



Participatory guarantee systems: organic certification to empower farmers and strengthen communities

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Problem statement

- › Certification is needed
 - › Usually 3rd party
 - › But expensive: Especially in developing world
 - › Often organic by default
 - › Alternative system needed
- › PGS are an alternative
 - › Currently around 110 000 producers in 72 countries
 - › This number is growing

Current PGS initiatives



Problem statement

- › But little research
 - › Into what the benefits are for farmers
 - › into what makes them tick
 - › Into why some succeed and some fail

Introduction: What are PGS?

- › Organic verification systems
 - Active participation of stakeholders
 - Built on a foundation of trust, social networks, and knowledge building and exchange
- › Intended for local market
 - › Producers have to be accessible to consumers
- Typically involve
 - Producers
 - Consumers
 - Stakeholders such as staff from NGOs, universities and extension services, government representatives, and consultants

Methodology

- › Interviews with 85 farmers: analysed according to content
 - › Mexico, Peru, South Africa, India, Philippines, France, Brasil
- › Interpreted with empowerment theory
 - › Empowerment at individual and community levels
 - › Enhancing factors include
 - › social cohesion
 - › collective infrastructure
 - › opportunity
- › and social process theory
 - › the ways in which individuals and groups interact within a system

Main results: Social cohesion

- › Bonds created between participating farmers
 - › Information exchange
 - › Improved techniques
 - › Locally suitable varieties
 - › Mutual support and (even) on farm help
 - › Often organised by women
 - › More intensive contact between participating farmers
 - › Self controlled
 - › Collective decision-making
 - › Free riders not tolerated



Main results: Collective infrastructure

- › Efficiencies of collective organisation
- › Collective marketing
 - › Transport
 - › Market access
 - › Green shops/Honey huts
- › Collective buying
 - › Reduces input prices
- › Seed banks
 - › Critical mass needed



Main results: Opportunity

- › Evidence of empowerment
- › Empowerment of women
 - › Seed banks/PGS administration
 - › Sometimes the first recognition
- › Access to finance
 - › Low interest rates
 - › Internal controls
 - › Not as easy as sometimes reported
- › Access to knowledge resources
 - › Such as market analyses



Main results: Threats

- › Common to all farming types
 - › Overproduction
 - › Crop losses
- › Particular to PGS
 - › Heavy reliance on key organisers
 - › Not suitable for export
 - › so only local markets
 - › Define local



But where are they now?

- › Ecovida (BRASIL)
 - › not members of IFOAM - Organics International and the standard they use is not included in the IFOAM Family of Standards.
 - › Were recognized by IFOAM but no longer.
 - › Still going strong
- › ANPE/IDMA (PERU):
 - › never obtained the Official IFOAM PGS Recognition.
 - › Still going strong
- › BONM (SA):
 - › never obtained the Official IFOAM PGS Recognition.
 - › I don't know. But there was one person who carried it.

But where are they now?

- › Green Foundation (INDIA):
 - › never obtained the Official IFOAM PGS Recognition.
 - › Still going strong
- › Keystone Foundation (INDIA):
 - › never obtained the Official IFOAM PGS Recognition.
 - › Still going strong.
- › REDAC (Mexico):
 - › not maintaining their standards anymore and the network seems to be inactive.
 - › never obtained the Official IFOAM PGS Recognition.
 - › PGS still in Mexico. University of Chapingo
- › N&P (France) and MASIPAG (Philippines) are both officially recognized
 - › Still going strong.

Conclusions

- › Results are about social processes rather than certification
 - › The original purpose of PGS has become secondary
 - › Social processes provide real benefits of participation
- › Still many problems to be solved
 - › Particularly about export
 - › Particularly about organisational sustainability
- › More work to be done

Publications

- › Home, R., Bouagnimbeck, H., Ugas, R., Arbenz, M. & Stolze, M. (2017), Participatory guarantee systems: organic certification to empower farmers and strengthen communities, *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* Vol. 41 (5).
- › Home, R. and Nelson, E. (2015), The Role of Participatory Guarantee Systems for Food Security. In Oehen, B. and Hilbeck, A. (eds.) *Feeding the People: Agroecology for Nourishing the World and Transforming the Agri-food System*. <http://orgprints.org/30165/1/home-nelson-feeding-people-ifoamEUGroup-chapter5-p26-29.pdf>

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