

Updates on Participatory Guarantee Systems worldwide

The PGS Newsletter's 5th anniversary

By IFOAM PGS Team



The Global PGS Newsletter was launched by IFOAM in October 2009 in the context of IFOAM PGS activities that were financially supported by Hivos. We are therefore celebrating its 5th anniversary! The first issue saw the publication of a global compilation of data on PGS initiatives for the very first time. Since then, IFOAM has published 45 issues of The Global PGS Newsletters, featuring hundreds of articles! The newsletter has proven to be one of the most appreciated regular publications of IFOAM, and is reaching an ever-increasing number of readers. While the first issue was sent to around 100 recipients in 2009, the newsletter is now going out to 1320 readers. The concept has remained similar over the past 5 years, with a mixture of short regional news items and more in-depth articles.

The Global PGS Newsletter benefits from a passionate readership that contributes frequently to the issues by providing detailed articles on various topics around PGS. The special contribution of the IFOAM PGS Committee members in channeling news should also be acknowledged. PGS is a dynamic movement and there is always something new happening somewhere, which other PGS initiatives can learn from. The Global PGS Newsletter is unique and has functioned over the last 5 years as the main tool for international exchange of experiences and news on PGS. PGS growth during the period has been very good, going from 50 PGS initiatives and 32,000 involved farmers in 2009 to about 150 PGS initiatives and more than 50,000 involved farmers today. We believe that The Global PGS Newsletter contributed significantly to this growth.

The main challenge with the publication of The Global PGS Newsletter has been the funding. While Hivos supported the early days of the newsletter, their support ended in April 2013. Since May 2013, we have maintained the publication at IFOAM's own costs but we reduced the frequency of publication of the newsletter from once a month to once every two months. We have not yet been able to secure a sustainable source of funding for this activity and this is a concern. Any ideas in this regard would be highly welcome!

In this issue, we share some exciting news about some good PGS development momentum in China, Bangladesh and Togo. We wish you a happy reading and hope to continue serving your need for PGS information in the years to come. As always, we look forward to your input and feedback.

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PGS and social processes – best practice study now completed

By IFOAM PGS Team



The Global Comparative Study on Interactions Between Social Processes and Participatory Guarantee Systems, a study conducted by IFOAM over a period of two years in the framework of the **Agroeco project** has

been finalized and is now available for download. You can download the **full study** as well as a **summary version**.

The study analyzes eight PGS initiatives from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America and explores how PGS and other social processes interact with each other. All examined cases have existed for a long time. They were selected to be part of the study because they address the sustainability issue with great success. The study can be seen as a best practice study for other initiatives to learn and get inspiration from. The main social processes identified among the surveyed PGS are collective marketing, sharing information, techniques and traditional knowledge, collective seed management and conservation, small scale saving systems, collective work, committed, informed and supportive consumer base and socialized pricing.

The study found that PGS is an important platform for the development of these social processes that in turn positively impact PGS initiatives in different ways, thereby improving the sustainability and impacts of PGS. The study also found that entry into PGS offers farmers and their families a range of economic, environmental and social benefits, thus improving their livelihoods.



PGS is an important platform for the development of these social processes that in turn positively impact PGS initiatives

The main benefits as perceived by the surveyed farmers are:

1. Improved social bonds
2. Cost savings
3. Enhanced market access and better income
4. Enhanced food security
5. Better management of natural resources



In all examined cases, PGS proved to be an important platform for community development. The strength of this platform depends on the capacity of the group for social interaction and common performance. Participation options, ownership, conflict resolution culture and gender roles are as important factors to success as tangible economic benefits, like access to markets.

While PGS triggered further social processes, it was also found that in some instances other social processes were in place before the PGS was established. They are a good precondition for establishing a new PGS. Hence, parallel social processes can be used as an element of a sustainability strategy for PGS since they help sustain the PGS. The opposite however, that PGS may not function well without further social process can neither be confirmed nor excluded in the scope of this study.

For more details, please download the **full study**.

PGS in China - a development tool for local Organic Agriculture?

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM PGS Coordinator



Thanks to the **EU-China Twinning Program**, a project of the **Stiftung Asienhaus**, supported by the **Robert Bosch Stiftung**, I was given the opportunity to spend one month in Beijing in September 2014.

During this month, I worked with the Beijing Farmers Market (BFM) on PGS and was able to gain in-depth insight into the local situation in China. It is now planned that a PGS trial will be launched at the BFM in 2015, preparations such as the drafting of criteria are currently underway. During my stay, a 4-day PGS workshop with representatives from farmers markets and other short-chain marketing initiatives from all over China was organized. The workshop had the aim to develop a better understanding of PGS among the stakeholders and to discuss practices that are presently being implemented. Additionally, challenges and needs in the various regions were brought up.

In recent years, frequent food scandals have unsettled consumers in China and created great demand for organic food, which can achieve high prices at the market. The Beijing Farmers Market was launched in 2010 and is regarded a successful model case. It is being copied in many cities throughout the country. For most of the farmers selling at the market, organic certification is not an option. The Chinese organic regulation requires inspection and product testing for each crop grown on the farm at least once per production cycle. This results in high certification costs that small farmers who sell their crops locally cannot afford. Consequently, the BFM and other short-chain marketing initiatives around China have to set their own criteria and to develop their own means of verification.

Producers that sell at the BFM are carefully selected. The types of farms involved are diverse and include producers well experienced in organic agriculture as well as farmers who are not yet complying with

all aspects of organic agriculture. Usually, they are small farmers in and around Beijing and the personal background of the farmer as well as his/her motivation and vision are well known. Instead of applying the same criteria to all, each farm is dealt with on a case-by-case approach. For many consumers in China, the priority regarding food is safety, i.e. they want food free of toxins, heavy metals, pesticide residues, hormones and antibiotics. Other characteristics of organic, e.g. the source of feed or the seeds may be only of secondary concern for them. Since the supply of organic products is lagging behind demand, there is a tendency to accept farmers that are not fully complying with all principles of organic agriculture to sell at the organic market, as long as they comply with some basic rules. At the same time, the organizers of the market encourage and support new farmers to convert to organic and to refrain from using agro-chemicals.

For several reasons, including trust and credibility issues, the BFM as well as many other similar initiatives in China feel an increasing need to establish a more formalized system. This system would fulfill the purpose of verifying the production methods of the related farms and providing more support to the farmers to improve their practices. This is why the BFM started looking into PGS. During our workshop, we conducted some on-farm inspections and received divergent opinions about one of the farms concerning organic practices. This is



1 The AGROECO project is carried out by the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina UNALM (Peru), the Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental SPDA (Peru) and the University of British Columbia, UBC (Canada) under the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF), financed by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD).

2 Participants were involved in farmers markets, consumer cooperatives, vegetables box schemes, online selling sites, small shops, restaurants and rural development agencies.

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not an uncommon situation if criteria are not clearly defined. Inspection team 1 felt the vegetables produced on the farm were fine, but they were concerned about the pigs' welfare conditions. Inspection team 2 believed the pigs were kept in good conditions (animal husbandry practices a lot better compared to average conventional pig farms) but they were concerned about the vegetables that were fertilized with chicken manure from a large conventional farm. While the groups did not find a final consensus, they did agree that "better than average" is not enough of a criterion, but more concrete rules need to be set.

In my opinion, the biggest potential of PGS for these initiatives lies in its functionality as a development tool and as an instrument to support farmers to improve their systems. The primary reason why not all farmers participating in these initiatives are fully complying with organic principles is the lack of knowledge as well as lack of resources. With PGS, recommendations can be drafted and development goals can be set for each farm. The PGS can then be utilized as a monitoring tool to oversee the progress of the farms over the years while providing adequate support and assistance.

There are many challenges on the path to creating PGS. Since opinions and practices vary, defining criteria will not be an easy process. Building-up knowledge requires long-term effort. Ways need to be found to engage and motivate farmers and other stakeholders to participate and share responsibilities in the development and implementation of PGS. At the same time, many of



the basic conditions are already fulfilled, which leaves me optimistic. Market access is already established and demand for the products is undeniable. Furthermore, there are close relationships among the stakeholders. BFM is already conducting trainings for farmers and consumers, farm visits by stakeholders are already being carried out. Now, they need to be formalized and made more participatory.

During my stay in China, I met passionate, active and engaged people from all over the country. There is lots of work ahead, but I am confident that these grassroots initiatives will bring forward Organic Agriculture in China and make a difference especially in regards to local consumption, smallholder production and rural development. I look forward to remaining part of that process and hope that full embracement of organic will become an achievable goal for these initiatives within the next years.



Launch of PGS in Bangladesh

By Dr. Shaikh Tanveer Hossain, Sustainable Agriculture Advisor, FIVDB and Board Member, IFOAM Asia, Coordinator PGS Organic Council Bangladesh



On September 16, 2014 Mr. Thonthai Gowder Samraj and Mr. Robert Leo from Keystone Foundation/ the PGS Organic Council India (PGSOC) visited the organic fields in Uttar Lakkirpar village,

Bishamvarpur upazila in Sunamganj district in the Northeastern part of Bangladesh. The organic farmer groups in this area grow organic rice and vegetables and are facilitated by the Friends In Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB). As there is no domestic certification system, farmers are not able to get a good price for their products and they urged the visitors from India to suggest solutions to improve this situation. The Indian experts discussed their present organic production, marketing systems and other related matters with the local producer groups and gave some basic training and demonstrations on how PGS works. The farmers showed interest in adopting PGS as a marketing tool and asked many related questions.

The following day, a workshop on PGS was organized by FIVDB in its Khadimnagar, Sylhet office. Among the participants were administration and public representatives, government extension officials, local elites, researchers, academics, NGO staff, farmers and retail representatives. The workshop was chaired by Mr. Zahin Ahmed, Executive Director of FIVDB and the welcome address given by Mr. Zahid Hossain, Director of the Livelihood Enhancement Program of FIVDB. At first, Dr. Shaikh Tanveer Hossain, Sustainable Agriculture Advisor of FIVDB and Board member at IFOAM-Asia presented the Bangladesh perspective on PGS. Later, two presentations were given by Mr. Thonthai. Gowder Samraj and Mr. Robert Leo, and detailed discussions were also held.

Finally, the "PGS Organic Council Bangladesh" and a PGS Logo were officially launched. On behalf of PGSOC India, Mr. Thonthai Samraj acknowledged the council and introduced Dr. Tanveer as a coordinator of this national council.

A number of buyers and chain store representatives from Dhaka also attended the event and showed



interest in purchasing PGS certified organic products from the growers. A retail company showed great interest in working together with PGSOC to develop the PGS certification system in Bangladesh. In future it will be possible to establish links between organic growers and buyers.

There is a good potential for rice and vegetables to adapt PGS, but it requires some basic training at farm level to assure the quality. Building a marketing platform would be ideal for Bangladesh. The capacity building on PGS for farmers, facilitation council and national council and also awareness on PGS at consumer level are very important and require a pilot project to establish a model for all stakeholders. The PGS Organic Council Bangladesh has expressed its wish to receive support and to cooperate with the IFOAM PGS Team and PGSOC India for the establishment and the capacity building programs on PGS in the coming years. The PGSOC India has shown their heartfelt willingness to support every step of the process to establish PGS in Bangladesh. It is also envisioned to encourage more NGOs to work with organic agriculture and to form a consortium to make the PGS Organic Bangladesh broader based and representative of all regions.

For more information please contact Dr. Shaikh Tanveer Hossain: tanveer107@yahoo.com



Organic Farming and PGS: The solution to provide sustainable income to Zanzinto women in Togo

By Nadia Kafui Klussey, founder of Zanzinto "the Virtuous"



Zanzinto means „Virtuous“ in Ewe, the national language of Togo. It is also the name of a Farmers Organization created in 2009 that aims at promoting the products of its members through

facilitating the access to fair markets and capacity building, focusing in particular on women. Togolese women represent 70% of the workforce, and produce 80% of crops in the country, representing the largest margin of poverty. To improve their situation, it is not only necessary to increase production but also to produce in accordance with the demand and to find channels where products can be sold. The lack of marketing skills has been identified as a main cause that prevents development and maintains those women in poverty. Zanzinto has become a marketing bridge to help the smallholders of Togo to improve their income and utilize development opportunities that rural people usually do not have access to. The organization is serving as of today, 10 cooperatives with a total of 275 members, the majority women.

Who is involved?

The first stage of this development project (based on skills enhancing) was supported by the US State department through a grant for professional development in 2009 - 2010. Since then, market research has been conducted, business opportunities for farmers have been identified, lobbying carried out, and contacts have been made. Additionally, a website and social media have been created to feature farmers' products.

While organic agriculture was not a focus in the beginning, producers have gradually oriented themselves towards organic agriculture and PGS. The motivation comes from several key values that are necessary for their improvement including:

- The benefit of embracing environment-friendly and sustainable agriculture.
- The need to reposition their products to respond to the market demand.

- The advantage of including consumers and other participants in the process.

As soon as farmers understood and approved organic agriculture as the way to go, they were trained in some basic organic agriculture principles by skilled trainers of CPIBE (Centre de Promotion des Initiatives de Base et de l'Environnement/Center for rural initiative and environment promotion). We also received support and learned from the Canadian Organic Growers Association and have participated in many organic events, farm visits and roadshows. Since 2011, producers have successfully implemented soil fertility measures, where the soil is fed with compost and is free of chemical fertilizers, and applied them to the production of vegetables, banana, plantain and cotton.

The products are sold in various markets of the Kloto region in Togo. Consumers have been delighted with the organic products, which they identify as the "always fresh products", even during dry seasons. The demand is high. However, the attempt to receive organic certification was not yet effective due to the complexity of third-party certification procedures, which are too difficult for small farmers.

What are the challenges and next steps?

The present goal is to continue improving organic farming practices and build more partnerships with likeminded people and initiatives in the region. The next steps are to fully establish a PGS system and to strengthen the local producer-consumer relationship. Furthermore, products shall be certified through PGS





and a strong organic market shall be promoted and built.

There are already some local and regional consumers as well as quality assurance professionals that will be joining the PGS initiative as stakeholders. In order to achieve our goals, in-depth training for small holders in organic production is crucial, as well as providing the leaders with more knowledge and experience in organic technics. We plan to base our PGS on the IFOAM

Standard and aim to certify the first farmers by the end of 2015.

We strongly believe that, with the participation of all stakeholders, we will achieve our objective to help small farmers improve their income, and provide an environment that is safe and sustainable for their families and communities.

Learn more about Zanzinto by visiting the website:

<http://www.zanzinto.org>

Continental news: what's new in...

ASIA AND OCEANIA

Thailand: In line with the Innovating Alternative Markets forum 2013, an alliance of SuanNguenMee Ma social enterprise, Towards Organic Asia (TOA) and the Thai Green Market Network along with many other partners organized two groundbreaking international events in Bangkok. Both events, in July and August 2014, featured PGS as an important topic. In July, Right Livelihood Awardee Hans Herren gave a lecture and talked about PGS as an important element in upscaling community- and farm-based action research to policy advocacy. In August, activists and practitioners from China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia and Thailand came together at the Mindful Markets Forum. Among them were representatives from PGS, Community Supported Agriculture, Consumer Cooperatives and other likeminded initiatives. For more information, please contact [Wallapa van Willenswaard](#).

Philippines: In August 2014, MASIPAG held its third PGS conference titled "Participatory Guarantee Systems: Building a Future for Organic Farmers and Consumers in the Philippines" with 140 representatives from farmers' groups, local government units and non-governmental organizations. The Philippines is the leading country in terms of number of farmers involved in PGS. While some local government units are increasingly expressing their support for PGS, the central government is still reluctant to PGS recognition. Currently, a two-year leeway has been granted for those who are using PGS. For more details, please read the related articles recently published on the [MASIPAG website](#).

AFRICA

Benin: PGS was a prominent topic at the **[Third West African Conference on Organic Agriculture](#)** in Benin, 27 - 29 August 2014. Musa Muwanga from the National Organic Agriculture Movement in Uganda (NOGAMU) talked about the experiences with PGS from his country. Lazare Yombi from Benin shared his thoughts about PGS as a tool for development of local market in West Africa. Finally, Dr. Allison Loconto from INRA/FAO talked about the importance of institutional innovations on PGS. For more information, including links to slides of the above-mentioned presentations, read the **[full article by Christel Kénou](#)**.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Peru: A recent article published in the Diario Correo discusses various public and private institutions in Peru and their interest in PGS for export. Products that are considered to have potential are native potatoes, quinoa, as well as guinea pigs, alpaca and vicuña. Read the **[full article in Spanish](#)**.



IMPRINT

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Editing: Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM
Layout: Mike Castañeda, 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

Cornelia Kirchner
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

Africa: Marc Lewis (S. Africa), cramlewis@gmail.com

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

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