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

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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

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