

The mandate for an organic unit should be clear enough and have the backing from the higher level, to limit the risk that its efforts are obstructed by intra-ministerial posturing.

In some public services there is considerable rotation of staff, which is problematic for the development of expertise. The same applies to countries where a big proportion of the administration is changed when a new government comes in. In such cases, the creation of a special agency, separate from the ministry, can be a solution to increase staff continuity.

d. Support to PGS development

Political justification

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange. PGS represent an alternative to third party certification, specially adapted to local markets and short supply chains. They are also sometimes referred to as ‘participatory certification’. Participatory Guarantee Systems share a common objective with third-party certification systems in providing a credible guarantee for consumers seeking organic products. The difference is in the path to accomplish this, with the emphasis being on stakeholder participation and transparency.

PGS offers numerous benefits, including improved access to organic markets through a guarantee system for small-scale producers (those systems are much more affordable than third party certification), increased education and awareness among consumers (by involving them in the guarantee process), promotion of short supply chains and local market development, and farmer capacity building and empowerment. In other words, supporting PGS development is a way to promote organic agriculture adoption, but also livelihood improvements through market access and empowerment of smaller farmers. As the concept of PGS is not yet widespread in all countries and regions, there is a need for public support in the initial stage of PGS development, to provide resources for investment in capacity building and organizational development, after which those systems can operate in self-sufficient ways.

Suitable contexts

Support to PGS development is a measure suitable to any context (all stages of development of the sector, absence or presence of a regulation or officially referenced OGS, different cultures of government intervention). The only context in which it will be difficult to obtain (at least from the central government) is the case where there is an organic regulation in place which excludes PGS, but examples from the Philippines or Peru shows that even then, it is possible to obtain support from PGS either from local

governments (who may disagree with the overall national regulation) or from other sections of governments than the competent authority in charge of the regulation.

PGS development is relevant to all objectives of policy intervention except the one to earn foreign currencies through organic export.

Possible modalities of implementation

The most important contextual factor in terms of PGS development is the organic regulation context. It is crucial that, if the country regulates organic agriculture, the organic regulation does not hinder PGS development by deliberately or inadvertently not including them, thereby making these systems illegal. Concrete recommendations on how to develop pro-PGS organic regulations can be found in the [Organic Regulation Toolkit](#) published by IFOAM-Organics International.

Aside from PGS being recognized at the same level as third party certification, and PGS-verified operators accessing the same policy benefits as third-party certified operators, there are ways in which governments can invest specific resources in promoting PGS development. A common way to do this is to finance projects that set up PGS groups. This is particularly relevant in countries where the PGS concept does not exist yet, to introduce it in the form of pilot projects. It can however remain relevant at later stages, where PGS projects can be replicated and even possibly scaled up into a very large national PGS program, as in the case in India.

These PGS projects should run for at least three years in order to give them a better chance of becoming self-sustaining after the project period ends. If the full funding of multi-year PGS projects by public authorities is not possible for the national government, it may consider submitting a proposal for international cooperation projects and external donor funding. However, the scale of a PGS setup project can be adapted to the size of the budget available, and it is possible to do something even with low budgets (setup one small PGS in a municipality, for example).

Aside from fully-fledged PGS projects, financial support can also be given to existing PGS initiatives, which are partly self-funded or funded through other sources. This is, for example, what Mexico did with the support to the national PGS network in 2010. Funding is particularly relevant to cover expenses such as farmer training, committee meetings, development of standards and operating manuals, as well as communication and networking.

Country examples

The most progressive example of government support to PGS is **India**, which now has a government-sponsored national PGS system, as well as several government-funded organic support programs with PGS certification included. The Ministry of Agriculture initiated a PGS technical cooperation project with FAO in 2005 and launched in 2011 a nationwide PGS development program implemented by its National Center for Organic Farming (NCOF) under the Ministry of Agriculture. This program has shown impressive

outcomes, leading to the certification of 21,240 organic farmers through PGS in the year 2015. The government has an ambitious vision to reach 200,000 PGS certified organic farmers by November 2017 (see more in the Best Practice example text box below).

In **Peru**, PGS initiatives have been promoted for more than 11 years by various stakeholders including the public agricultural university of La Molina (UNALM). Although the national organic competent authority and regulation do not recognize PGS, there are various regional authorities that have officially recognized and supported PGS. To date, PGS are implemented in 10 regions of the country, often with the support of the local governments. For instance, between 2009 and 2012 the Regional Governor of Huanuco co-financed a project for the implementation of a PGS, which now certifies more than 200 producers. The governor has also introduced a regional regulation, which recognizes and supports PGS initiatives within this region. Similarly, in 2013, the Regional Governor of Abancay introduced a regulation to recognize and support PGS. In other areas, such as the Satipo Province or the Cerro Pasco Region, a program concerning development of natural resources, promoted by the Ministry of Environment, is also dealing with PGS implementation. In April 2016 the regional government of Hancavelica approved a regional regulation to recognize PGS as alternative tool to achieve sustainable development and to foster organic agriculture in the region among small-scale farmers. This regional regulation foresees the establishment of a regional PGS Committee led by the Regional Economic Development Unit.

In **Cuba**, ACTAF (Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales), is currently coordinating the international development project “Proyecto de apoyo a una Agricultura Sostenible en Cuba” (PAAS) which, among different objectives, aims at developing and implementing a PGS program sustained and included in the framework of the National Program for Urban, Sub-urban and Family Agriculture. This is a governmental plan; therefore introducing PGS implementation in this plan will lead to institutionalization of PGS.

In **Argentina**, the municipality of Bella Vista has taken an active part in setting up the PGS as a tool to raise awareness about agroecology and organic agriculture, eating healthy foods and sustainable production. The municipality has recognized the public value of PGS for the municipality in a council resolution (Municipal Council resolution 113/07). Following this, the municipality council has approved by municipal decree (Ordenanza 919-09) the creation of a PGS Committee and has defined its functions. The Committee is formed by public organizations, producer’s organization and NGOs and its role has been to promote the creation of the PGS and to ensure the compliance of the system with the charter and the functioning of the PGS Committee. The same decree also commits the municipality to promote organic agriculture within its area. Twenty smallholder families are currently involved in the projects together with local consumers and several NGOs. It is a good example of cooperation between public and private institutions.

The government of **Mexico**, in 2010 gave support of around EUR 82,000 to the national PGS network Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos to form 20 PGS groups.

In **Colombia** in 2009 Bogotá's Economic Development Secretariat cooperated for the first time with the network Familia de la Tierra (composed of farmers, NGOs and consumers) to conduct market research for launching an alternative channel for marketing products from indigenous and peasant farmers in Bogotá. As a result of coordinated work between organic farmers, civil society organizations, public institutions and local political leaders, this objective was formalized in a district development plan by the mayor's office of Bogotá. It strengthened the Familia de la Tierra network within an institutional environment that provided small grants to CSOs with an ecological and innovative approach. In this framework, the district government, aiming at implementing organic farming as a model for Bogotá's rural development and protecting the city against the entry of genetically modified seeds into urban kitchen gardens, supported the Familia de la Tierra network in the implementation of a PGS.

In **Bolivia** the government partnered with the United Nations in a EUR 6.2 million program to integrate indigenous Andean producers into new national and international value chains. The project trained 7,000 producers in agro-ecology and consolidated 17 PGS in the country. In February 2012, a ministerial decision approved the national technical standard for PGS, which provides for an Ecolabel in recognition of the work of smallholders. The project ran from 2009 to 2013 and involved six UN agencies working closely with specialized units of government (UC-CNAPE) and in coordination with the National Agriculture and Forestry Innovation Institute (INIAF), the Rural Entrepreneurship Implementation Unit (EMPODERAR), the Bolivian Development Agency (PRO-BOLIVIA), the Food Security Support Program (PASA) and AOPEB (the Federation of Bolivian Organic Producers Associations).

In **Costa Rica** the government provided technical and financial support for the establishment of PGS groups. The national accreditation body for organic certifiers conducts the annual audits of the PGS groups, which is needed for their official recognition according to the law. Currently, 4 PGS groups are officially approved and can make organic claims.

In **Brazil**, the Ministry of Agrarian Development supports PGS initiatives and Social control organizations (the other form of alternative verification systems allowed for direct marketing under the Brazilian organic regulation). For example, the Ministry, in partnership with the Federal South Minas Institute, carried out a diagnosis of those organizations to identify existing initiatives, and potential new ones. In 2016, around EUR 91,000 were allocated to support family farmers and technicians involved in those initiatives. For 2017, the government plans to consolidate the 18 existing PGS initiatives, train 300 extension agents in participatory certification, support the establishment of 10 new PGS initiatives and publish various resources for PGS promotion, for a total allocated budget of around EUR 268,000.

In the **Philippines**, the debate about the revision of the Organic Agricultural Act is not over: the language of the Act prohibits PGS-verified products to be labeled as organic, but the government has given several periods of grace that have, until now, meant that this requirement is not enforced. Meanwhile, the government (for example through the

Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Agriculture Research) has supported PGS implementation in the country through funding some projects including PGS development. In parallel, local governments in the provinces have played an important role in supporting PGS. The PGS initiatives in the provinces of Quezon, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, Negros Occidental, Lanao del Norte and Davao City were all developed and supported by their local government units, with some even allocating funds to support the initial operation, including training, committee meetings, and development of standards and manual of operations.

In **Lao**, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) has adopted PGS as part of their certification portfolio of activities, under the responsibility of their certification department. The DoA issues the logo and conducts the training, as well as the audits of PGS groups. PGS certification under this model is free of charge for farmers, as the government subsidizes all costs (through a grants it receives from the ADB PGS project – see below).

More generally in **Asia**, the Asian Development Bank, a government-funded multilateral development bank, supports PGS development in the framework of the Core Agriculture Support Program, 2011-2020. The program supports PGS development in the 6 countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion. This includes the establishment of PGS pilots in all countries, as well as a conversation with the respective governments to gain their support and recognition for PGS.

Best practice example(s)

Best Practice Example: Support to PGS by the Government of India

In India, the NGO sector has been a pioneer in PGS and has managed to grow the PGS movement from a few farmers before 2006 to more than 6,000 farmers certified in 2015. It has also managed to consolidate the various independent NGO initiatives into one single national PGS system: the PGS Organic Council. However, there are limitations in terms of the capacity for the NGO sector to include the large number of farmers and farmer groups interested to join the PGS movement in India. The government, through its National Center for Organic Farming (NCOF), is tackling the opportunity by offering an alternative PGS system that is government-facilitated and benefits from important and stable resources enabling rapid uptake of PGS in the country.

The interest of government representatives in PGS started in the early 2000s. During 2005-2007, the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO undertook a technical cooperation program that, among others, aimed to develop PGS in India. As part of this project, FAO facilitated a national multi-stakeholder dialogue on PGS, in which some representatives of government institutions attended. In India, the mandate for organic agriculture support is somewhat shared between the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Commerce is in charge of the National Program for Organic Production, including the national organic standard, certification and accreditation system, with a focus on exports. The Ministry of Agriculture hosts NCOF, whose mandate is more broadly to support organic farming in the country. NCOF became interested in the PGS concept as a way to support rapid uptake of organic farming within smallholders producing for the local market.

After some years of reflection and consultations with the NGO PGS sector and international

experts, NCOF launched its PGS India program in 2011. The initiative was not aimed to compete with, but rather to complement the NGO PGS system, with the advantage that the government bears the cost of institutional networking, surveillance and monitoring as well as data management. NGOs can participate in the system and receive financial support to cover the work of data collection and upload on the central PGS website. Due to the availability of institutional resources, the PGS India network is growing very rapidly, reaching more than 130,000 farmers at the end of 2016.

In addition to the institutional support to PGS through the NCOF-facilitated PGS network, the Indian government introduced various financial assistance schemes for the promotion of PGS. One of them is the PKVY scheme (EUR 55 million allocated for a 3-year period starting in 2016) that promotes organic farming through an organic village cluster approach and PGS certification. In August 2016, the government also opened a PGS shop inside the building of the Ministry of Agriculture in New Delhi, selling only PGS-certified products. The Ministry has also opened a café and hopes to add another 7-8 PGS shops in the coming year.

Pitfalls and challenges

The main risk of government involvement in PGS support is that of having a top-down inflexible approach, which is rather contrary to the PGS concept. This risk can be mitigated through participation processes and an effort to delegate to and trust the power of grassroots organizations. Especially when PGS are recognized in an organic regulation, a certain level of formality is going to be inevitable in order for PGS to maintain official recognition. In the case of the government-run PGS program in India, the government, when setting up their PGS program, copied the PGS system that was already run by civil society organizations and there has been a lot of consultation on the government system (both nationally and even internationally whereby the advice of IFOAM-Organics international was requested). As a result, the government-run PGS has found broad support from civil society, even those that were involved in PGS prior to the government involvement. The two systems (civil society and governments) co-exist in good faith and are not considered by either party to be competing with one another.

Any nationally consolidated PGS system is also more prone to rigid procedures and inflexibilities than very localized systems, as they have to manage several (sometime quite heterogeneous) local/regional groups in a somewhat harmonized way. This is not a specificity of government-run or government-supported PGS system but any nationally consolidated system. However, when things are linked to government regulations, decrees and such official documents, they become less flexible for changes and local adaptation.

Government support to PGS might also face some internal resistance from the part of the organic sector that is purely third-party oriented and sees PGS as a competitor or as a threat to organic integrity. Typically those actors opposed to PGS development are third party certifiers, but it has become more and more common in the past 10 years to see third party certifiers acknowledging the power of PGS to promote organic growth and to deliver real organic integrity. In India, for example, some Indian 3rd party certifiers are even cooperating with the government-run PGS program, as they see an opportunity to convert PGS farmers to third party certification at a later stage.

Finally, in the case of government-led PGS development project, a common problem is too much focus on the capacity building component and not enough (effective) engagement with the market (private sector), which does not lead to sustainability after the end of the project funding period. In some cases the government-led PGS initiatives try to set a shop or markets to sell PGS products but they lack the business experience and funding to keep the shop going beyond the establishment stage. It is therefore highly recommended that, when governments wish to engage in a PGS project, they do so in partnership and with significant (management) involvement of the local private organic sector representatives.

e. Support to urban gardening and collective gardens

Political justification

There are many reasons to support urban gardening and collective gardens, from a policy point of view. They produce local food with a very low carbon footprint and contribute to local sustainable production. They reconnect people with their food and contribute to education about what food production entails, which then helps people to better understand and participate in programs supporting agriculture and farmers. They encourage people to consume more vegetables in their diet. It contributes to city landscaping by maintaining nice green garden patches in urban environments. They provide a healthy, stress-relieving, community-building, and productive social activity for people of all ages, background and economic situation to engage in.

Many collective garden projects include social integration components, such as rehabilitation of ex-convicts, integration of refugees and immigrants, people with mental or physical disabilities, children from economically disadvantaged households, or elderly people in need of social connections.

Collective gardening and urban gardening can play an important educational role. Most collective gardens make the choice of going organic, because there are usually people in the group that are aware of the risks of handling and using pesticides. Other people in the group become aware and are then more likely to purchase organic products for the rest of their diet. Gardeners also become more used to eating a variety of vegetables, including ancient or forgotten varieties of vegetables and fruits, and to cosmetic imperfections in produce, which also influences purchasing behavior in the shops. They become more aware of the value of food and make more efforts to reduce waste. All these encourage positive consumer behavior, in line with an organic lifestyle.

Suitable contexts

Support to organic urban gardening and collective gardening can be implemented in any context (any stage of development of the organic sector, any organic regulatory framework, any culture of government intervention on the organic sector) and often