

Developing Local Markets with a Participatory Guarantee System Proposal

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Initial commitment

Certified ecological production in Peru is distributed in the 3 major natural regions and in 15 departments. The 97% of land under certified ecological production is focused on exportation, with coffee, mango, banana, amaranthus, quinoa, maca, chestnuts, and sesame being the main crops.

However, there are thousands of small Peruvian farmers whose main source of income comes from agriculture, and these farmers comply with the organic norms but have neither an organic certificate nor a chance to export. The main target market is the local one, strengthening strategies that already exist and fostering new commercialization spaces.

In this development process, the debate in Peru was focused on the need of third-party certification for the local market considering the expenses it involves. In the one hand, we wonder whether local market experiences can be sustainable without the guarantee of a third-party certification. On the other hand, in a country with high levels of poverty, especially in marginal rural and urban areas, is it possible to generate a real and constant demand for organic products from all consumers or only from high-income consumers?

In response to these questions, the National Association of Organic Farmers of Peru (ANPE Peru) and the Institute of Environment and Development (IDMA) worked separately on developing a proposal for a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) based on experiences from other countries, mainly from Brazil. To start this project, the need for joint work arose and a first strategic alliance on this issue was launched by both ANPE and IDMA. So, we both decided to be involved in this project no matter what it would take.

We assumed it would be hard. First of all, it was going to be a new experience for all of us; second, we both would be beginning a building process; and third, we were not going to construct buildings, roads, or anything similar—we had to create a process in which the main input involved the human being as the processor; a process whose final product was the satisfaction of the human being as a consumer, a process whose interface would be the

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human being in the form of public and private institutions, associations, and local and regional governments, among others. This would mean a process that was basically social. This all reflects the importance of this first commitment.

Who started all this?

We analyzed and wondered who would be really interested in developing this proposal, which ANPE's bases we would consider, and which producers' organizations we would start with. The experience started with farmers who already had a commercialization strategy, with trading experience, and with the clear need to give an organic guarantee to the consumer—a guarantee to provide them with a different and special product and with a long-term message, an alternative to those who were looking for an alternative at the Bioferia of Huancayo and the Ecological Fair of Huanuco.

The main strength of the Bioferia of Huancayo (Huancayo–Junín, March 2001) and the Ecological Fair of Huanuco (Huánuco–Huánuco, August 2001) was their organization of farmers—in both cases with the bases of ANPE: the Regional Association of Ecological Producers of Central Region–APEREC in Huancayo and the Departmental Association of Ecological Producers of Huanuco–ADPE Huanuco. Their permanence, with or without the project (the first one bears a relation to NGO CEAR; and the second one bears a relation to NGO IDMA) is due to the commitment of each member, no matter what inconveniences they might run into: they had to struggle to push for what they believe in, for agroecology, for the conservation of the environment.

Who else is in?

The PGS is not a proposal of just two or three groups, it is a proposal of a heterogeneous group with similar rights, duties, and powers, but necessarily having the same thoughts, yet we all have a common objective: to gain the confidence of and credibility with the consumer. But just the consumer? Not really. Confidence and trust should be the cornerstone of every human relationship. Each one of us must be sure of what we say or believe in.

PGS started with ANPE, IDMA, regional bases of ANPE in Huanuco and Huancayo, and another NGO, CEAR—all of them civil representatives. And, what about the government? Is PGS something that can be trusted by the government? Due to the many years of the agroecological movement in Peru, governmental organizations have joined the initiative (local and regional governments, health departments, agricultural and educational sectors). There's a common interest, support, and work for the agroecological proposal (not in budgetary terms, but in political terms, which are inserted in the institutional guidelines of every sector.) This helped us to bring together the proposals of the representatives of public institutions of the

agricultural and health sectors, mayors and their council members, and so forth. With regard to the educational sector, a very interesting, unplanned experience took place that is worth telling.

One of the members of IDMA's technical staff, a former student at Universidad del Centro del Perú-Huancayo, had the idea to invite the students of the Social Projection Faculty (students who had become agricultural engineers but who had had to do fieldwork in any community for a year). Youngsters, many of whom were farmers' children, helped PGS evaluators during fieldwork visits in organizing the development and offering of products (transformation and presentation), and in organizing consumers. These young students and their teachers thus became a very important part of the proposal and their experience was applied in other areas.

Consumers strengthen their citizenship

In this process, the consumer is not a mere client. Consumers get involved and turn out to be active and involved stakeholders, visiting organic farms, being supportive to the organization of fairs, training, and advancing the proposal until are represented at the different levels of the organization of the PGS, exercising their citizens' rights to voice their opinions and make decisions.

We are as many as we need to be

In a process such as the PGS, social control is done with a bottom-up approach, from a local nucleus of groups to regional and national ones. These nuclei have representatives of organic farmers, consumers, educational organizations, and governmental organizations, and they create communication bonds within a framework of ethics and shared values. Social control in PGS strengthens organizations of farmers and consumers, addresses production, and satisfies demand, mainstreams agroecology in the government, and nurtures institutions. It also informs and helps consumers play an important role, and perfectly complements any other guarantee system development.

Conclusion

I want to express my gratitude on behalf of those who have worked, and continue working, on this proposal. I also appreciate the opportunity to be allowed to share the experience of Peru in this construction and development process. As with any process, this one has not been easy, nor is it finished. We have been learning all the way, and we will continue learning and making corrections, all with great enthusiasm, thinking of every single small producer that supplies the ecological local ecologic market, trying to make this small producer feel that

supplying these markets is a great opportunity, a risk, a Pandora's Box filled with surprises. The story is not over yet. You have us, who are willing to share with you what we have learned so far.