

Mainstreaming PGS in the Philippines

By Andre Leu, IFOAM President



A National Conference on Mainstreaming Participatory Guarantee Systems took place from January 14 to 15 in Manila, Philippines. It was held at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City, Metropolitan Manila and was organized by MASIPAG with the support of IFOAM, in the framework of the SSNC-funded project “Gaining Government Support for PGS”. The aim of the event, which was attended by more than 100 participants, was to get PGS included in the

new organic regulation of the Philippines, the Republic Act 10068 (or the Organic Act of 2010), enacted in April 2010. Currently section 17 of the legislation, which will come into force in April 2013, only permits 3rd party certified products to be labeled as organic. This will mean that after April 2013 it will be illegal for the 70 existing PGS groups in the Philippines to use the word organic in their products.

The law will force a prohibitive cost onto smallholder farmers who cannot generate enough income to pay the high costs of third party certification (which could be more than fifty thousand pesos or US \$1,250). Many smallholder farmers in the Philippines earn considerably less than this per year.

Presently there are only two national 3rd party certifying bodies (apart from the foreign certifiers that are primarily focused on the international export markets) in the Philippines and they only have a few clients, while it is estimated that several thousand small holder producers belong to PGS groups. If the current law is implemented, it will mean that it will be illegal for the overwhelming majority of organic farmers complying to an existing organic guarantee system in the Philippines to sell their products as organic.

MASIPAG invited me to participate in the event as I had been involved in a PGS workshop on this issue during the 9th Philippines National Organic Conference, in Cebu, at the end of October 2012. The National Conference focused on informing



Andre Leu and the conference participants

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participants about the multiples benefits of and the need for PGS as an organic guarantee system for smallholder farmers and the issues surrounding the current organic regulation in the Philippines.

Several participants gave examples of different PGS groups that were operating successfully in the Philippines. One of the outstanding presenters was Mayor Jun from Dumingag who was the winner of the One World Award in 2012. He gave a very inspiring presentation on how they were turning their local government district of Dumingag into a 100% organic farming area and on how they had set up their PGS for the district. Another significant presentation came for the Government of Quezon Province, the first province in the Philippines to bring in a regulation for PGS and to actively implement it.

There were two significant outcomes of the conference: The Philippines PGS Network was formally launched and now all the PGS initiatives are working together as a unified network.

A delegation from conference participants went to a meeting of the National Organic Agriculture Board (NOAB) on the morning of January 15 to request an extension to the deadline on the implementation of Section 17 of the regulation and that PGS must be included in this section when it is implemented.

This second outcome was especially significant. The delegation consisted of various organic leaders, including from MASIPAG and myself. We outlined the need for including PGS as a complementary guarantee to 3rd party certification, especially for small holders. Mr. Edicio dela Torre, Member of the Secretary's Technical Advisory Group (STAG), spoke strongly in favor of PGS, stating that it was wrong for the regulation to turn the current PGS farmers into criminals and gave good advice on how to approach the issue.

Dr. Chito Medina, MASIPAG National Coordinator, sits

on the NOAB and strongly advocated for PGS during the later session of the NOAB meeting, where it was formally put on the agenda. The NOAB along with the Secretary of Agriculture, SEC. Alcala, unanimously agreed to the extension of the deadline on the implementation of Section 17 of the regulation and that PGS will be included when it is implemented.



Andre Leu and Dr. Chito Medina during the conference

This is an extremely positive impact of the event and of the collaboration between IFOAM, MASIPAG and organic stakeholders in the Philippines: means that when the organic regulation is amended, the Philippines will be the third country in the world, after Brazil and India to have a national regulation that recognizes PGS.

This was a very successful event in that the primary aim of the conference, to get PGS into the new regulation, was achieved far quicker and easier than anyone imagined. It will now be a matter of time and government processes to see the law amended. I also believe that it was very successful in promoting PGS to a range of stakeholders from farming organizations through to government at local, provincial and national levels.

The potential of PGS: Examples from India

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM Value Chain Assistant



After six months of internship at IFOAM where I had learned a lot about PGS from a far-away perspective, I was eager to visit some PGS initiatives, dig deeper into the realities of PGS and learn more about the people and challenges behind the model. In August 2012 I accepted the

invitation of [Joy Daniel](#) from the Institute for Integrated Rural Development (IIRD) in Maharashtra state and travelled to India. Joy and his colleagues from the IIRD planned a full 4-day program and provided me with a broad picture of their PGS and of rural Indian life. Later I was given the opportunity to visit another PGS initiative: [Mathew John](#) and Keystone Foundation. In this article, I would like to share what I have learned in this visit about PGS in a rural Indian context.

The IIRD promotes organic agriculture as a way to improve the livelihood of rural people in the villages in a country where hundreds of millions live in very poor conditions and farmers struggle to feed their families. Today more than 2,500 farmers in 94 villages in Maharashtra are producing organically. 1,000 of them are participating in the PGS; they are split into 50 groups with an average of 20 farmers each. Visiting the fields, I saw a high level of organic techniques, e.g. advanced inter-cropping systems, which proved that the system of knowledge sharing is well functioning. All the farmers I talked to were very positive, both about their conversion to organic as well as about the value of PGS for them.

The key to the success of the IIRD PGS are the field coordinators, each of whom is in charge of one to four groups. These field coordinators are all women farmers from various villages, who have participated in a one-year organic agriculture training provided by IIRD. They carry out many functions in the PGS, while visiting the farms regularly. They not only act as a key connection between the IIRD and the farmers but also facilitate exchange among the different groups. When asked about what benefits they obtain from their participation in the PGS, nearly all farmers immediately referred to the field coordinators as a major source of support.

Some of the field coordinators fulfill a double-function, acting also as coordinators for the producers' company, which is another important component of the PGS. This farmer-owned company was established in March 2011 in order to create additional channels for the farmers to sell their products. On-farm subsistence and local food security are the main priority for the IIRD, but farmers also need to earn income. Since organic is still very little known in India, selling their produce is one of the main challenges. The new sales opportunities that opened up for farmers through this company (e.g. organic bazaars and shop in nearby city of Aurangabad, exchange of products with other PGS groups), even though they are still limited, have made a big difference to them.

The accumulation of debt is one of the most pressing problems for Indian farmers*. So it is remarkable that the IIRD PGS is able to have a money saving system installed within the groups. Each participating farmer

* According to the statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau, more than 250,000 farmers in India have committed suicide between 1995 and 2010. The most prominent motive is believed to be the huge debt that many Indian farmers have accumulated from the loans they took to pay for the modern seed and the chemical inputs necessary to support their survival.

contributes 100 Rupees** a month and the money collected is used for common investments or is lent to individual members as a short-term credit for small investments. An example for such a credit could be the purchase of a flour mill or sewing machine to start a micro-enterprise. The fact that the farmers participating in the IIRD PGS are able to contribute money on a regular basis, while most farmers in the country are struggling with huge debts, is on its own an important sign of success.



Farmer proudly shows her flour mill. The money saved in the PGS group enabled her to start this micro-enterprise.

What is the role and perception of consumers in the IIRD PGS? When I talked to some consumers at the weekly organic bazaar, nobody even knew about the PGS. Consumers buy the organic products because of the freshness, good taste and because they can obtain rare local varieties. It can be assumed that the quality guarantee that PGS adds to the products might have more significance for indirect sales (PGS label); consumers who buy directly at markets however, seem to be satisfied by just meeting the farmers personally and looking at the products. Similar observations have been made referring to other PGS initiatives around the world. In the case of the IIRD PGS it appears that the main strength of the PGS and core benefit for the farmers is the creation of a system of knowledge sharing and of mutual support and cooperation.

During my trip to India, I also had the opportunity to pay a short visit to another PGS initiative: Keystone Foundation in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu. Mathew John and his colleagues are doing a great job to conserve the tribal villages of the region and the natural environment they live in.

Keystone Foundation is currently in the process of developing a standard for wild collection, which will become the main pillar of their PGS. By defining such a standard and implementing a PGS, Keystone works

** 100 Rupees are approximately 1.4 Euro. This is a considerable amount of money considering that 80% of the Indians live on less than 2 Euros a day.

together with the tribal people to protect their highly endangered living environment and in addition enables them to produce and sell their products as high quality.***

The activities of Keystone Foundation remind us about the diverse potentials that PGS carries. PGS can constitute a platform to set standards in sectors that still lack them and in that way fill the gaps.

These visits were highly educating. Before I went to India, coming from a European context, my perception of PGS was dominated by the aspects of certification and quality guarantee. In India I was reminded that, depending on the context, those functions might only be of secondary importance. Actually, PGS can perform a wide range of purposes, such as facilitating knowledge exchange or the development and implementation of an innovative set of standards. Such functions can make a big difference in the promotion and improvement of sustainable or organic systems in different regions of the world.



In the meeting hall of one PGS group. The extensive collection of records includes information from each farm, pledges, savings books and much more.

***Products from tribal villages are commonly perceived to have low quality and hygiene by the Indian society, and are often sold at very low prices.

PGS Vietnam – The way forward!

By Ms. Tu Thi Tuyet Nhung, Head of PGS.CC Vietnam. Contact: nhungadda@gmail.com

PGS Vietnam was first established in 2008, with the support and under the technical guidance of the project “Organic Development ADDA-VNFU”. As the project came to an end in September 2012, PGS Vietnam kept operating and building trust among consumers. In early 2009, PGS Vietnam developed its initial standards for organic crop production, including a PGS guidance manual with the support from Koen den Braber, project advisor, and from Chris May, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee. When building our PGS standards, we used the National Basic Standards for Organic Products, issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in December 2006 as a reference. We also referred to IFOA to develop detailed procedures for the certification of organic products, which were not described in the MARD’s standards. In this sense, our PGS is filling a gap by helping many stakeholders in the organic sector, especially small farmers. There are now 29 groups registered with 225 small organic farmers (average of about 10 ha per producer), among which 23 groups have obtained PGS certification.

In 2011 we applied to become part of the IFOAM Family of Standards and during the assessment some suggestions for improvement were made. This, associated with the identification of problems referring to certification and inspection activities at a practical level, led to a discussion to revise the PGS standards. During the revision process, we tried to follow as much as possible the IFOAM standards and the result is that now they include stricter requirements about conversion periods and incorporate “good practices” in organic crop production (e.g. green manure must be in rotation of year). Moreover, the standards for organic animal husbandry and processing were added to the new PGS standards as well. The new standards were approved by our constituency in the PGS Annual General Meeting (AGM 2012), which took place on 14 December. The revised standards approved by AGM 2012 were submitted to IFOAM for the second time after justification according to the first assessment. It is now in the process of approval.

The AGM 2012 of PGS Vietnam was held in Hanoi with the support from IFOAM, through the project “Gaining governmental support for PGS”, funded by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). Over 80 participants joined the event, which was more than an internal meeting and was also aimed at advocating for PGS recognition. Among the participants there were leaders from the departments of Crop Production and Quality Assurance of the MARD, members of the Vietnam Organic Association (VOA), representatives of the producers groups that are part of PGS Vietnam, retailers, consumers and representatives of NGOs interested in

PGS, such as VECO Vietnam, Jica, and Seed to table.

The event was very successful and it demonstrated that PGS Vietnam has established itself as a reference for organic agriculture in the country. In fact, promotion of organic agriculture has been taken on also by local stakeholders: local authorities of regions where PGS is being implemented have participated in planning and expanding the organic production in the coming years. Government representatives from Hanoi city and the district People's Committee also saw the prospect of quality management through PGS in Soc Son (Hanoi) and Luong Son (Hoa Binh) and decided to support organic farming in those areas.

However, PGS still faces difficulties in obtaining recognition by the government because it is a very new concept and both consumers and government officers have limited knowledge about it. Through our activities, we hope to contribute for a further change so that, with the support from the local farmer unions and the authorities, PGS can prosper in Vietnam.

The success of PGS and organic farming in the South of Brazil

By Claudia Hofstadler, Student, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

Contact: claudiahofi@gmx.at

In my master's studies, I learned about the growth of the global organic market, and how it is manifested in different ways around the world. Most of the consumption of certified organic products happens in the global North and West, while the certified organic production is rising in the countries of the South and the East (Egelyng, H. et al., 2010, p. 3f), where small farms dominate organic agriculture. These are often not certified, because they can't afford the costs of a third party certification. The exclusion of small-scale farmers of the organic market contributed to the development of PGS, which were primary discussed at a global workshop on alternative certification in 2004 in Torres, Brazil (Meirelles, L. & Rebelatto dos Santos, L. C., 2008, p. 22f). The absence of PGS in Austria and my interest in Brazilian culture motivated me to write my master thesis in this country.

In 2012, I spent over three months in Brazil to do my empirical research in Rio Grande do Sul, with the group "Vale do Cai" from the network "Red Ecovida de Agroecologia", the first and biggest network for participatory certification in Brazil. My research objectives were to primarily describe a successful PGS, referring to the actors of a PGS, their position and their relational ties and the formal and informal institutions regulating PGS. My research also included further investigation of the perceptions of the actors in the PGS related to strengths and weaknesses of the system, as well as of opportunities and threats for organic farming, in general.

My field research started at the 8th meeting of the "Ecovida Agroecology"- network in Florianopolis, where I got to know my key contacts, attended workshops and presentations. Then I travelled to Rio Grande do Sul, where I spent two months with data collection, through informal conversations at peer reviews, participant observation of group meetings and personal structured interviews with the members registered in one group of the network.

My research partners were four different cooperatives of organic producers. The perceptions of the actors about the strengths and weaknesses of a PGS are very similar to what has been described in the [proceedings of the workshop on alternative certification in 2004 in Torres](#). The majority of the stakeholders interviewed prefer PGS to other organic guarantee systems mainly because of the participation of local producers who know each other and the local problems. The organic production in "Vale do Cai" benefits from the growing demand for organic products, which leads to the development of new markets. The main challenge for the producers is the difficulty in receiving organic seeds of good quality. Participant observation and discussions with stakeholders on different open air fairs showed me that the lack of participation of organic consumers in this PGS is an issue for the group "Vale do Cai", but I also observed a great cooperation and exchange of information among the groups inside the network.

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Continental News: What's new in...



...Africa

- **Morocco:** A national encounter on agroecology was organized on January 26 and 27 and it included a PGS workshop held by Eva Torremocha. A PGS initiative is already active in the North of the country (Chefcahouen), working in cooperation with local restaurants and consumers. For more information, please contact [Annie Mellouki](#)



...Asia and Oceania

- **POETCom:** IFAD has just approved a grant for POETcom to develop PGS and associated value chains. POETCom is trying to establish recognition of PGS for trade in the region and the project will positively impact especially the most vulnerable and marginalized islands, whose production capacity will never warrant the cost of 3rd party certification. We will follow the progress of the project and publish news about it on this Newsletter, but you can contact [Karen Mapusa](#) for more information.



...Latin America

- **Costa Rica:** The International Analog Forestry Network (IAFN) is organizing a 3 day workshop to look at PGS for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), from February 4 to 6 in Quepas, Costa Rica. IAFN works towards the promotion of Analog Forestry worldwide, as well as in the promotion of a sustainable marketing of anthropogenic forest products. They hold the label for Forest Garden Products (FGP) and as part of a larger consortium called the Rich Forests Initiative would like to begin with a process to develop a PGS for NTFPs that can enable partners and the communities where they work to enhance local markets while restoring biodiversity and improving livelihoods. This workshop will bring together people from Latin America, both members and not from the IAFN, in order to discuss and highlight the main aspects to be considered and draw a road-map towards the PGS. Mathew John from Keystone Foundation, member of the IFOAM World Board and PGS Committee, has been invited to join this workshop and share his experience. Mathew has been working with NTFPs for the past couple of decades and building systems for certifying wild produce through PGS. For more information, please contact [Mathew John](#).
- **Bolivia:** Laércio Meirelles from Centro Ecológico, Brazil, has been to Santa Cruz de la Sierra for a PGS seminar at the NGO "Centro de Promoción de Agropecuaria Campesina - CEPAC". More than 40 people joined the event, mostly producers, some representatives of NGOs and associations. For details on the program and results, please contact [Jannet Villanueva](#).



...North America and Europe

- USA: The international CSA network URGENCI held its assembly during the EcoFarm Conference, on January 21 and 22, in California. Eva Torremocha joined a round table and presented PGS initiatives related to CSA experiences. PGS and CSA are getting closer and closer! For more information, please contact [Eva Torremocha](#).
- USA: Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) has been implementing different communication and visibility activities. CNG recently printed a small handout to increase awareness of the value of local farmers networks, and CNG's resources to support them, which can be viewed [here](#). It was printed for distribution at winter farming conferences and to take advantage of the winter months when it is easiest to harness farmers' interest in networking, before the busy growing season gets started. Also, CNG has launched a "sister website" to increase public awareness of and engagement with CNG. The new community site includes weekly blog posts about member farmers and other stakeholders, a compilation of helpful resources developed to support farmers networks, and a listing of events sponsored or supported by CNG, including educational webinars. Check it out at this [link](#). All feedback and suggestions are welcome. Contact alicevaron@naturallygrown.org

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Editing: Flávia Castro, IFOAM

Layout: Omkar Gopalakrishnan, IFOAM

IFOAM Head Office

Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5
53113 Bonn, Germany

Phone: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 10

Fax: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 99

Email: headoffice@ifoam.org

Web: www.ifoam.org

Trial Court Bonn, Association Register no.: 8726

PGS Coordination at IFOAM

Flávia Castro

Email: pgs@ifoam.org

Phone: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 14

IFOAM PGS Committee Members' contacts

Europe: Eva Torremocha (Spain), evatorremocha@hotmail.com

North America: Alice Varon (USA), alice@naturallygrown.org

Oceania: Chris May (New Zealand), biomays@clear.net.nz

South America: Janet Villanueva (Peru), jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe

Asia: Mathew John (India): mathew@keystone-foundation.org

África: Marc Lewis (South Africa): cramlewis@gmail.com

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