

Participatory Guarantee Systems – a nice governance model

By Gunnar Rundgren

The original version of this article was published on August 2 2012, on Gunnar's blog [Garden Earth](#).



In 2004, when I was the President of IFOAM, I had the pleasure to be instrumental in the first global meeting for the furthering of what

is now called Participatory Guarantee Systems for organic markets. PGS have developed primarily in Latin America as an alternative to the third-party certification model, which has dominated the organic market place since mid 1980s. I have myself been very active in building up the third party certification model, e.g. as the founder of KRAV in Sweden and as founding president of the International Organic Accreditation Services (IOAS). Because of that, I also knew the models' weaknesses and shortcomings.

The workshop in 2004 was hosted by one of the PGS pioneers, Ecovida, from Brazil. I was then sick with malaria and spent all the time in a hospital in Porto Alegre instead of participating in the workshop. Nevertheless, or perhaps as a result of my absence(!), the workshop was a great success. And from then on,

PGS have developed a lot.

Lately, this concept has received a lot of positive attention, and it has been recognized as a relevant and legal method for guaranteeing organic products in many Latin American countries, as well as in India. There are several reasons for this: one is the decrease in terms of cost and bureaucracy, which are higher in third-party certification. But even more important is the fact that PGS allow for ownership of the process and the results by the producers themselves. To undergo impartial third-party certification, with its increasingly bureaucratic procedures, standardized globally, is a rather alienating process.

Historically, the first organic certification bodies were either farmer organizations or were established by associations working closely with farmers, also taking on a promotional and educational role. With the introduction of adherence to the ISO 65 norm, government regulation and internal professionalization of the certification service, the distance between the certification body and the "subject of certification" has grown tremendously. Organic farmers today always refer to certifiers as "them", never as "us".

While there are some strengths in a third-party certification, it has a lot of weaknesses. PGS also have strong

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Participatory Guarantee Systems – a nice governance model | 1 |
| News from the Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and PGS - Results from Brazil | 2 |
| PGS and the efforts of Governments to convert whole Indian states into organic | 3 |
| Continental News: What's new in... | 5 |
| PGS Basics | 6 |

and weak sides. As things stand now, third-party certification is the model preferred for the anonymous mass-market, especially when distance between producers and consumers are big, while PGS is the choice for direct marketing situations. But for me, the most interesting thing about PGS is that it is based on a different paradigm, and on a participatory model of governance. As such, it merits attention not only as a method of guaranteeing the organic quality of products. The notion that we create credibility by

having supposedly “independent” organizations doing “objective” and “impartial” assessment is **at best just one way** of creating credibility, or **at worst an illusion**.

PGS are certainly not perfect. Also, it lies in their nature that they are different and not globally standardized. Some of them may be defunct; some of them may be inefficient or ineffective. But the idea behind them is sound and could be a building block also for strengthening local democracy and building new types of institutions.

News from the Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and PGS - Results from Brazil

By *Hervé Bouagnimbeck*,

IFOAM Organic for Africa! Coordinator



In the framework of the project “Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and PGS” currently being implemented by IFOAM, a new set of results are now available, referring to the selected PGS in Brazil, Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia.

From July 5 to 13, the researchers Tabatha Frony Morgado and Lucas Gambogi Rodrigues collected data in Passo Fundo, Brazil. They conducted interviews with representatives from CETAP*, with 12 farmers (women and men) from Rede Ecovida’s nuclei of Planalto and Alto Uruguai, and with consumers at the local PGS farmers’ market.

The data collection aimed at identifying relevant social processes and how they interact with PGS, as well as

understanding the impact of PGS on the communities where PGS initiatives are operational. What follows is a short summary of the results so far.

Joint marketing and PGS

It emerges that, for all farmers, PGS is very important for joint marketing, because the group enables access to specific markets, reduces costs and helps reaching consumers on a larger scale, especially through the farmers’ market. Joint marketing in fairs stimulates the exchange of production techniques and even modes of food preparation (recipes); allows teamwork regarding production and organization of the market. At the same time, joint marketing is considered by all as the main social process contributing to the success and sustainability of the PGS. A farmer explains:

“The farmers’market [joint marketing] was the mechanism which further promoted the PGS. It is very effective in promoting organic agriculture, bringing the rural nearer to the city. The market promotes changes in the group and in the society, with incidence on various aspects: family, income, production factors, political factors and subjective factors - culture, traditions’ replication.”

Knowledge and experience sharing within PGS

PGS is also considered as a crucial factor for knowledge and experience sharing among farmers. According to the respondents, this is mainly due to two factors:

1. Visits to the production unit: the visits are not just an inspection of conformity with the Ecovida’s standard. Farmers also perceive them as an opportunity for knowledge and experience exchange.
2. Group meetings dynamic: brings people together, facilitates farmers’ participation and information



Lucas and Tabatha, the local researchers

* Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas Populares - CETAP is a member of Ecovida since its foundation and has been promoting agroecology in northern Rio Grande do Sul since 1986. It provides support and technical advice to the two nuclei where the research was carried out.

exchange, thus enabling collective discussions over challenges and solutions and building trust within the group. This makes the PGS much stronger.

Seed sharing and PGS

For many farmers, seed sharing is another social process that is considerably influenced by PGS. The organization of farmers in a PGS enables the development of a network for seed sharing, and facilitates the joint seed acquisition, when necessary. Seed sharing occurs in different occasions. For example, during farm visits, at the farmers' market, during local group meetings and during the expanded meetings from Ecovida, which bring together all nuclei. However, when it comes to the contribution of seed sharing to the PGS's success and sustainability, respondents felt that it is difficult to keep as an ongoing process and therefore it cannot be considered to support the PGS to become sustainable.



Lucas Gambogi interviews farmers at the market

Common funds and PGS

Finally, some farmers mentioned that PGS has led to the establishment of a common fund in some groups. A farmer explains:

"Our group from Sananduva farmers' market is organized as follows: each one pays 1BRL [0,5 USD] plus 2% of sales every day of the market (the market happens twice a week). The money raised during the farmers' market is mainly used to pay for the transportation of products from farms into town. Through the common fund we managed to market our products.

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Overall benefits and positive impact of PGS

According to the respondents, farmer empowerment (involving personal growth, strengthening of individual self-confidence and increased recognition by the society) is the most remarkable change. As a farmer describes:

"The notion of a decent life takes another perspective. Moreover, agroecology or the Ecovida network itself provides farmers with another level of exchange that they never had before. This leads to farmers' growth and maturity. They become influent people and act as conscious citizens."

Increased income and increased quality of life (including improvements in health and increased access to food) are other major common benefits associated with the participation in PGS.

PGS and the efforts of Governments to convert whole Indian states into organic

By Thonthai Gowder Samraj – Coordinator at Keystone Foundation



On the 22nd and 23rd of August, a two day National Seminar on Organic Farming was held at SAMETI, Trivandrum by the Department of Agriculture of Kerala. It was a chance encounter and an opportunity to explore the possibilities of using PGS in the process of converting large areas like an entire district into organic.

Inaugurating the National Seminar, the Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy said that Kerala would follow the organic method of farming practiced in Sikkim*. Current vegetable

* In the framework of the Sikkim Organic Mission, the entire state of Sikkim will be converted into a certified organic state by 2015. For more information, please consult <http://www.sikkimagrisnet.org/General/en/Download/english.pdf>

farming practices comprise the use of highly harmful pesticides and chemical fertilizers, which have an adverse effect on people's health and also the environment.

Further in his inaugural address the Chief Minister said: "Farmers need to be provided with the right kind of confidence in terms of income through farming. For this, we need to promote organic farming, produce value-added products and should have proper marketing system. It is only by developing the agriculture sector that Kerala can attain economic growth.

The inaugural function was presided over by the Minister for Agriculture, K P Mohanan. Others who were present include the Director of Agriculture, Sikkim, Corleo Bhutia, Secretary for Agriculture, Jyothilal, Director of Agriculture, R Ajith Kumar and other officers.

I was invited to make a presentation on PGS, and am grateful for their hospitality and keen interest. The event acquires particular significance as it was attended by the Honorable Chief Minister of Kerala and the Agriculture Minister. Both the ministers in their address to the audience repeatedly mentioned the catastrophe in Kasaragod district* and the need to reverse to organic and sustainable agricultural practices. The Chief Minister expressed his concern about pesticide residues in food in the state and urged the Department of Agriculture to come up with a roadmap to convert the state into an organic farming state, in line with what is being done in Sikkim which is already progressing towards becoming 100% Organic.



Chief minister Chandy speaking at the seminar

The audience was kind enough to listen to my presentation with complete attention and interest, as I started explaining that PGS certification system is not a service provider like third-party certification bodies, which was a surprise to everyone, and more of a marketing tool in the local market to promote organic farming and practices. The NGO who is playing a facilitator role for PGS in one region can help another NGO in a different region to form Local Groups and be the facilitator in the process. In the meeting, the general assumption was we would provide the same services as third-party certifiers. As we went through the presentation, many ideas unfolded on how to make the best use of PGS.

Key areas of interest were how to provide organic food locally and how to address the needs of the local populations. As most of the organic agriculture products that are certified are meant for the export markets, the need to import organic food into the state and the cost of such an exercise and other social implications were discussed in detail.

My understanding of the situation in Kerala has given me an insight into how to integrate PGS in the process of converting large geographical areas, be it agriculture land or forests. In any geographical area, there will be small and marginal farmers who will be organic by default, who will not get any certification from any agency. This will either leave them out of the organic movement or make them enter into contract farming which is not for the local/domestic market. Now, the question of how the local markets' needs are addressed and how organic they are becomes a vital question. PGS has the potential to address this through local markets and local economies with close-knit networks of producers, traders and consumers.

The effort of the Government of Kerala and the Department of Agriculture is laudable and I hope a work-plan along with strong feasibility studies can convert the severely pesticide affected district of Kasaragod and infuse new life into the environment and its people.

* The Government of Kerala and of India appointed various commissions to inquire about mutations and ailments that many in the villages of Kasaragod district are suffering from. Various NGOs also conducted studies at their own level. The majority of the studies revealed the hazards of Endosulfan use and its impact on food and water. Endosulfan, a highly toxic organochlorine pesticide, was sprayed in the cashew plantations in Kasaragod since 1978, till 2001. Over 4000 people were identified as suspected Endosulfan victims in 2011 and began to receive treatment. [Visit this link \(.pdf\)](#) for details.

Continental News: What's new in...



...Asia and Oceania

Philippines: MASIPAG will be conducting a national training of trainers for PGS on October 1-5 with the support of the Foundation for Philippine Environment. The number of participants is restricted to 30, but there are many requests for more training opportunities. There are currently many initiatives under development in the country and the promoters' include local authorities such as the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist of Quezon, under the guidance of Mr. Roberto Gajo and the Municipality of Dumingag, under Mayor Nacienceno Pacalioga Jr.. For more information on the training, please contact [Rowena Buena](#) from MASIPAG.

Kyrgyzstan: A PGS workshop took place on August 27-28 in Naryn. It was coordinated by the [Organic Centre of Kazakhstan](#), and organized in the framework of the project „Vegetable Value Chain Development in Naryn Oblast“. The project is funded by the EU and implemented by MSDSP Kyrgyzstan, a partner of the Aga Khan Foundation. For more information, please contact Laurie Ashley (Natural Resource Management Specialist at Aga Khan Foundation) or Kyrgyzstanlaurie.ashley@gmail.com



...Latin America

Argentina: Small producers, technicians and officers from Chaco and Corrientes met on July 11 to discuss about developing health regulations that favor the marketing of processed products from family farming. The working day was attended by about forty people and was organized by the “Mesa Regional de Alimentos”, a group that brings together small producers organizations and technical officers from local authorities and research institutions from Chaco, Corrientes and Formosa. The group discussed the possibility of implementing participatory guarantee and organizing awareness raising campaigns to assist “artisanal producers” as a specific category.

Bolivia: In August, 915 operators (families or small holders) in 4 municipalities have been granted access to the national PGS logo and received documents attesting the organic status of their production units and products. The recipients recognized include operators from the municipalities of Batallas (278), Achocalla (269), Caracollo (279) and Caranavi (89). In Caracollo, Oruro, the documents were distributed during an event which was attended also by the FAO representative in Bolivia, Crispim Moreira. The logo is granted by AOPEB, the national association of organic producers organizations, SENASAG, the national competent authority for Organic Agriculture and CNAPE, the national council for organic production which is responsible for regulating, planning and promoting organic farming in the country through the creation of policies for the agricultural sector.



...North America and Europe

France: The Association for development of agricultural and rural employment (ADDEAR - L'Association pour le développement de l'emploi agricole et rural) has organized a [public debate](#) in order to discuss a project based on PGS, to promote local production and consumption using the AMAP (AMAP: Association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne – Peasant Agriculture organization) Charter.

The objective of the project is to create interactions between consumers and producers while providing consumers with better tools to understand agricultural practices and to make better purchasing choices; providing the producers with opportunities to explain their practices and values in short supply chains; and to allow producers to evaluate themselves. For more information please contact ADDEAR: addear_41@yahoo.fr

Spain: On October 14, in the framework of the Festival Kuminda, PGS initiatives from different parts of Italy will have the opportunity to meet and discuss the status of alternative certification experiences in the country. This meeting will also be the occasion for the group in Lombardia to discuss the results of a project that has been implemented since the beginning of this year, which included PGS trainings and activities for awareness raising on the importance of PGS for food security. A round table has been organized and it will be moderated by Venetia Villani, from the magazine "Cucina Naturale". The participants will be:

- Alessandro Triantafyllidis (President of [AIAB](#))
- Marco Servettini (L'isola che c'è – Como)
- Francesco Boldrini (Project "Garanzia Partecipata Toscana" - Gruppo Mugello)
- Michela Potito (CampiAperti/Genuino Clandestino)
- Giuseppe Vergani (Brianza - Monza)
- Eva Torremocha ([IFOAM PGS Committee](#))

For more information, please contact [Eva Torremocha](#).



PGS Basics

The IFOAM PGS Brochure has been translated into Spanish! It is now [available for download](#) on the PGS Portal. The brochure gives an introduction to PGS, and is a tool for advocacy to be used by the PGS community all over the world.

Imprint

The Global PGS Newsletter is published monthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to pgs@ifoam.org. Deadline for submission of articles is the 30th of each month for the following month's issue.

The Global PGS Newsletter is a free electronic publication. To receive the newsletter, please write to pgs@ifoam.org.

The Global PGS Newsletter is published by IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM website.

Editing: Flávia Castro, IFOAM

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The Global PGS Newsletter is supported by

