

Discussing government recognition and support for PGS in Latin America



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Based on an interview for LEISA Magazine – Teresa Gianella

This is the second and final article looking at the current development of PGS in Latin America, through the work of the Latin American Forum on PGS. The previous article was published on the issue *nr. 3, vol.8, March/April 2018 of the Global PGS Newsletter*.

The IV Latin-American Forum on PGS, which took place in Piura, Peru, in March this year, was organized considering the Inter-American Commission of Organic Agriculture (CIAO)¹ meeting, scheduled for 6 – 8 August, in the city of Cuzco, Peru.

The participation of representatives of competent authorities for organic agriculture was an innovative aspect of the IV Latin-American Forum on PGS. Representatives from two agencies of the Peruvian government attended: SENASA (control competent authority) and the Ministry of Agriculture - Department of Agricultural Policies (development competent authority). SENASA presented the status of organic production in Peru and reported on the work done, in consultation with national stakeholders, towards recognizing and regulating PGS. SENASA has been working on a proposal of a legal device which outlines the basics of what a PGS should have, and some areas of this proposal have raised concerns.

One example is the fact that this proposal pushes for the principles of Impartiality and Confidentiality. SENASA's approach emphasizes the concept of Independence, which is essentially how third-party certification works

to achieve Impartiality. In PGS, the emphasis is on Participation, as the (opposite) way to achieve impartiality in a guarantee system. Impartiality is therefore relevant for PGS, if we consider the participation of parties other than farmers themselves in the system; and Confidentiality also plays a role at a certain level to safeguard a PGS. But these principles cannot be understood as more paperwork and bureaucracy for a PGS initiative. The government's approach also foresees the use of terms that are common in third-party certification, such as "operators". Farmers are not used to this terminology. This is a major concern, because terminology ends up conditioning the way in which the system unfolds, de-characterizing a PGS. Essentially, the overall proposal of SENASA forces PGS to fit the way third-party certification bodies operate, including the organizational structures and requirements. These concerns were highlighted during the discussions at the Forum but will most likely

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1 CIAO is comprised by organic agriculture competent authorities.

not lead to any further action since CSOs in Peru have been waiting for this recognition for more than a decade and want to have the system approved as soon as possible, after more than a year of hard work.

The Forum creates opportunities for discussion, but PGS stakeholders in each country have the task of building



Participants at the IV Latin American Forum on PGS

their own strategies for strengthening and consolidating PGS. In some cases, the focus is on advocacy for recognition, in others on tools for development, funding, capacity building, consumer awareness, etc. The two fronts in which the Forum takes common action are: towards governments, to promote and support PGS with action plans and public policies; and towards CSOs themselves, to strengthen them and tackle their own internal challenges. The role of the Forum is to articulate the different initiatives at the regional level, showcasing and reporting on what has been successfully achieved. This means that those that still do not recognize or understand the multiple benefits of PGS can do so and start their own processes. Compared to the starting point in 2004, when the first international workshop on alternative certification took place in Brazil, there is a positive balance in terms of number of functioning PGS

initiatives and of legal frameworks in Latin America both supporting and recognizing PGS. Nevertheless, there is a lot to do with regards to promotion. The achievements are documented and expressed in the Letters resulting from each meeting, which highlight the importance of staying connected, sharing, and contributing.

During this last Forum, the presence, participation and commitment of authorities from Brazil, Chile and Mexico, gave an especially positive dynamic to the discussions, with the presentation of promotion policies that other governments should consider. Participants were impressed by the work of Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (INDAP) in Chile, with a budget of almost USD 500 million to support family farming: this represents 60% of the overall budget of the Ministry of Agriculture of Chile. Another example were the Groups of Study and Research on Agroecology and Organic Production in Brazil, working with funds allocated by the competent authority, COAGRE, in alliance with universities, which are making significant progress in science, technology and innovation in organics and Agroecology. Mexico has allocated resources to support several initiatives of the organic Tianguis, including the Ministry of Agriculture, which financed the first Latin American Organic Leadership Program (OLC) of IFOAM - Organics International, together with SOMEXPRO².

The authorities reported that PGS have been discussed in previous CIAO meetings but not with the approach adopted by the Forum, of the multiple benefits PGS provide to the social, economic and cultural realities in which they are working. They mentioned that, as a result of these two days, it would be appropriate that a Peruvian representative participates in the next meeting of the CIAO, to put the issue in the agenda of the commission from this perspective.

The LA Forum on PGS allows PGS stakeholders, government agencies and CSOs to walk together. Even though the path is not crystal clear, it is certainly a path of inclusion and justice for smallholders, peasants and indigenous people.

² SOMEXPRO is the cross sector umbrella organization for the organic movement in Mexico.

PGS and the SDGs: achieving sustainable development through organic farming and participation



By **Federica Varini**,
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There are many lenses through which we can observe Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). We can look at them as organic assurance quality systems and focus on the market perspectives they open up to small-scale farmers. We can describe them as a learning process, a tool to bring democracy at local level, or we can look at them as means for rural development interventions. Like third party certification, PGS are a tool to support and promote organic agriculture. While the contribution organic agriculture can make to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is often highlighted³, not much has been said so far on how PGS can be instrumental in the implementation of the SDGs. Therefore, this article looks at PGS in the light of their specific contribution to the SDGs as change agent of local food systems.



SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Being low-cost guarantee assurance systems, PGS enable small-scale farmers to access domestic organic premium markets and to benefit from premium prices for produce; on average

between 5% and 20%, as reported by some PGS initiatives in Asia and South Africa. Access to market translates into income and livelihood improvement. For instance, **farmers in Phonsim village**, in Laos, say that after taking part in a local PGS they are now able to build new houses and can afford to send their children to school regularly.



SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

PGS are an innovation for local markets. Instead of focusing on one or few commodity crops, PGS farmers produce local food for local people through the adoption of diverse farming systems and growing a variety of different crops, which increases resilience and food security.

This means that even if one crop fails the family still has enough to eat, as well as having improved and diverse nutrition.



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

The learning process is a key element of PGS which has its foundation in the peer review process. All PGS initiatives provide, in different ways, spaces for joint learning, dialogue, cooperation and coproduction of knowledge, the impact of which extends far beyond agricultural production, e.g. reducing conflicts within households and communities, stimulating individual and community empowerment and significantly improving livelihoods.

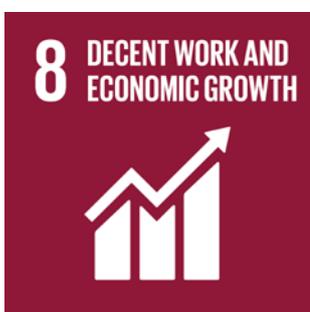
³ Especially SDG 3, SDG 6, SDG 13 and SDG 15; to know more about the ways organic farming is contributing to the SDGs see our factsheet: https://www.ifoam.bio/sites/default/files/oasdas_web.pdf



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The intrinsic features of horizontality and participation mean that when PGS are used to help build local food networks, great attention is paid to

gender equality. In many PGS initiatives around the world, women represent the majority of the farmers involved. Women empowerment in PGS initiatives and the role of female farmers in agroecology is currently a central topic in several PGS worldwide. In Brazil for instance, the Ecovida network, has organised workshops and meetings to improve women's participation and to incorporate gender issues into PGS principles.



SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

Fostering farmers' collaboration, PGS tends to create an enabling

and resilient environment for smallholders improving microcredit opportunities, access to markets, i.e. through collective delivery systems or farmer markets, as well as access to inputs and information. Additionally, PGS plays a primary role in the inclusion of small-scale producers who are organic but not certified by a third party, reducing entry barriers to entry the local organic premium markets. This means helping smallholders to improve the economic sustainability of their farms, which would not otherwise be economically viable in a global commodity market. Finally, being a system owned and managed by the group itself, rather than an external body, developing a PGS often leads to the creation of new qualified positions in rural settings. For example, one PGS initiative is Nature & Progress, which currently employs 9 people for coordination and facilitation activities.



SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Access to safe, healthy, affordable and sufficient food, both in terms of quality and quantity, is a growing issue for cities. The

design and implementation of a sustainable urban food system plays a crucial part in the future management of urban areas. Policy makers, civil society and city planners look with increasing interest to support urban or peri-urban agriculture, based on agroecological and organic principles. Due to the typical reduced size of urban and peri-urban farms, and the need to supply a diversity of fresh products to an ever-demanding urban consumer base, PGS provide a credible and accessible certification alternative that thrives under direct producer-consumer relationships and encourages short supply chains.



SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

PGS initiatives are built on a foundation of trust between producers and consumers. It is often the case that consumers together with the producers set together

the rules and general management of the PGS initiative. This co-creation process provides incentives to producers and consumers to continuously improve their practices and supporting each other in a long-term perspective. Moreover, PGS enhance the food security and sustainable consumption patterns of community members not directly engaged in production by raising awareness, creating local markets and increasing access to organic products sold at fair prices. This is especially the case in communities where access to safe, high quality, nutritious foods may be limited by low incomes.

The United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is launching a call for submissions of good practices, success stories and lessons learned in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which will serve as thematic input to the next High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2019. The recently concluded HLPF (July 2018) brought together governments, civil society and other stakeholders to review progress and challenges of implementation of the SDGs. Important progress has been made particularly when it comes to raising awareness and mobilizing action. But at national scale, the messages that clearly comes out from the forum is that countries are not on track to meet global goals on sustainability by 2030. This is where partnerships of producers and consumers, such as PGS, come into the play as major drivers for kick-starting a revolution of the food system, from the bottom, and this is why such initiatives should be highlighted, spread and scaled up.

The Pastapur Declaration of PGSOC

Concerned about potential negative effects that the new FSSAI regulations on organic foods which recently came into force in India might have on farmers, the Participatory Guarantee Systems Organic Councils (PGSOC), has published on 27 June 'Pastapur Declaration'. PGSOC is a coalition of 21 civil society organisations committed to the promotion of organic food production for domestic consumption in India. The declaration is reproduced below, and is signed by Kalyan Paul, C.K. Ganguly, P.V. Satheesh, Bhartendu Prakash, Mathew John, Joy Daniel, Niranjana Maru, Sandip Pattanayak, P. Babu, Jogi Naidu, Suresh Kanna, Poornachandran, K.A. Chandra, M.N. Kumaresh Babu, Prasant Mohanty and Saji Pulickal.

Organic farming has been the proud tradition of peasant farmers in India for millennia. They know no other way of farming, especially in the vast stretches of this country's farmscapes across the North East, the foothills of the Himalayas, the hills of Central India, the plains of the Deccan plateau, and the Eastern and Western Ghats.

When there was no space for these farmers in the emerging organic market of India, we at PGSOC (PGS Organic Council) stood shoulder to shoulder with them, mobilised tens of thousands of them, and created a space and identity for them.

In existence since 2006, PGSOC has consistently helped small and peasant farmers to gain a fair share of the organic market, which were otherwise controlled by the big and powerful traders and corporates. For the first time in India, PGSOC made it possible for the small and peasant farmers to assert themselves and create a niche for their products.

PGSOC introduced a unique system of participatory certification whereby the farmers could subject their practices to a peer review and establish the primacy of trust over cumbersome paperwork.

By reaching out to all the important stakeholders concerned, PGSOC elevated PGS to the level of a national movement. This in turn led the NCOF (National Centre for Organic Farming) to introduce 'PGS-India', which is largely based on the framework developed by PGSOC. Globally, the pioneering work of PGSOC has been acknowledged by international institutions such as IFOAM Organics International, Urgenci International, and INOFO. The world looks at us in appreciation as a country that provides space for the civil society along with the state to participate in organic certification. Our country needs to cherish and protect this image.

PGSOC, which has done its work in a truly voluntary spirit, now finds itself on the verge of delegitimisation through a narrow FSSAI (Food Safety Standards Authority of India) notification that mandates that, from July 1, 2018, the sole authorities to recognize organic are NCOF and APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority).

It is extremely difficult for us to accept this situation, which will significantly impact tens of thousands of small farmers. Therefore, we will reach out to important policy makers, the most crucial of them being the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, and urge them to provide a space for civil society-led PGS initiatives to enable small peasants to certify themselves. We firmly believe that allowing farmers to voluntarily certify themselves as organic is a small but very significant step towards achieving the Prime Minister's vision of doubling farm income, particularly of small farmers and peasants.

CONTINENTAL NEWS: WHAT'S NEW IN...

Global

PGS advocates in Portuguese speaking countries can now count on one more tool to support their work. The introductory [IFOAM PGS brochure](#) is now also available in Portuguese. The translation was carried out in the framework of the project OM4D, which IFOAM – Organics International is implementing in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Sao Tome e Principe and Togo. Please visit the online [PGS Media library to download](#) it and to access other publications in Portuguese.

Africa

NIGERIA: The 2018 National Organic Agriculture Business Summit took place in Lagos, between 10 and 13 July. During the summit, Dr Olugbenga Adeoluwa, the Country Coordinator for Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) initiative in Nigeria, called for a paradigm shift in agriculture to embrace organic farming. This will have beneficial effects on the nation's nutritional needs, the environment, farmers' incomes, markets and employment. During the meeting the importance of quality assurance of organic produce and products through appropriate certification, using PGS for the domestic market was also emphasised.

Americas

BRAZIL: The IV National Agroecology Meeting, organized by Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia – (ANA) took place between 31 May and 3 June 2018 in Belo Horizonte. The gathering was attended by 2000 people from all over Brazil. During the event, the Brazilian PGS Forum was organized and it discussed how to shape the strategy of the forum in the coming years. You can read more (in Portuguese) [here](#) and the final declaration is also available in French.

COLOMBIA: Under the terms of the “Strategic guidelines for public policy for peasant, family and community agriculture” (Resolution 464 of 2017), together with

the Technical Committee on Family Agriculture and Rural Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has initiated a process to build a Public Policy for the promotion of Agroecology and the recognition of PGS in Colombia. The plan foresees more than 10 regional workshops to be held with the participation of social organizations, academia and, where possible, local governments. The first workshop was held on 18 June in Bogotá, and the next ones will be on July 5 in Pereira and on July 19 in Caquetá. For more information, please contact Pedro Guzmán, from RENAF Colombia at info@agriculturafamiliar.co

Asia

LAOS: The Agroecology Learning Alliance (ALiSEA), with support from the organization GRET – Professionles du développement solidaire and the French research centre CIRAD, will organize a three-day workshop on PGS from 1 to 3 October in Vientiane. Due to the increasing attention given to PGS in the Great Mekong Subregion (GMS) and their high relevance in supporting smallholder farmers engaged in an agroecological transition, this regional workshop aims at sharing experiences in the implementation of PGS, identifying and understanding challenges linked to the development of genuinely participatory PGS and drawing operational and policy recommendations for an improved and widespread implementation of PGS across the Mekong Region. [Read the concept note of the workshop.](#)

VIETNAM: On 30 July 2018, the Vietnam National University of Agriculture and Rikolto organised the workshop “10 years of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in Vietnam: Sharing lessons and introducing a new PGS training toolbox”. The event concluded a one-year project funded by the Agroecology Learning Alliance in Southeast Asia to capitalise PGS experiences in Vietnam for upscaling and institutionalisation. [Read the full article on the workshop and other interesting documents on PGS in Vietnam here.](#)



Special Announcement: Call for applications for the IFOAM PGS Committee

IFOAM - Organics International's technical committees are composed of experts appointed by the Executive Director for a defined term period, to advise the Head Office on the development of norms, references and tools related to guarantee systems.

The IFOAM Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) Committee is a technical expert group that assists the development of PGS, provides advice on how to develop, facilitate and encourage PGS around the world.

Members of the PGS committee are volunteers, appointed according to their experience with PGS, considering geographic, gender and professional balance. The committee remains in office for 3 years, after which the membership to the committee is open to new nominations

and a selection process is done by IFOAM – Head Office. We are now calling for applicants to renew the IFOAM PGS Committee.

The Terms of Reference of the Committee, including detailed requirements, member responsibilities and procedure can be found [here](#). Candidates can apply via email, by sending their CV and a short letter of interest, explaining the candidate's PGS background and vision on IFOAM's role to support and promote PGS to: pgs@ifoam.org

PGS practitioners around the world are encouraged to apply, applications will only be processed if submitted by 28.09.2018.

Imprint

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome at any time. Please send your PGS-related articles in English, French or Spanish to pgs@ifoam.bio.

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