation.

If the first mobilization of actors for the November seminar in Paris was relatively easy, it was much harder to mobilize the political and institutional decision-makers (as the "green class" target group) and to make them leave Paris (and Brussels) to come to the countryside. Thus, the absence of representatives from the European Commission, the French Ministry of Research and from the national direction of INRA is regrettable. In consequence, the "green class" missed one of its objectives: allowing a controversial exchange amongst these representatives with the actors involved in participatory breeding and farm management. The workshop on research was therefore rather consensual and without real debate about implementations in public research.

Nevertheless, the "green class" could provide three advantages: (1) visualization by the participants of the research done in the fields with the involved farmers and researchers, (2) gathering of different actors including actors from the economic sector willing to generate new employment as well as improving their environmental performance and (3) a discussion based on concrete results of numerous participatory research projects, initiated more than a decade ago.

### **Project outcomes:**

The "green class" format has favored more open and "relaxed" climate of exchange between actors used to meet in negotiating arenas about seed regulation than usually since they are not sharing the same or similar positions. Taking into account the positive feedback of the participants, further meetings outside Paris and offices should be proposed. They would offer to decision makers and other administrative and policy staff, information which is not easily transmitted neither orally neither in written documents.

The positive reactions and issues resulted probably from the general context opened to negotiation (as it is currently the case at the European Commission level) as well as from the “green class” format. **Some progress of the institutional bodies on the recognition of on farm seed and its consequence on regulation (GNIS, Ministry of Agriculture) had emerged.** The representative of BSSV, Bureau des Semences et de la Santé des Végétaux (Service specialized on seed of the ministry of Agriculture) was to take home proposals at the Cabinet of the Ministry at the end of the “green class”. Then, the “green class” did not expose itself as a negotiating place but as a laboratory to make hypotheses emerge.

The demonstrative and educational dimension of the “green class” has borne fruit, especially through the visit in the fields. **The organization of a transdisciplinary research at several levels and the peasant wheat demonstration showing adaption advantages (wheat which did not fall), constitute possible breakthroughs in terms of recognition.** Some of the key persons were very impressed when they left the “green class”.

The ReSoRIV project presents a point of culmination of 10 years in action-research in France. The aim of the “green class” tool was to open up the debate on concepts and means for developing participatory research with peasants – an issue, which is not frequently considered by decision-makers. Up to now, previous academic discussions in the usual places have not contributed to raise significantly means allocated to this kind of research and its recognition. We continue to pursue the idea that encounters of actors beyond the usual sphere will support an evolution of strategic choices in public research including participatory research. At this time it is too early to evaluate possible direct consequences of the green class for the scientific policy and research planning, but one outcome could be the emergence of several poles of interest inside public authorities and civil society.

In terms of participatory research on farmers’ seeds, the ReSoRIV project is part of an innovation process, both on substantive and organizational aspects of research. The “green class” constitutes an experimental part of the project, which enlarges the participatory aspect to other actors.

### **Immediate consequences**

- Communication to a broad public of the expertise developed by the partners during the last decade;
- Integration of the partners in discussion areas where they were excluded until now;
- Acquisition of a social and regulatory recognition. The process is not concluded but it would help to go beyond the institutional inertia to support participatory research in practice;

### **Middle-term consequences**

How to ensure a sustainable dialogue established between the ReSoRIV actors during the REPERE program?

Several suggestions can be drafted: the recognition of different knowledge in a research project involving society; recognition of a scientific culture/investigation outside the research institutions;

the diversity of approaches favoring the emergence of new research; the integration of citizens and civil society organizations in research management (downstream instead of upstream).

### **Recommendations for the Ministry of Ecology**

- It seems important to maintain calls for proposals or tenders, which offer opportunities to work on environmental themes that are not mainstreamed for researchers and civil society organizations;
- The programs should favor direct funding of the associations and should avoid administrative complexity, for instance on small expenses (we had to establish individual conventions between peasants and INRA to compensate their working day on the farm);
- Democratization of the project evaluation process and the monitoring of results through the integration of actors from the ground.

If SAD is an interesting INRA department to develop and support that kind of research, its funding remains insecure. Therefore, prospects remain hardly identifiable in terms of research, notably due to a bottleneck in human resources.

Who could durably support participatory research? Even if an evolution is perceptible in terms of proposals for projects, for instance no long-term position had been created within INRA to support daily this research.

Besides the fact that the participants enjoyed the involvement of the young generation (students, young researchers) in this research, one may wonder whether participatory research will always be paid so poorly in the future. ReSoRIV and all the previous named projects are mainly implemented by students or researchers with precarious contracts. The "green class" operated in this way.

Moreover, it resulted from the debate that there was another important issue for the future of participatory research, which is to ensure the continued existence of facilitators in associations. Indeed, they have a central role to play in co-constructed projects.

Participatory research needs researchers who are not only dealing with process analysis, but who are also implied on the ground with the actors.