

Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system

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(editors)**

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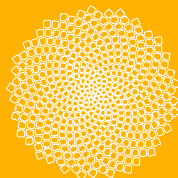
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Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system

The People's Knowledge Editorial Collective



Reclaiming
**Diversity &
Citizenship**

Everyday Experts:
How people's knowledge
can transform the
food system

Cover photos:

(left): Field teaching by Farmer Research Team members about planting methods, Lobi area. Photo taken by C. Hickey, December 2014. Used with the permission of project participants.

(right): The Coventry Men's Shed participatory video project exploring "What's Eating Coventry" and unpacks social justice issues related to food in the city of Coventry. More information at www.peoplesknowledge.org

Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system

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*Contributors listed in alphabetical order. This book was a collective endeavour and work and responsibility was shared evenly amongst the editorial team. All chapters have been peer reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers and revised accordingly as a part of a non-blind open peer review process.

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The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) is driving innovative, transdisciplinary research on the understanding and development of socially just and resilient food and water systems internationally. Unique to this University Research Centre is the incorporation of citizen-generated knowledge - the participation of farmers, water users and other citizens in transdisciplinary research, using holistic approaches which cross many disciplinary boundaries among the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences.

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The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* seeks to encourage debate outside mainstream policy and conceptual frameworks on the future of food, farming, land use and human well-being. The opportunities and constraints to regenerating local food systems and economies based on social and ecological diversity, justice, human rights, inclusive democracy, and active forms of citizenship are explored in this Series. Contributors to the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* are encouraged to reflect deeply on their ways of working and outcomes of their research, highlighting implications for policy, knowledge, organisations, and practice.

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* was published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) between 2006 and 2013. The Series is now published by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, at Coventry University.

Professor Michel Pimbert is the coordinator and editor in chief of the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series*.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, its partners and donors.

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Colin Anderson: I am fortunate to have an amazing family who support me in this work - even when it requires working at strange hours. Thank you Jenny, Clara and Finn. This book project was one of the first that I started when coming to CAWR and it is wonderful to see it come to fruition. I have appreciated all of the debates with my fellow editors - both on the content of the book, but also unpacking the politics and dynamics of the (related) process of putting it together. What fabulous mistakes we have made and learned from along the way.

Javier Sanchez Rodriguez: I am grateful for the opportunity of being part of this editorial team, I have learnt a great deal in this process. Special thanks go to my partner Maria P. and my children, Chla and Mallkum, for their love, support and patience while I was working on this project. I would like to give thanks to my parents, Javier and Rosa, for teaching me to love the campesino way of life.

Marina Chang: In celebrating both moments and movements with food in life, I come to realise that we are part of nature and we are connected ourselves to something far beyond us. I thank all kinds of people and things, visible and invisible, now and then, for keeping the water flowing, the food growing, the kitchen cooking, and our journey together continuing, and ultimately leading the world to enter a new epoch of history.

Christabel Buchanan: Thanks to the rest of the editorial team for giving me the chance to work with them on this book, and for being fantastic peers - I have gained a lot of valuable practical and personal lessons from being in this collective. I'd also like to offer gratitude to my partner, Alex, for his genuine encouragement and enthusiasm for what I do.

Tom Wakeford: Working with others on the editorial collective has been a rewarding, educational and humbling experience. I'd particularly like to thank them for their patience while I was dealing with health problems in my family. Both my extended and immediate family have been a wonderful support. I would particularly like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my debt to Gail Vines and Frances Price who have been giving me critical and supportive feedback on my writing as well as offering general editorial advice for over twenty five years.

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Abra Brynne lives in the traditional territory of the Sinixt people in south eastern British Columbia, Canada. She works to lower barriers to place-based food systems through supportive policy and by assisting farmers and other food producers to access the information and markets they need. She is currently the Director of Engagement and Policy of the BC Food Systems Network.

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Dora María Chamorro is a feminist, former activist with the 19th April Movement (M-19), costume designer, trained in theatre techniques and popular education focusing on cultural development. She is a mother of a daughter and a son, both professionals. She is a natural leader of social development processes. As an ex candidate for Cali Council in 2015 representing the Unión Patriótica party, she promoted participation with a gender perspective. Not only is she a concept creator and co-author of various city proposals, but also a human rights activist focusing on the arts, culture and women. She is currently formally unemployed.

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Mama D is a community researcher and learning facilitator working at different social interfaces using community-centred narratives, drama and intergenerational performances. She embraces and endorses the ways of the Earth in terms of diversity and intersectionality from a place of pluriversal consciousness and practice. Having worked with communities in Africa, the Caribbean and the UK, she is enthusiastic about the benefits of lifelong learning; growing from and with the land and alternative forms of education.

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Thierry Kesteloot is a policy advisor on food and agricultural policies with Oxfam-Solidarity. Master in sociology Thierry Kesteloot has extensive field experience for NGOs in developing countries as well as in Belgium. Over the years he has worked in support of farmers' organisations and social movements worldwide including at the International Fora on Food Sovereignty and the one on Agroecology, as well as at the Committee on World Food Security.

Cathleen Kneen was an active leader in farm and women's organizations and worked for social justice and ecological integrity. She was a feminist organizer in Nova Scotia, cofounder of the BC Food Systems Network and Food Secure Canada, and a strong advocate for community organization participation in the Canadian Association for Food Studies. Cathleen was a community colead of Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE).

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Kenton Lobe spends winters teaching International Development and Environmental Studies at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. The politics of people and place, particularly the discourse of food justice, continue to shape Kenton's imagination and academic interests. He has spent the last seven growing seasons working on small-scale farms and is currently working with students on an on campus urban farm. Kenton spent six years working on food policy issues with Canadian Foodgrains Bank, an international NGO and serves as chair of the Board of Directors of USC Canada.

Rob Logan is a food grower, researcher and political organiser based in London. In 2016 Rob began an action research PhD at the Centre for Agroecology Water and Resilience, Coventry University, UK, with new Haringey-based cooperative London Grown as a lead case study. His research explores pathways for food justice in London through urban agriculture and the potential of transformative entrepreneurial commons on appropriated public land.

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Ma'at á Nkemi, aged 15, is a student of Life and an avid reader, mainly of dystopian novels and comedy. She might be the first rapper of science, her favourite subject! She enjoys learning from and in nature and is also embracing the use of the arts as a way of communicating her passion for learning and being in the Earth.

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Graciela Romero has 18 of experience of working with communities, grassroots groups, NGOs and social movements on issues related to indigenous knowledge, food sovereignty, social conflicts, resource extraction and community organising. She was Director of International Programmes at War on Want and worked alongside the Women's Collective: Celendinas Luchadoras en Defensa de la Pachamama. The women's collective is a group of women (campesino and indigenous women, teachers, food vendors (both market and street), health promoters, housewives, religious sisters and students) defending their land and water in Cajamarca, Peru. War on Want is an international non-governmental organization based in London www.waronwant.org. She is now a PhD student at Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University, UK.

Carla Roppel has a diverse background as a researcher, writer and editor, community organizer, communications officer and strategic thinker. Carla was the Executive Director of the Canadian National Farmers Union. She is interested in agriculture, policy analysis and development, and grandchildren.

Javier Sanchez Rodriguez was born in South Central Colombia in a peasant family. He is a shade-grown coffee and mixed crops farmer, political activist and participatory action researcher. He studied theatre, dance, music and anthropology in London where he lived for 12 years. For the past 9 years has been working in rural Colombia with his partner and children on the development of CAISMALOKA – Social Action and Research Centre. Javier is also part of the International school for Bottom-up Organizing (ISBO). Recently he has been working in the UK supporting the development of Solidarity Hull through the study of participatory action research, popular education and arts.

Maruja Salas and **Timmi Tillmann** are facilitators, documenters and advisors for farmer-scientist dialogues. They are also trainers in Indigenous Knowledge and Visualisation in Participatory Programmes (VIPP) and authors of many publications including the VIPP manual and a practical handbook for Participatory Action Research, both in English, Burmese and Spanish language. They are both Honorary Research Fellows at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, UK.

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Jeanette Sivilay is a first generation small urban farmer in her sixth season operating a small-scale vegetable CSA in Winnipeg Manitoba as part of the Metanoia Farmers Worker Co-op. Together the worker co-op grows open-pollinated varieties of vegetables using sustainable, organic based practices to feed over 100 families in Winnipeg. She is also a graduate student at the University of Manitoba in the department of Environment and Geography, studying food sovereignty, social movements, and local food systems.

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Introduction

1. A time of upheaval

The collaborative project that has led to *Everyday Experts* has come together during perhaps the greatest global political upheaval since the Second World War. Food and water insecurity, mass human migrations and violent conflict, often involving struggles for control over land and other resources, are affecting more people than any time in history.

Our collective aim, as editors and contributors, has been to support efforts that allow all people's participation in the creation and democratic control of change. We do this by sharing stories of people who we call everyday experts. These are people whose expertise comes from their life experience rather than from professional training. Our book explores how these experts-by-experience can work together with professionals to transform our damaged food system towards health and agroecological goals on the one hand, and a fair distribution of power, risk and resources on the other. We have been brought together by a common desire to reflect critically on how people's knowledge and wisdom can be harnessed through action, participatory research and critical learning in support of movements for greater justice in the food system.

Everyday Experts is a call for dialogue between different ways of understanding the world, and a call for the recognition and affirmation of Indigenous, local, traditional and other non-mainstream knowledge systems. While we have no problem with science, we reject the increasing role being played in current debates by scientism: the belief that the methods of natural science, particularly the categories and things recognized in physical-mathematical sciences, form the only proper elements in any philosophical or other inquiry (Blackburn 2005, Midgley 2014). We argue that different knowledges and wisdom emerge from, and are connected with, particular livelihoods, values and lifestyles. Increasingly, such long-standing and often ecologically appropriate ways of living and knowing are threatened by the imposition of technologies based on scientism. This book rejects these hierarchies of knowledge and is rooted in a call for what has been referred to as "cognitive justice", which implies the active valuing of different knowledges and compels us to work towards horizontal *dialogos de saberes* (wisdom dialogues) as the basis for knowledge co-production.

In recent years, scientism, “professional expertise”, the economic dogmas of transnational corporations and the neo-colonial political ideology of charismatic politicians have shaped knowledge systems both globally and locally (de Sousa Santos 2015, Giroux 2017). We acknowledge that some conventional approaches to research have, in many cases, produced important knowledge and have led to innovations that appear to have improved particular aspects of people's lives. In the areas of food and agriculture, technologies arising from high-tech science and innovations have led to increases in efficiency and safety for some. However, many of these technologies and processes of innovation have contributed to changes that have also displaced and oppressed huge sections of society, contributing to the human and ecological crises that we see in many parts of the world. In this context, mainstream agricultural knowledge and innovation has been used to support the provision of labour, natural resources and intellectual input to fuel an unequal global economy and the accumulation of power and wealth by a small global minority (Patel 2013).

The starting point for Everyday Experts is that we all need to share, support, mobilize, affirm, amplify and develop knowledges and processes of knowledge production that promote social justice and ecological regeneration. We have gathered together a collective of practitioners and thinkers to reflect critically on projects that, in different ways, reflected bottom-up processes of knowledge creation and mobilisation. In doing so we are attempting to support non-dominant (or “everyday”) people in society so as to have their ways of knowing recognized. The initiatives described in the following chapters point to vital strategies for producing and validating knowledge. These strategies should be an integral part of broader attempts to transform our food and agriculture systems materially and politically.

2. Top-down science and knowledge injustice

Today's globally-integrated and chemical-intensive capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption of food is largely based on knowledge that is underwritten by the objective of maximising corporate profit. The neoliberal takeover of agriculture and food systems has resulted in the privatisation and financialisation of most of the mainstream food system. This has come about through a cultural, political and economic shift that privileges neoliberal political, economic, regulatory approaches as well as knowledges that are congruent with this neoliberal project,

This emphasis on the market as the mediator of all social and ecological relations has also been applied to the realm of knowledge, where private intellectual property rights are undermining the “knowledge commons”. The hegemony of marketable knowledges marginalizes the ways of knowing that form the basis for equity, social justice, concern for welfare (human or animal), health and care for the environment. This has exacerbated existing inequalities, increasing social breakdown, such as racial and gender oppression and has undermined human rights, including the right

to food (Claeys 2015). It has also accelerated the loss of biodiversity, soil degradation and climate change (McIntyre 2009, McMichael 2009).

Scientism and its implicit marginalisation of everyday expertise, including how to produce, exchange, cook and eat food, has not been merely a crude process of censorship. The suppression of local, folk, farmer and Indigenous knowledge systems is a part of a wider historical process that undermines what Visvanathan (1997) called “cognitive justice” or what Fricker (2010) terms “epistemic injustice”. Cognitive justice is based on a critique of the hegemonic influence of dominant knowledges (western science, neoliberalism), which continue to undermine alternative knowledge systems. These excluded forms of wisdom and expertise can be significant sources of useful new ideas. They are connected to, and entwined with, different cultures, livelihoods and socio-economic and political ecological systems. The marginalisation and erasure of non-dominant (or “subaltern”) knowledges is a part of a wider process of incorporating people in the majority world as part of capitalist systems of wealth accumulation by elites often holding positions of power in the nations that once colonised them (Guha 2003).

The dominance of scientism as the basis for global corporate food systems has its roots in European colonialism stretching back to the fifteenth century (Quijano 2000). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012:1) argues, scientific research is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism”. Over five centuries, colonizing forces have introduced many of the mechanisms that have destroyed or degraded knowledge systems, for example, through disease; economic exploitation; subjugation and enslavement of Indigenous people; enlightenment notions of rationality, science, dominion, and civilization; the positional superiority of European knowledge; the dismissal of Indigenous spirituality; and imposition of what is “human” and what is “other” (Mignolo 2012).

Though the full history cannot be recounted here, the exploitation of fossil fuels gave mechanical knowledge systems economic dominance over, and eventually displaced, a whole livelihood system of artisan knowledge and skills, first in Britain and its empire and those of other European nations (Galeano 1971, Dugan & Dugan 2000). In his detailed documentation of the effects of colonisation on the majority world, Pankaj Mishra writes that, “The British Empire and its European counterparts were wholly unprecedented in creating a global hierarchy of economic, physical and cultural power; that is why their impact endures” (Mishra 2012).

In many settler states, European colonisers destroyed Indigenous knowledge systems through violent processes of forced assimilation. For example, the Canadian Residential School program (extending to the 1960s) involved the removal of Indigenous children from their families to assimilate them into European culture by isolating the children from their language, traditional knowledge and culture. Residential schools were a violent and brutally effective method of intentionally disrupting the transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems.

3. The Green Revolution: Dispossession of people and knowledge

During the post war period, technological advancements in agriculture accelerated. There was a widespread assumption, as displayed by President Truman, that “scientific” approaches to problems would inevitably outperform the supposedly “backward” practices of those who were considered uneducated and thus “primitive”.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people...I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life...And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of scientific and technical knowledge.

US President Truman, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949.

With the backing of the government-industrial complex, scientists became a powerful political force during the twentieth century. Scientific research often became incorporated into state machinery and science and engineering became key tools for building national wealth through dispossession (Kamminga 1995).

During the same century, the United States took an increasingly influential role in industrialising food production, using science as a front for neo-colonial economic development and the expansion of Western economic influence in the global south. The US-driven “green revolution”, which came to prominence during the 1960s, had its origins in the Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) and involved a massive undermining of agriculture and food systems based on traditional local practices in Africa (Box 1).

Box 1: The technical foundations of the industrialisation of agricultural knowledge (adapted from Jennings 1988)

From 1943, the Mexican Agricultural Programme (MAP) shaped a model of technical assistance that was taken up by United Nations and other institutional bodies and has now become entrenched in the agricultural systems of almost every country in the world.

Previously, the Rockefeller Foundation had run a medical mission in Mexico. Staff in the mission pointed out that economic conditions were so poor in rural Mexico that public health was impossible to achieve. As a result, three Rockefeller scientists visited to examine prospects of improving Mexican agriculture. These scientists also consulted Carl Sauer, a geography professor who the Foundation staff respected due to his familiarity with Latin America.

Box 1 (contd.)

Sauer recommended that the improvement of the genetic base of agricultural crops be predicated on an understanding of the knowledge and skills of poorer farmers. He recommended that Indians of Mexico should be encouraged to continue cultivating as they were and be protected from exploitation. He argued that the Foundation's campaigns to increase the cultivation of wheat in Mexico, Peru and Chile for foreign markets was far less important than the cultivation of legumes for Indigenous consumption, emphasising that "the standardization of a few commercial types [risked] upsetting native economy and culture hopelessly."

Sauer's suggestion of drawing on the agricultural know-how and social needs of the small farmers was ignored. Leaders of the Foundation accused Sauer of merely trying to protect Mexicans' "picturesque folk ways".

Moreover, MAP's backers did not consider it within their remit to explore the social or cultural value of existing cropping systems. Instead MAP's planning followed the technical logic of maximising the commercial production of crops suited to export markets that had been pioneered by the British in its colonies.

With the assault on Mexican maize farmers, the loss of language has been irreversible. It has had the intended effect of stripping Indigenous people of their ability to express other ways of knowing, including traditional knowledge of seeds and cultivation (Yannakakis 2008, Barkin 2002, Benz et al. 2000).

The exclusion of social and political analysis in agriculture research has significant political consequences. Yet, the institutions of science, usually governed by believers in scientism, largely view science as separate from politics. Because international agricultural research regards laboratory-based biology, particularly genetics, as the basis of the world-view from which it seeks authority, rather than sociology or political economy, it has become closed to other perspectives in solving problems of agricultural development, including questions as to who would lose out and what would be lost.

This was significant because the programme, and the Foundation, were hugely dominant in the establishment of the highly influential Consultative Group on International Genetic Resources (CGIAR) of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Today, at all levels, public funding and investment in agriculture research and development continues to focus on narrow, high-tech, green-revolution style approaches, ignoring the social and political consequences and continuing to marginalise the wider knowledge systems in food producing communities. While these are continually under threat, they still form the basis of the majority of food production in the world.

The MAP, along with the World Bank, the FAO and the Development Programme, and representatives of national governments and major foundations, became one of the international research centres of the CGIAR, whose mandate was to provide research into food security. The authority of the different centres is based on the supposed quality of their science and the extent to which it furthers CGIAR's mandate.

Despite the universal consensus among social analysts that malnutrition is as much caused by social and political factors as the quantity of food (Lappé and Collins 2015), CGIAR maintains a focus on the technical aspects of agriculture.

The rarely-spoken sub-text of this apparently altruistic US investment in MAP is the promotion of a mechanized system of agrarian development in order to combat the spread of communism. As post-war events in “poor” agrarian nations such as China, Vietnam and Indonesia have shown, rural peasants have found political movements promoting the redistribution of land appealing (Mehr 2009). Transforming relatively autonomous self-sufficient smallholders into waged labourers on larger farms has had the political effect of weakening support for redistributive political forces (Friedman 2015, McMichael 2009).

Box 2: Green Revolution in Colombia and India

In countries like Colombia this green revolution is directly connected to the violent forced displacement of subsistence and smallholding farmers, in order to give way to mechanized mega-agricultural projects (see Cárdenas Motta 2007).

The attitude of governing elites to the peasants can be traced back to the historic exploitation and genocide of people kidnapped from Africa and enslaved in the Americas to produce cotton, coffee, cacao, rubber and sugar (Galeano 1973). More recently, millions of Colombian peasants have again suffered violent displacements by paramilitary forces, who have cleared the land for take-over by multinational corporations in the name of modern agricultural “development” (Organización Soporte Klan 2011).

India, which then, as now, contained more malnourished rural poor than any other country, did establish policies promoting land-redistribution from the 1950s onwards. But the lack of political and legal rights available to marginalized rural people, most of whom had been denied education and still suffered tremendous caste discrimination, meant that in practice India's Green Revolution followed the same trend of greater concentration of land holdings among those farmers who were already comparatively wealthy (Sainath 1996, Vasavi 1999).

As well as imposing a capitalist mode of production, the green revolution model entailed the erasure of the knowledge and practices of subsistence farming communities. As a stark example of cognitive injustice, the green revolution undermined the life-worlds that were inseparable from those knowledge systems and generally severed the diverse social ties, know-how, rituals, and cultures of local peoples. Farmers and communities became dependent on external knowledge and inputs and the potential for knowledge exchange for self-reliance between people living in such communities was effaced.

Because of the way post-war economists measured crude total yields per region, rather than household food security, the green revolution appeared to be a success. In reality, as crops shifted to monocultures, food often became scarce, less varied and hence less healthy. Subsistence farmers also experience forced displacement, as their land was appropriated by larger farmers. Indeed, studies by both participatory and conventional academic researchers have now comprehensively challenged long-

standing claims that the Green Revolution benefited the livelihoods and health of small farming communities (Altieri 2002).

4. Knowledge and struggle in food systems today

Today, agri-food companies are some of the most powerful and profitable in the world, and along with complicit governments and knowledge institutions, have been accused of perpetuating some of the worst damage to the environment, to health and to rural communities (Holt-Giminez and Altieri, 2013). Agri-food-corporations extract substantial profits, while hunger, disease, environmental degradation and loss of rural livelihoods are the collateral damage (Patel 2013).

Far from being confined to isolated examples, the tendency of knowledge created as part of industrial food systems to favour the interests of agri-chemical corporations has become the norm (Pimbert et al. 2010, Pimbert 2017). Yet the capture of knowledge systems in modernisation and development agendas has gone largely unremarked by mainstream researchers (c.f. Alvares 1992, de Sousa Santos 2015, Hall et al. 2016). A coalition of elite scientists, governments, companies and philanthropic organisations have often promoted privatized knowledge and technologies as the solutions to the very crises that such industrial technologies have created. This tendency to focus research on new technology as a magic bullet to address perceived backwardness in existing agricultural practices has further marginalized the everyday expertise associated with them.

“Biopiracy”, the prospecting for, and stealing of, natural and cultural resources from the most rich and biodiverse lands inhabited by Indigenous communities has become widely associated with corporate-industrial approaches to agricultural “modernisation”. Companies operate on the pretence of ensuring plant ‘biodiversity’ in a future of unpredictable climate change. In reality this is a method of corporations for capturing genetic material and the everyday expertise that is associated with its use. Legal mechanisms such as patents can even allow the corporate shareholders to benefit from a monopoly on the use of certain species, breeds and varieties. The exploitation of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom is integral to this process. This exploitation is often undertaken without any compensation being offered to, or in many cases permission obtained from, the people who hold that valuable and often sacred knowledge (ETC Group 1995, Neimark 2012).

Today's mainstream agricultural knowledge and innovation systems and institutions are now promoting “second green revolution” approaches such as novel foods, genetically modified seeds, hybrid seeds, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and mechanization. Some of these technologies have proven effective at increasing yields and profit for agribusiness as a whole. Yet there is now much evidence that these approaches reduce the profitability and viability of smaller-scale farming as a livelihood. Smaller farmers live on an uneven playing field, where political and economic context undermines their

livelihoods, discourages alternative and traditional food systems, while propping up the industrialised system (e.g. Laforge, Anderson and McLachlan 2017). In many cases, unable to compete with industrialized system, farm and have to sell up, which in turn leads to the continued concentration of farmland into agribusiness. In addition to the social cost, the intensification of farming has caused significant environmental damage that risks wiping out entire ecosystems (Restrepo Rivera 1994, Perfecto and Vandermeer 2015).

Processes of participatory action research have shown evidence that some of these approaches, such as the use of GM crops, are already encountering serious constraints and deleterious side-effects when compared to approaches that draw on everyday experience (Kuruganti et al. 2008). The focus on technological fixes, rather than holistic change, often means that while a technology might make gains in addressing one problem (e.g. antibiotics increasing milk production and short term profitability), they often create others (e.g. antibiotic resistance in humans and poor animal welfare). These 'externalized costs' contribute to wider social, cultural, economic and environmental problems.

While some crises have been exposed, others remain largely unknown - even to those affected - such as the harm that pesticides cause to people who come into prolonged, direct contact with them, which includes poisoning, cancer, and birth defects (United Nations 2017). This could be due to lack of research or under-reporting of information, or the bribing of governments or academics by agribusiness lobbyists who now have a huge and growing influence on what we 'know' and what we don't find out (Nestle 2007, Lipton 2015).

5. Food movements and knowledge strategies

The harm caused by the spread of industrial food systems has prompted a groundswell of responses from civil society and social movements. These movements contest corporate-industrial food systems, policies and knowledges and work to actively develop alternative approaches to reduce hunger, improve the sustainability of food systems and to reclaim the power for people to determine their own food systems. This resistance is occurring through decentralized and informal networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movement organisations as well as, in rare cases, parts of public institutions such as universities.

The wide and growing body of documentation of these processes has primarily focused on characterising the problems of the food system and critically documenting the various political and practical strategies to resist and to develop alternatives (e.g. Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). There has been less deliberate attention to the various methodologies and approaches that these social movements are using to reclaim and mobilize knowledge - a gap that we hope that this volume will help to fill.

On small farms, in community organisations and in social movement networks, people

are defending, affirming and strengthening their knowledge systems, in many cases reclaiming the best from the past and combining it with new ideas and technologies in hybrid knowledges (Richards 1993, Pimbert et al. 2010). These efforts for cognitive justice are one domain of action in the wider struggle to reimagine and transform food systems (Pimbert 2017).

Many of the contributions in the book are framed by food sovereignty, which represents a radical paradigm for transforming the food system. It emerged in the mid 1990s through debates amongst peasants, Indigenous peoples, farm workers and small-scale farmers from various regions of the world who were organized in La Vía Campesina, the most substantial transnational agrarian social movement in modern history. Food sovereignty is a critical alternative to the dominant concept of food security, which was being articulated by mainstream institutions as a technical, market-led and apolitical approach to addressing hunger and agricultural development (Desmarais 2012). Indeed, the origins of food sovereignty, as it has been articulated by social movement, was in part a rejection of the monopoly of knowledge of NGOs, scientists and elite institutions. It represented a claim for agricultural development to be based on the knowledge systems of food producers.

Proponents of food sovereignty frame the problems in the food system as fundamentally political, rejecting the dominant emphasis on technical fixes, and call instead for democratic reform, new forms of citizenship and rights and transformation towards agroecological food systems (Nyeleni 2015). From this perspective, global hunger and rural impoverishment will not be solved through the production of more and more food via increasingly globalized food systems, but by confronting and dismantling the capitalist and neoliberal modes of food production - and the knowledge systems that underpin them.

Closely related to food sovereignty is the global movement to advance agroecology (Anderson, Pimbert & Kiss 2015). The Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology (Nyeleni 2015) states that,

“Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It will be implemented in different ways in different places. It is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of our territories, can and are practiced in many different ways”.

Agroecology is viewed by social movements as being rooted in the practices, knowledge and wisdom of food producers and as the practical implementation of the principles of food sovereignty. Far beyond a set of technical production methods, agroecology links practice and politics through the development of collective agroecological knowledge, production practices and political networks.

In a related strand of activism and organisation, “food justice” movements are emerging among consumers and producers across the globe. This is particularly the case in

North America, and increasingly in India, where social movements are focusing on tackling the structural inequalities tied to race, caste, gender and class, on which the food system was built and on which it still relies, arguing for the dismantling of the belief systems and structures of power that maintain these inequalities (Harper and Holt-Giménez 2016, Food Sovereignty Alliance 2015). These movements argue that food justice cannot be achieved without acknowledging historical trauma, inequality and the deep legacies of colonialism which persist and continue to shape how people think about, access and produce food today. A food justice approach not only challenges the mainstream food system but critically encourages food activists and organizers to address the ways that their thinking and knowledge can reproduce racist, caste/class, patriarchal, heteronormative and other systems of power and privilege (Bradley and Herrera 2016). Food justice movements are employing knowledge strategies to decolonize thinking and practice, shifting power away from the centre to the margins which are viewed not as deficient but as a crucial site of resistance and radical possibility (hooks 1990).

Food movements of all kinds are also realising the necessity to link up with related struggles (for example see Chapter 1 on Indigenous food sovereignty), anti-racist movements (#BlackLivesMatter), workers' struggles, (e.g. fast food workers' movements), environmental movements (for example, see Chapter 26 on anti-mining), building (trans)national women's solidarity for issues such as seed sovereignty (for example see chapters 7 and 8) and violence against women (Human Rights Watch 2007). The transnational links and cross-struggle connections allow for knowledge sharing that strengthens people's capacity for control of their resources.

Food movements are evolving with diverse approaches, languages, tactics and strategies. Although the emphases and politics of these food movements are heterogenous, they all reject the mainstream food system as unsustainable and unfair. They also all reflect a call for the recognition and re-valuing of people's knowledge and wisdom as being central to the struggle for social transformation. In this regard, the pursuit of cognitive justice is one important approach to advance the goals of food movements.

6. Food movements and cognitive justice

Given the role that hegemonic top-down science has played in the emergence of today's industrial-corporate food systems, it is no surprise that food movements emphasize the importance of knowledge struggles. Through a range of tactics and strategies, food movements are working to take back power by reclaiming the importance of multiple knowledges and ways of knowing - especially those knowledges that embody ethical and spiritual commitments to social justice and ecological stewardship. In this book, our aim is to better understand and strengthen strategies that enable people's knowledge to be recognized as valid and to demonstrate the role of these knowledge strategies in food movements.

Box 3: A brief overview of the process of creating the book

In this book you will find case studies, critical analysis and creative representation of knowledge strategies and knowledge processes used in efforts to bring about food justice and food sovereignty around the world. Contributors include activists, farmers and non-professional researchers as well as academics.

The editorial collective includes an activist PhD student (Buchanan); a Canadian action researcher (Anderson); a community organizer and researcher who is also a peasant farmer (Sanchez-Rodriguez); an urban community practitioner and action researcher (Chang), and a participatory worker and researcher (Wakeford). We all have connections with the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, UK.

We hope that the relative diversity of our collective, and our efforts to provide a supportive publishing and editorial context for authors from different backgrounds, has helped to produce a diverse and rich volume. Indeed, the diversity of the contributors, in terms of places of origin, ethnicity, class, age and experience, reflects our attempt to make participation in a book project like this much more accessible than is normally the case.

We created the book in a commitment to a non-hierarchical process of dialogue and critical reflection, expressed through a range of cultural forms. We have therefore welcomed chapters that speak through poetry, photos and visual formats.

We encouraged authors to consider processes through which knowledge-generation can be oriented towards action, rather than remaining theoretical. Our intention was to avoid contributions that are devoid of practical experience. Many chapters focus on knowledge processes that are participatory in nature – an approach that the editorial collective views as a better, more democratic way of producing reliable and politically effective knowledge and of achieving social and ecological justice than approaches that treat people as passive research subjects.

We first asked authors to submit short case studies of up to 2000 words, resulting in a set of 35 first drafts. Each draft was then reviewed by at least three peers, and reviews were posted online in a forum where everyone could interact and react to comments. This enabled all contributors to play an active part in the critical and constructive development of the chapters and so of the book itself. Through this process, contributions were developed as authors expanded and elaborated their narratives and critical reflections. We hope you enjoy the resulting product of an intense, experimental and (for us) a very rewarding process.

The chapters in this book deploy different approaches to affirming the knowledge of non-elites and to challenge the monopoly of knowledge that forms the basis of the dominant neoliberal food system. Thus, the kinds of knowledge strategies represented in the chapters in this volume largely reflect five objectives:

1. Challenging the assumptions, legitimacy and the imperialism of corporate and western scientific knowledges
2. Working collectively to co-produce and combine knowledges (e.g. the combination of scientific with local knowledge in agroecology) and mobilising these in processes of social transformation

3. Developing critical understanding and consciousness in grassroots organisations and communities through processes of popular education and self-reflection
4. Building solidarity, critical pedagogy and partnerships between marginalized groups and allies in mainstream institutions (e.g. community-university partnerships)
5. Providing analysis and examples of different knowledge strategies used by social movements towards achieving these objectives.

Examples under the fifth objective include citizen juries, collective learning, transformational or experiential learning, international social movement gatherings, participatory on-farm research, wisdom dialogues, farmer-to-farmer learning, community review, critical pedagogy, participatory video, critical race theory and, central to many of these, self-reflection. They also can include collaboration between academics and social movements, or community-university partnerships, using a range of different paradigms including co-inquiry, appreciative inquiry, participatory action research (PAR) and feminist PAR inquiry.

7. Reclaiming popular education traditions

In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Paulo Freire wrote “Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply ‘blah, blah, blah,’ and practice, pure activism”.

In the context of this book, Freire's words affirm our desire to work with activists, which includes many of the authors, to reflect on practice in order to improve our effectiveness. However, it should also put us on our guard against becoming professional researchers who merely use the words “participatory”, “action research” or “co-researcher” without coming to a critical understanding of them (Kapoor and Jordan 2009). This process of critical analysis, which Freire called “conscientization”, is best done, not inside academic ivory towers, but rather in a process of dialogue with grassroots activists with whom we work.

Freire's work fundamentally challenges much of the thinking about participation that has taken place in traditions of the political left and among many Western environmentalists who believe they are the intellectual leaders of the change that is required. They are, to use the traditional Marxist term, at the “revolutionary vanguard”.

Since at least the 1960s, some critics of mainstream Western science, who have believed themselves to be part of this vanguard, have issued slogans such as “science for the people” and issued calls for scientists to “democratize technology” (e.g. www.scienceforthepeople.org). Unfortunately, what this meant in practice was more akin to the Bolshevik slogan “all power to the Soviets”. The reality behind this slogan in the Soviet Union was that the Kremlin held all the power while the local “Soviets” had to do exactly what they were told or face brutal punishment. There was no opportunity for dialogue between the leaders of Communist Party and the people who

were experiencing the effects of the often-disastrous policies that had been made, supposedly, on their behalf. Similarly, many intellectuals from the socialist and green movements of the 1970s who called for democracy and participation wanted, in reality, to decide what was best for people. In the post-communist era many have become suspicious of calls to “democratize knowledge” (Appadurai 2006).

Although operating in capitalist democracies rather than communist dictatorships, mainstream Western academics have been largely content to leave intact hierarchical systems of knowledge production established during the Enlightenment. The result has been that most academics have remained just as isolated from everyday experts as were the central decision-makers in Soviet Union.

Research approaches - even those supposedly carried out in the name of social justice - that repeat this hierarchical pattern or that exclude the marginalized from the process of knowledge creation, risk reproducing cognitive, and social, injustice. We believe the approach developed by Freire and other popular educators, particularly active in Latin America, provides a radically different and fruitful strategy for social change.

In the 1950s and 60s, much of Latin America was ruled by a series of dictatorships often supported by US intervention. Paulo Freire was among a remarkable group of people who worked under conditions of dictatorship and, at great personal risk, worked to build a social movement that contributed to the beginnings of a democratic alternative to dictatorship. It built on the work of theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and formed a radical challenge to top-down models of knowledge and governance (Taylor 1993).

Freire's philosophy, first popularized in 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', was that the teacher also had to be a learner. Teachers often come from a more middle class background, and are by definition more privileged, than those they teach. Freire explained that the teacher was going into areas where people were practicing agriculture and other complicated practices that enabled them to survive, and asserted that “you are yourself ignorant of these things, so you, the teacher, have to learn as well” (Freire 1970).

In Brazil, working under the noses of a brutal dictatorship, Freire and these other educational workers succeeded in creating what he called 'cultural circles'. These groups were made up of a popular educator and non-literate people - both in rural areas and in the favelas, the slums in the cities. The government demanded everyone passed an exam before they were allowed to vote, which effectively excluded the poor from voting. But what, asked Freire, was the point of voting if you did not have a critical understanding of power? The members of these cultural circles, which numbered 20,000 by 1964, learnt not just how to read and write but about social justice and power. Paulo Freire's point was ultimately to co-learn through critical education in order to encourage a democratic challenge to the dictatorship.

The peaceful transition to democracy in Brazil and the coming to power of the President Lula da Silva and the Worker's Party that did so much to address inequality in Brazil could not have taken place without the cultural circles initiated by Freire. Other Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Chile and (despite the civil war) Colombia, had experiences that drew on Freire's teaching, speaking to the power of bottom-up knowledge processes rooted in social movement practices.

There was a parallel movement of critical popular education happening at the same time as part of the US civil rights movement, using remarkably similar approaches. The Highlander School, which was attended by Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and many other members of the Civil Rights movement, was a prominent part of it. The Long Haul, written by its founder, Myles Horton, tells its story (Horton 1997).

Wadada Nabudere (2008) describes cases of critical pedagogy amongst communities in Africa which resisted the neo-colonial methods of practitioners calling themselves participatory, by publicly criticising their terms and practices and redefining what participatory research meant to them. The co-production of knowledge between scholars and community members, who were in the most part illiterate, was developed, following Freire, into a three-pronged approach: firstly, the necessity of direct involvement of the community in the research, then the discussion with wider community of findings and their meanings before any publication, necessarily in the local African languages "to develop African knowledge, expressing and preserving African values, ethos, norms, and spiritual systems, and bringing about social and economic transformation." Finally, the discourse was allowed to properly develop only when ideas were "assimilated and debated through people's own traditional techniques of communication and learning," for example dance, drama and poetry.

These communities have pushed back against fixing knowledge in reports or academic texts since it has then become someone else's property. Instead, they have insisted the knowledge must remain in the community, where it is of use and where the discourse can continue to evolve, even if consent is given to publish outside.

The knowledge processes in the chapters that follow began before this book project and shall continue after. Whilst this publication can only share a selection of these processes, these examples provide insight into how farming and eating communities around the world are working together for emancipatory transformation.

8. Mapping out the book: themes and chapters

The book is divided into five themes, the chapters clustered according to the general approach they use. Many chapters could easily fit into more than one theme, reflecting the interconnected nature of the book. These themes include:

1. Participatory research - practitioner reflections

2. Research processes in social movement organisations and non-government organisations
3. Adult education and critical learning
4. Community-university engagement
5. Autonomous approaches to Action Research: knowledge processes occurring in different spaces outside of mainstream institutions

Section 1, on Participatory Research – practitioner reflections, includes chapters that discuss the dynamics, opportunities and challenges faced by practitioners of participatory processes in various contexts. The approaches taken by the practitioner-authors in each chapter reflect attempts to create horizontal processes to co-produce knowledge, but often within structures of power and hierarchy, resulting in messy and emergent processes and outcomes. The eight reflective chapters provide analytical first-hand accounts, drawing from the wide range of experience and contexts of the contributors. The authors ask, what are the contours and possibilities of participatory processes? How can participatory workers navigate the contradictions and power dynamics that arise in the unequal playing fields that pervade all social relations? Collectively, these chapters pose a challenge to improve the praxis of participatory work in order to imagine power as a productive and emancipatory force. To this end, the chapters in this section provide important insights and lessons for anyone interested in participation.

Section 2, examines Research processes in Social Movement Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations. Non-government organisations (NGOs) and social movement organisations (SMOs) such as La Via Campesina play an important role as mobilising structures to coordinate the interconnections between actors, to mobilize resources and to enhance the durability of dissent in food movements. But how are these organisations co-producing and mobilising knowledge? What are the challenges that arise when implementing knowledge strategies and when social movement activity is enmeshed in organisational dynamics in and between NGOs and SMOs? How do these knowledge process play a role in shaping the organisations themselves? The chapters in this theme provide analytical and reflective accounts of knowledge processes in the organisational dynamics of food movements.

Section 3 focuses on Education and Critical Learning Processes. Education and learning are an important aspect of social movement processes and provide important mechanisms to develop critical consciousness and political capacity amongst food movement participants. Critical educators, such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and bell hooks have been central to the development of critical pedagogy, where popular education is viewed as a practice of freedom that is essential for the realisation of social justice and democracy. Critical pedagogy provides tools, approaches and theory for learners to understand the conditions of their own oppression as the basis of political action. Chapters in this section ask: How does education and the knowledge

shared and co-produced through critical education lead to personal and collective transformation? What role does popular education play in strengthening food movements? How can critical and transformative learning challenge actors within social movements to deepen the political commitments and to critically examine and transform their own practice and politics? These contributions provide new insights into the role of learning processes in food movements.

Section 4 focuses on Community-University Engagement. Universities, and university-based researchers, have a complex and often fraught relationship with communities and social movements. Historically, universities have promoted scientism, enabling and legitimising Western science as the dominant mode of thought and marginalising all other knowledges and ways of knowing. At the same time, universities are not homogenous, and some spaces and actors within universities have engaged with, supported and helped to advance social movement struggles for social change and community empowerment. There is a growing emphasis on community-campus engagement, citizen science, public scholarship, participatory research and community-located teaching as forms of public scholarship, where the emphasis is on the co-production of knowledge between university and actors outside of university institutions. The chapters in this section ask: What can be accomplished through these community-university partnerships? What are the limitations? How can the power imbalances be addressed between knowledge institutions and communities? What ways and strategies of cooperation can maximize the potential of knowledge co-production? The chapters make timely contributions to the current thinking about crossing, blurring and even dismantling the boundaries between universities and publics.

Section 5 focuses on Autonomous Approaches to Action Research: Beyond Mainstream Knowledge Institutions. Our final theme demonstrates how knowledge production can be found in disparate groups that are working outside of formal systems of power and decision-making. The chapters provide examples of collectives, activists, and coalitions of farmers and eaters engaged in process of knowledge mobilisation for food system change. This theme deals with the questions: How is knowledge being produced in “solidarity economies” to create new relations between farmers and consumers? What kinds of configurations and innovations in community experimentation can generate new ways of being and becoming? How can communities work collectively to make sense with and self-organize in the context of periods of societal transition (as in the case of Cuba)? The chapters in this theme exemplify the multifaceted knowledge strategies emerging in the everyday spaces and encounters of communities and movements working towards food system change.

9. Join the dialogue

The chapters in this book reflect on a diverse range of knowledge processes underway in the food movement and chart the various dynamics, impacts, politics, implications

and challenges in any struggle for cognitive justice. These examples represent a response to a long history of material, social and cognitive injustice, that arise from uneven processes of capitalist development in food systems. These injustices have been experienced in different and uneven ways by different actors and social groups. It is thus of little surprise that the knowledge processes in this book are not all based on the same politics or strategy of change and, indeed, that they reflect the diversity of tactics and approaches that have emerged from the differences in the lived experience and perception of injustice.

Some initiatives emphasize the struggle to have knowledge legitimized by the state in order to gain greater influence in reforming policy. To this end, this often entails a process of engaging with, and translating non-dominant knowledge into dominant knowledge systems. This approach often creates opportunities for policy reform, but also creates risks of co-optation and can reinforce the monopoly of knowledge held by experts. As discussed in many of the chapters, special care must be taken when everyday experts engage with sympathetic scientists, policy-makers and NGOs, whose knowledge is often privileged, and could, unwittingly, perpetuate cognitive injustices.

Other processes in this book focus more on how knowledge can be harnessed and applied in local contexts; with little interest in, or scepticism of, the role of the state or of dominant groups (e.g. scientists) in providing legitimacy. These processes work to strengthen knowledge systems from the bottom up, building capacity and collectively and autonomously addressing the needs of people and community. At the same time, attempts to develop these autonomous spaces are at risk of being undermined, stamped out or starved as islands in a wider hostile political economy and culture. These subaltern knowledge systems are often invisible to the institutional knowledge apparatus and, in order to build these systems as part of a countervailing power, more connections need to be made to build solidarity and amplify efforts through grassroots counter-institutions that are constituted through social movements and grassroots networks. Many of the chapters in this book thus illustrate the opportunities and challenges that organisations and social movements face and, especially, how individual knowledge processes can be embedded within, and strengthened when linked to, social movement networks and organisations. Building solidarity between everyday experts and political movements is the key to not only bringing about cognitive justice, but also transforming a food system in crisis.

The decisions about what strategies to use to reclaim knowledge, and when, why and how, are important matters of debate and consideration. The contributors in this book are pushing at the edges of these, inventing new processes as a part of longer-term strategies for social and environmental transformation. We view the practitioner-authors in this book as a part of a wider global community that can be strengthened through processes of dialogues, sharing and mutual support.

The process of developing *Everyday Experts* has strengthened many of the connections between its contributors. In bringing together a growing number of people with shared

values and vision we hope the book can help grow this community of practice by exchanging, creating connections between and critically reflecting on efforts to reclaim knowledge and wisdom for food justice. We invite you to make your own connections at: www.peoplesknowledge.org.

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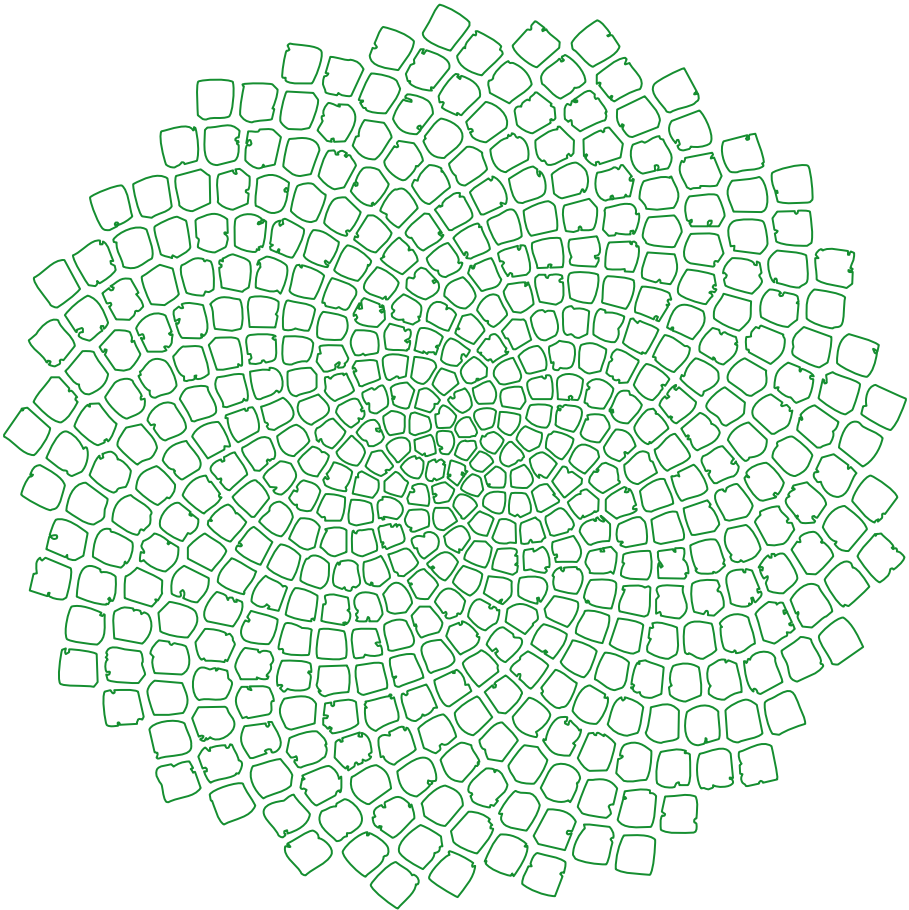
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1



Looking inwards, looking outwards: reflecting on an Indigenous research approach

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Chapter highlights: This chapter charts the author's reflective journey through an action-based research project in western Canada.

Connections between Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous research methodologies are inherently strong.

Indigenous food sovereignty represents a resurgence of culture and a connection to land, culture, people and place.

Keywords: Traditional food, Indigenous research, Indigenous food sovereignty.

1.1 Introduction

For thousands of years, Indigenous cultures have provided offerings to and received gifts from the land, honouring the source of life. The gifts of language, shelter, comfort, medicine, knowledge and, of course, food, are inherent to an Indigenous way of life. In essence, this is the practice and part of a belief system called Indigenous food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty requires a shift in the food paradigm to one that respects people, their culture and the environment. These elements are interconnected and cannot be pried apart.

In recent years, Morrison (2011) has argued for four principles of Indigenous food sovereignty: food is sacred; land reform is necessary; food systems and cultures

should be self-determined; and food systems should be participatory. These principles can serve as pointers for working towards Indigenous food sovereignty. Interestingly, they also align closely with Indigenous research methodologies – a connection I will explore in this chapter.

The connections between Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous research methodologies are strong. As people of the land, we have land as our original teacher. Food and land are one and the same, and lessons from the land have an important place in our research practices. As an Indigenous researcher embarking on a research topic that represents a way of life for so many, these pointers allowed me to approach my research as a participant and an observer. As Morrison (2011) suggests, participation in a food system is vital to how we come to know what we know. Participation requires us to engage with our food system – the air, soil, water, plants and all of the spirits and ceremonies surrounding these elements. My own participation required acknowledging these connections.

This paper reflects on a gathering that was held in the final phase of a three-year research project that examined Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada as a part of my Master's thesis programme. An Indigenous food gathering was held in the summer of 2013 for the 36 research participants who had contributed to earlier phases of the research project. Through the gathering I discovered the power of observation, or respectful witnessing. I also learned the gift of reciprocity. By offering my story and taking part in the gathering with the participants, I received a great deal in return. Reciprocity is at the heart of our culture and there is no better way to discover this than through food. As researchers, we have a responsibility and a place in our research; we also have a responsibility to connect with ourselves throughout our processes.

1.2 Indigenous research framework

Designed with the help of Indigenous elders¹, committee members and research participants, I used an Indigenous research framework to guide this research. Kovach (2009) has noted that these frameworks make space for Indigenous knowledge and this was the focus of the Indigenous food gathering. Moreover, an Indigenous research framework can help to guide a researcher's thought processes (Martens 2015) while ensuring they work in a way that reflects the cultural values and traditions they carry on behalf of their participants. For me, this framework supported a personal journey, one where I worked on behalf of and with respect for my people, and one where I began to find my footing in my own Cree culture. I felt that choosing an observational approach to the gathering was important to our collective understanding of Indigenous food sovereignty. As both an insider (an Indigenous person) and an outsider (only a few of the participants were related to me, the rest represented other groups and nations across western Canada), I understood there was a lot for me to learn from observing,

1 The role and status of Indigenous elders varies from nation to nation (Braun *et al.*, 2013). However, in this context I use the term to describe a wisdom-keeper, someone with a history of helping to maintain traditional ways.

participating and reflecting on the work of the gathering. Although I organised the gathering, I did so on behalf of the participants.

The ways of knowing, or the epistemology of my research framework, centred around experiential knowledge. Participants were asked to gather and participate in a series of activities that took place over two days in the bush. This approach allowed for the organic emergence of knowledge that was shared, offered and felt by participants at the gathering. Relational accountability, as discussed by Wilson (2001), and reciprocity (Hart 2010) were additional guiding tools used in my methodology. By recognising the relationships I had with my participants and their own work around Indigenous food sovereignty, the relationships they had to their work, and to the land that supports us, I was drawn into a greater web of connections. All components of the gathering were related and connected to each other and to the land. Hosting the gathering was an offering to the participants that had shared their food stories with me through visits and interviews. Held at Tommy's Point, on the shore of Lake Winnipeg in Peguis First Nation, there was no cost to the gathering. The food, accommodations and travel support were provided through a Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance grant. It was an opportunity for people from across western Canada to connect, and for Indigenous voices to create a dialogue around Indigenous food for two days in August 2013.

Witnessing and looking within

During the gathering, no recordings or interviews took place. Thus, we used the practice of respectful witnessing, a process that has been articulated by west coast elders (Spencer *et al.* 2006), and was suggested by one of the elders involved in this research. Witnessing is an important element of Indigenous life – it asks us to be present and open to the details of the world around us as an observer and a voice that can reflect on events in a respectful way (Ibid). The gathering, as an action-based research approach, was written up through an observer/participant lens (Wilson 2008). Throughout the entire research process, I maintained a reflective journal to record observations, insights and changes to the process. These accounts were woven into a personal narrative, a process that has been characterised as reflexive. Reflexivity has been described as a process whereby a “researcher's cultural, political and social context” is presented with the knowledge being captured from that particular positioning (Bryman and Teevan 2005, p. 361). Reflexivity has also been defined as a practice of “turning back on oneself” (Aull Davies 2008, p. 4). In sharing this knowledge, I am attempting to present my place and story as a personal narrative. Simpson (1999) has argued for the use of personal narrative in research to describe one's insights into the process. This kind of process-based knowledge is critical to supporting and understanding Indigenous knowledge (Simpson 2002).

Situating myself

Absolon and Willet (2005) have described the process of situating yourself in Indigenous and anti-oppressive research as being critical to what you do and why

you do it. Indeed, I can only write from a place I know, and I have only come to know my own voice in the last ten years. I am of Cree and European ancestry, although my heart has settled nicely into Cree territory. I grew up in a family that was disconnected from our Indigenous culture, due to too much pain carried on through generations past. Yet, coming to learn about myself through my culture has been an incredible experience for me. Many years ago, a grandmother² shared with me that “being Indigenous is bigger than you”. I wasn’t sure what she meant at the time, but now I think I do. I know that my hands and my heart, my blood and my bones contain a link to my past and allow me to walk forward in my culture today. I am grateful for this knowledge. During my research I discovered that much of my family’s troubles were tied to the history of residential schools. This discovery rocked my world and also helped to settle my heart. I began to see that I had a different place in my research than the one I had originally thought. I was part of my research, a vessel for those that generously shared parts of their world with me. More importantly, I was accountable to this research, to my participants, to my family, and to the world around me. I walked – a slow, steady path of learning – on behalf of my ancestors. Through the practice of examining myself I witnessed and felt the importance of relationships, self-determination and identity within Indigenous food sovereignty.

The gathering: Indigenous food sovereignty in practice

The largest phase of my research involved seeking out and connecting with those involved in Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in their communities. I discovered a number of rich and dynamic food sovereignty initiatives and I interviewed 36 participants who spoke on behalf of 24 Indigenous food sovereignty projects across western Canada. I spent two years cultivating relationships with research participants, acknowledging who I was, what I knew and what I did not know. I tried not to position myself as an expert, but rather as someone who is learning. My ties to my own Indigenous culture grew stronger as a result of these relationships. As a mixed ancestry Cree woman, I have struggled with issues of identity; however, my experience of working with participants and in communities was one of welcoming and belonging. Reflecting back on this time, I can see that my research was deeply personal and brought me to a richer place than I had originally expected. Through conversations and during visits, I heard stories about the need to extend the knowledge around these projects and to create a mechanism for sharing amongst communities. Many of the project proponents (the workers, the administrators, the volunteers) spoke of a need for support by the larger food community, and their excitement in sharing their stories encouraged me to host a gathering where all participants were invited to attend. I feel blessed for the level of involvement and the support provided by the research participants. I always tried to listen “with my whole being”, as Hart (2010) describes, so that I could truly learn. Listening resulted in an entirely new phase of research, one where I was witness and participant.

² The term grandmother is used to describe a female elder.

The Indigenous food gathering was held on August 22 and 23, 2013. The location has no power or running water, however we were able to secure the use of a generator to provide electricity during the day. The camp has a dock and a pontoon boat that we used for fishing, along with a tipi and fire pits, a kitchen and dining hall. It is a lovely site, with rocky shores and small stretches of white beach hidden among the trees. The focus of the gathering was on food practices and was guided by one of the participating research communities and their food programme: 'The ways of our people, back to the land camp'. We offered workshops on fishing, filleting, trapping, skinning, cooking wild foods and preserving. In the mornings, we held open forums, where everyone could contribute to promising practices and treaty obligations to agriculture. There was an optional field trip to the Peguis community garden as well as an evening sweat lodge ceremony³. The event drew to a close with a traditional feast.



Figure 1.1. Fishing on Lake Winnipeg

Relationships

Reciprocity is vital to Indigenous relationships; it is also important within Indigenous research. Relationality, accountability and reciprocity have been described as the tenets of an Indigenous methodology (Wilson 2008). In sharing information, ideas and opportunities among partners, we are working towards reciprocity (Ibid.). Similarly, the importance of reciprocity has been described as a process where ideas are shared and presented in order to support a community (Hart 2010). Indeed, this

³ A sweat lodge is a ceremonial lodge used for cleansing and healing.

is why I chose to hold the gathering at the location of one of the featured Indigenous food sovereignty projects in Peguis First Nation.

To help guide the process, I developed a working group to help advise and plan for the gathering. I attempted to choose participants from across the western provinces, representing different nations. We communicated via email and held weekly conference calls. I met with the host community in person, either by driving to Peguis First Nation or in the city of Winnipeg. These were all individuals that had requested further involvement or offered guidance beyond their interviews. Indeed, I consider the working group to be mentors to this day. The working group, including the host community, felt that the focus of the gathering should be experiential, hands-on and on the land. As a group, we came up with a list of workshops based on what the host community could deliver.

One of the members of the working group, a grandfather from Nanaimo, played an important role in my journey. The night we arrived at the camp, we watched thunderbirds⁴ dance over the water. The grandfather shared that the presence of the thunderbirds meant we were on a good path, and we would be watched during our time together. We had taken on the role of helpers, and the thunderbirds were there to help us too. I talked with the grandfather late into the night about thunderbirds and spirits, prayers and the significance of water. I felt a familial connection that night, standing on the shores of my ancestors. My family fished these waters and, without the support of the First Nations working with Icelandic immigrants (one side of my family), the long hard Canadian winters would have been deadly for my family. These waters are where my Indigenous and Icelandic family would later connect, so being there felt special to me.



Figure 1.2. A trapping workshop at the Indigenous Food Gathering in Peguis First Nation

⁴ Thunderbirds refer to the spiritual realm of thunderstorms.

All of the research participants had been invited to the gathering, but many had not been able to attend. The gathering was held during the growing season and many felt they couldn't be away from their work. In the end, over 50 people attended the gathering. This small group size proved to be a blessing. We planned many activities designed to be accessible and inclusive. Yet we also left quiet times and spaces for people to explore on their own. Following morning prayers and songs, we met the first morning under an arbour. Here, I welcomed everyone and offered my relationality – who I was, how I came to be there and why the gathering was important to me. I wanted the gathering to feel like a safe space for learning and sharing and for the participants to feel that this was my way of saying thank you for sharing their stories, but also to support and help me find my way. I explained to the participants that I would be acting as an observer and participant so that I could reflect on my own journey, and I offered consent forms. With hands held out to the sky, one of the grandfathers stood up and offered his consent orally, on behalf of all his relations, on behalf of the world around us. The rest of the group stood up as well and offered their support orally. All participants declined to sign the consent form.

New bonds formed that morning and we set the tone for how we wanted to move forward using Indigenous values and beliefs. It quickly grew and settled into a quiet rhythm of work and the buzz of new friendships. The problem with the consent form resulted in me having to add an amendment to the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. While it took a bit of explaining, in the end they agreed that this would be appropriate. It left me to wonder why this alternative process of consent is not more common in Indigenous research, and speaks to a balance that must exist between university requirements and cultural protocols. These offerings of consent are traditional and present a different kind of ethic than the western legalistic mode of consent and protection offered through bureaucratic institutional ethics review boards.

Self-determination

To provide meals for the gathering, we worked with local caterers. These caterers were my friends and family, although I only discovered the family connection while I was there. I developed even stronger connections to my family than I had anticipated and was reminded again of the importance of relationships. The menu was developed using as many local foods as possible: berries, fish, potatoes, wild rice and wild meat. For our final meal together, we prepared a feast using foods acquired throughout the gathering – fish caught from daily lake outings, beaver that had been skinned so that participants could learn how to process and prepare it, and bannock and jam made that afternoon. We invited all participants to share any food from their home community to trade with others or contribute to the feast. Frozen fish, homemade jam, herbs, potatoes, greens, carrots and onions were shared for the feast. Sharing food is part of our culture. It is a way of giving thanks for what the land has provided for us. Watching everyone work together to create a menu reflective of our time

together was self-determination in practice. No-one was asked to contribute to the preparations, yet everyone took part in their own way. The feast was created and touched by many hands and hearts.

Self-determination was an important thread to our meals. Practices such as tobacco offerings, the use of spirit names, traditional languages, pipes, medicines and songs were incorporated into all of our meals. Breakfasts were communal affairs, with individuals responsible for their own meals. Each morning I woke to a campfire where tea was always brewing. There is something incredible about watching a group of near-strangers cook a meal together. No one person was in charge, and yet, almost everyone helped without being asked. As the participants woke, they joined us around the fire, where we had pulled picnic tables into a circle as a prep surface for making breakfast. People offered bits of food they had brought for breakfast – ripe tomatoes, berries and jam, and the caterers shared leftovers – mashed potatoes and fish – to go with the sausages, wild meat and more bits of fish. All of the food was combined, shared and presented as offerings to one another. People cooked together and a collective formed each morning as hands tended to the work. Food is a great equaliser and something we need to be well in mind, body and spirit.



Figure 1.3. Prized potatoes at the Peguis Community Garden, an optional field trip

Breakfasts provided opportunities for people to share their own food stories, to network and collaborate on future ideas. They were loosely structured and undefined and yet they were the most attended meal of the day. These meals were intentionally set up to be self-determined by participants, who decided how and when and what food would be cooked and, in the process, formed new relationships. They practised our traditional teachings of helping and sharing and supporting one another. Smith (1999) has argued that self-determination is also key to Indigenous research, as it

“necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonisation, of healing, and of mobilisation as peoples” (p. 116). In watching people come together to laugh and share, I witnessed this first hand. Indeed, through practising food, we acknowledge a way of life. There is no greater mobilisation of our people than that.

Identity

For many Indigenous people, knowing one's identity can be a struggle. The reasons are numerous and range from colonial impacts to “growing up off the reserve, not having access to traditional people and subsequently culture, traditions, and language, and struggling with issues around Indian status” (Cidro 2012, p. 162). In her book *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, Indigenous author Kim Anderson (2000) shared her experience of being judged by non-Indigenous people for not growing up on a reserve. Interestingly, the judgments of non-Indigenous people add a further element to this identity tug of war. I am often told that I don't look or act Indigenous, for example, and I am surprised at how strongly people relate appearance to culture. Likewise, when people hear that I did not grow up on a reserve, they often dismiss my Indigeneity as though it is less important than for those living on a reserve. Having been disconnected from my family and culture for my childhood years undoubtedly shaped me. I grew up having my identity compartmentalised, and my Indigenous identity felt too painful to understand as a child. Later in life, this changed. Through my research I met so many people rooted in their culture that I felt safe enough to start unravelling the complexities of my Indigenous identity. I now have a much larger family circle, one based on traditional adoptions. Perhaps more importantly, I have connected to my culture in so many new and beautiful ways that I feel strongly in identifying myself as a Cree woman. I always acknowledge my mixed ancestry; however, my heart has firmly settled into Cree territory.

Many of the participants shared that this camp and these food experiences were healing. Being welcomed to join together to learn the food skills of our ancestors or re-practise skills that had been forgotten created empowerment and peace. For hundreds of years, colonial impacts have interrupted traditional food systems, with food being used often as a tool of manipulation and coercion by the government (Daschuk 2013), so there was a peace and pride in being able to demonstrate our traditional ceremonies and food practices. The healing that took place happened organically. It was time, and so it came. In the beginning, the emotions surprised me. But this gathering was healing for me too and it didn't take too long until I could relate. I felt ready to unearth some painful truths around my family and our history, and these conversations were hard and heavy, but felt ready to come out. Today, I find myself reading stories of residential school experiences, drawn into the cruelties around children and food. Once again in our history, food was a tool to control and punish, and the years of children working for food in residential schools⁵ created an

⁵ In Canada, Indigenous children were removed from their homes on the reserves and taken to residential schools as part of “a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, p.2).

even stronger disconnect from this part of life (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Indigenous food sovereignty is a movement that seeks to combat those injustices. Healing and transformations are occurring on the land and in communities, allowing people to reclaim their historic food systems (Martens 2015).

1.3 Discussion

Through this event, I discovered the power of food to transform a people and to celebrate a way of life. I witnessed the power of self-determination, of having the ability to describe and define your own food system based on your priorities, needs and history.

I saw that identity is a precursor to Indigenous food sovereignty. If you cannot identify and reflect on your own heritage, it is not possible to move on a pathway towards Indigenous food sovereignty. The movement needs Indigenous voices. I found out that relationships are key to creating a network of supports and friends to help guide the way and re-develop Indigenous food systems. Indeed, these powerful, intricate relationships are the source of new food communities, inspiring and encouraging a path towards Indigenous food sovereignty. Prior to this journey, I didn't understand that it was possible to feel so connected to people, and to a way of life. In looking inside as much as looking out, I was confronted with long-buried hurts, confusion and ideas of how and what my Indigeneity meant. I'm so glad I did. From this new place, I can relate to my research differently. It was a long process. I spent hours, days and weeks listening to stories again and again. I stood on the shores of my ancestors and sat there for hours watching the water and the sky for the eagles and the thunderbirds. I attended ceremonies and listened to the drum and the voices of the land until I could breathe through the heaviness caught in my chest.

At some point I recognised that I needed to look beyond the interviews and the words on the transcribed pages. I had to look beyond the political discourse that had been written on Indigenous food sovereignty. Instead, I focused on the people and places to look instead of at the fundamentals of a way of life. Indigenous research methods are tools that allow you to engage in other and important ways of knowing about the world around you. These tools are rooted in our land and a culture of respect and sharing, among other things. In coming to research a topic that comes from the land, we must acknowledge the ties between people and the land. People are, in fact, the key component of Indigenous food sovereignty – people in action, participating in their food systems, honouring their relationships to the land (Morrison 2011, People's Food Policy Project 2011). Someone wise told me during my research that the word culture is what others would describe as a way of being. You say culture, I say a way of life.

What is involved in culture? I am still discovering this. Instead, I write what I know, and this, although with much trepidation, is myself. The knowledge I co-produce is

interpreted and created from my own situated perspective. I can speak to the power of identity. Self-determination requires identity. It involves a movement of Indigenous people understanding who they are and what that looks and feels like. Only from that point can we define food systems and all that is necessary to defend them. Cultural identity requires that we reconnect with a way of being. Without deepening our understanding of our identities it is difficult to move Indigenous food sovereignty forward. Relationality and collective processes of self-determination are thus at the heart of research for Indigenous food sovereignty.

1.4 Conclusion

Food is healing and transformative for Indigenous people. It can attend to all elements of our being – the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual. It is a critical and often misunderstood part of Indigenous culture – our language, our spaces, our history and ceremonies all stem from the land, and the celebration of land as a food provider. Indeed, food is an inherent part of who we are. It has spirit and is regarded as sacred (People's Food Policy Project 2011). Food practices and politics can propel us forward towards revitalising our food systems and can tell us stories of the past. For me, food was a central element of my research practice and, in particular, at the gathering I was presented with an opportunity to look within myself through collective and traditional food practices. Whether I was fishing, stoking the fire, kneading the bannock or cooking, I felt my past in my bones and I felt my future in my heart. Simpson (1999) has described experience as one of the ways we come to know ourselves. I came to see the beginnings of who I was, how I came to be here, and why. Food and identity are undeniably linked. In practising our food, we practise who we are. Indigenous food sovereignty represents a resurgence of culture. That is just part of what I witnessed, but it was enough to know that this movement is just warming up. As the gathering wrapped up, one of the participants took me aside to thank me for bringing him here. To all of my participants, I would like to say: thank you. For bringing me here.

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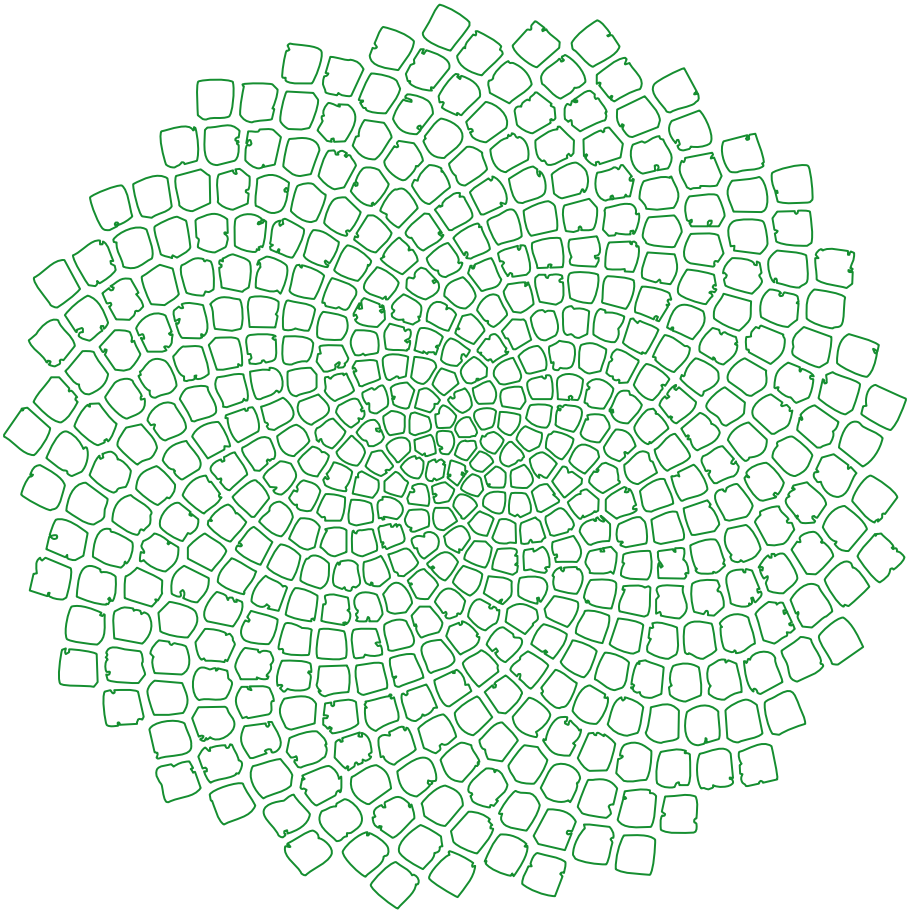
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2



Reflecting on a participatory process on biofuels challenges

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Geographical location: Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, India

Chapter highlights: Farmers in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are clear that growing monocrops, especially biofuels, undermines food production and gender and land rights.

This chapter describes the Food-Energy Nexus Project, which used participatory approaches to show how women's desire to grow a mix of food crops helped locals resist the colonisation of their land and minds.

The author also reflects on his own position with respect to colonialism.

Keywords: Food, energy, biofuels, participation, gender, Dalits, Adivasis, cognitive justice, colonialism.

2.1 Introduction to the Food-Energy Nexus Project

This paper focuses on the Food-Energy Nexus Project¹, a participatory process conducted in 2010 in rural south India. The project emerged through a series of conversations about biofuels with activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India, and with researchers at a university and environmental NGO based in England.

The narratives around biofuels are often framed around the science of climate change and energy security. In contrast, this project focused on the stories of the farmers who cultivate biofuels. Many have found that growing biofuels undermines food production and gender and land rights (Singh *et al.* 2010). The project also showed how agricultural science, which justifies monoculture such as biofuels, is used to subject

¹ <https://foodenergy-nexus.wordpress.com/>; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/food-energy-nexus/albums>

lands and minds to a new form of colonialism (Singh *et al.* 2015). This new form of colonialism has been described as 'coloniality' (Quinjanó 2007, Grosfoguel 2007).

When women returned to their land to replace biofuels with food, they resisted the monoculture agriculture approach. The act of growing food in traditional ways had the effect of resisting coloniality and thus supporting the decolonisation of the land and minds (Singh *et al.* 2015).

2.2 Creating a participatory process

Reflecting on this project, I encountered two challenges in the construction of this participatory process. The first recognises that one's 'self' and identity influence how we undertake participatory work (Wakeford 2016); and the second highlights that the limits of participation is in the way it is imagined.

Engaging with ourselves and our identities

The identity of the facilitator can influence the participatory process with unwitting biases, especially if the project is in a different country to that of the facilitator. For the purpose of this paper, identity can be described as a construct that is informed by experiences of gender, age, race, class, disability, caste, sexuality, literacy and a range of other factors. These influences have been described as positions. Any given individual holds multiple positions; for example, I am a man of Punjabi heritage raised in Britain, and I have experienced racist, pro-colonial and imperialist education alongside other Eurocentric cultural influences (Fanon 1952).

Conducting participatory projects through a male Eurocentric colonial gaze could reproduce colonial patriarchy. To respond to this means recognising racism and coloniality so that I am better equipped to disrupt it. This logic also extends to recognising patriarchy and the reproduction of the male world view. Being cognisant of these logics, the research team was constructed in a way which included women and men who were located in India and were conscious of the legacy of colonialism and patriarchy, and how it operated in the here and now.

As a man, it is critically important that I give attention to sexism within the participatory process. One way to do this is to create spaces in which women's voices are valued, heard and recognised completely. Such spaces could foster processes that can resist patriarchy/male dominance so that gender sensitive research practice can flourish. As a male facilitator, this means stepping aside to create gender sensitive spaces, being curious and staying silent but actively and sensitively listening when women speak in mixed gendered spaces. It also required constant reflection on gender throughout the participatory process.

Imagining participation as a transdisciplinary, human and politically conscious process of learning and resistance

Participatory practice is often rooted in categories of research disciplines and methods,

predominately but not exclusively in western universities or international NGOs (Tuihawai Smith 2012, Drame and Irby 2016). These Eurocentric categories can limit the imagination and how we understand the world. For example, Visvanathan (1997) stated that:

"We cannot survive on the categories that the West provides us in terms of democracy and property rights. We have to invent words in English to say what the west cannot....we need thought experiments that disturbs both worlds and allows both the self and the other to confront each other in a kaleidoscope of new experiences."

Imagining participation therefore requires thought experiments and crafting a practice that steps away from a western Eurocentric position, so that we can create experiences that are new. In this project, there was a move away from imagining participation as a research discipline. There was a desire to create a project that was in opposition to the Eurocentric position, to forge a new. For example, a Zapatista idea can be used to create a thought experiment: *"it is not necessary to conquer the world, it is sufficient to make it new"* (Klein 2002). This idea can be applied to participation. The process of making anew engages with coloniality and creating spaces that aspires to undermine it. For example, participatory processes can be a way to create new spaces with communities and collectives for dialogue, learning, mutual understanding and resistance.

2.3 Insights on the participatory process on biofuels

The approach for this project was to move from a solely disciplined research model to a transdisciplinary participatory process (Bernstein 2015, People's Knowledge Collective 2016). The process involved interlinked layers. These layers involved creating human conditions for the process and the people involved to flourish; developing a collective framework and clear and purposeful roles for the team to enable the process; desk-based research and workshops to understand participation and biofuels from a non-Eurocentric view; widening the process to include activists and farmers; creating dialogue with farmers cultivating biofuels to understand their experiences and sharing that with other farmers; and maintaining a gender-sensitive approach throughout, especially as male bias from my facilitation is a distinct possibility.

Conditions to help the process flourish:

- We ensured that we ate together where possible, and made the process playful and enjoyable.
- We developed trust among the research team through open, critical and honest conversations to understand each other's perspectives.
- We listened and learned.
- We conducted workshops to develop a collective understanding of participatory action research and the purpose of the project.

- We created a collective framework where the roles and responsibilities of the team were clear.
- We did not follow a set of questions devised in the UK to be investigated in India; instead we deliberated and critically developed themes to follow through the process.

2.4 Constructing a critical and plural view of participation

Participation is often rooted in a voice-based research discourse and this poses challenges, since being offered the opportunity to speak does not guarantee that all critical issues will be heard. It is also important to include a plurality of perspectives from rural south India, ones which are cognisant of how governments and corporations combine to gain control of land and farmers' production, in often, aggressive and oppressive ways.

We thus imagined participation as a space for dialogue and learning with farmers, activists and communities to co-produce understanding in a way that was cognisant of plural perspectives and ways of being. Such approaches advance cognitive justice with diverse views being valued equally (Visvanathan 2005).

Learning workshops

A range of reports suggested that biofuels will tackle climate change and provide energy security (Altenburg *et al.* 2008, FAO 2008). Through workshops, conversations and research, our community activists and research team concluded that the India biofuels policy was rooted in colonial history and racism; engaging with coloniality. For example, the policy assumes that there are wastelands in forests, an idea first introduced to India by the British in the 18th century (Ramdas 2014, Shiva 2009).

The policy also targets Dalits and Adivasis, communities that face abject discrimination and oppression in Indian society (Sainath 1996). The policy therefore has a racist legacy and a racist potential. To explore this, we interviewed government officials who implemented biofuels policy. One individual admitted that the policy targeted Adivasis as they were "lazy and backward", clearly exposing the undercurrent of racism.

A team of researchers and community activists visited farmers who were cultivating biofuels. We visited diverse geographical areas to better understand farmers' experiences in different environmental conditions. We visited Dalits and Adivasis to understand the social and cultural contexts. We had conversations with both men and women. We created a space where women were in the majority so they felt safe to speak, so that we could understand the impact of biofuels on gender. It is in these conversations that we understood more clearly the ways in which biofuels and gender are linked (Singh *et al.* 2015). Through these conversations, the team learned about the gendered, environmental, cultural context of biofuels. We layered these perspectives with the colonial and racist power structures that informed it. These perspectives were shared in a dialogue with farmers to create mutual understanding.

In the villages and forest spaces, many of the women farmers, through their own analysis and memories of traditional ways of life, wanted to stop cultivating the cash crop. They wanted to return to their lands to grow food for self-reliance. These experiences were shared at other villages we visited.

Consolidating learning through writing

Writing about participation can feel awkward as it is a contradiction, one or two people write about a process that involves many (Pearson *et al.* 2016). When an individual does write about the participatory process, they represent the participatory work. The individual is afforded power to represent, and this seems in direct contraindication with the spirit of participation that seeks to equalize power relations and create plurality.

However, in many parts of the world, crops such as biofuels are displacing people from their lands and livelihoods. These political realities need to be weighed against the contradiction of writing. On balance, there appears to be a need to disseminate the realities behind biofuels, and one way to do that is to write a report to share the knowledge with activists and farmer networks so that they approach biofuels with a full view.

I would like to explore how participatory work is represented and to discuss that at the beginning of future projects. In other words, how does writing about participation capture the spirit of participation that seeks to equalize power relations and create plurality? Does writing about participation afford power, through notions of authority, to the writer? Does writing about participation silence the plurality of voices involved in the process? How do we create processes around dissemination that remain plural?

2.5 Final reflections

Researching biofuels could have been tackled through a range of different research disciplines or perspectives, such as climate change, social science, energy security, land grabs and food security. Locating the project in any of these categories would have limited the analysis and conceptual understanding of biofuels.

The project team decided against using questions from researchers located in established research institutions and based around colonially-inspired disciplines as their starting point (Land 2015). This shifted the terrain from a research discipline to a process. It also allowed the enquiry to start from a non-European location. However, questions still remain on how writing about the process captures the spirit of participation, such as plurality.

The project showed how biofuels have disrupted the social fabric of the village. For example, imposed biofuel monocultures undermine food and land rights, biofuel companies targeted men to grow biofuels and thus men started to cultivate it and this displaced women and their knowledge from the farm land. We also witnessed how women

took control of the land and used their knowledge to grow food and thus they regained their power through the assertion of self-reliant food production. The conversations throughout the process also showed the complex nature of society in which the land was viewed in a spiritual way, not merely as land. There was a spiritual connection between the land and women and the village; a social spiritual system which is hard to describe in words alone. Importantly the project was a witness to women's self-reliant food systems as a form of resistance to coloniality (Singh *et al.* 2010).

It could be argued that the project using a process approach recognized the complexity of the Indian agrarian society and did not seek to reduce it to understand biofuels. This process cannot be used to argue that this layered and textured analysis could not be illustrated by a traditional research discipline. However, the process orientated approach has shown the importance of reflecting on identity, learning and plurality as a way to advance cognitive justice in the context of patriarchy and coloniality.

Finally, the process has created a space to reflect on how the facilitator/self and the participatory process are connected, and thus the potential for colonial and male bias to be part of that. The process has also shown the need to recognise racism, sexism, and the limits of research categories. Furthermore, the process created a space where the researcher and activists could engage imaginatively and use thought experiments in order to create new worlds within participatory processes.

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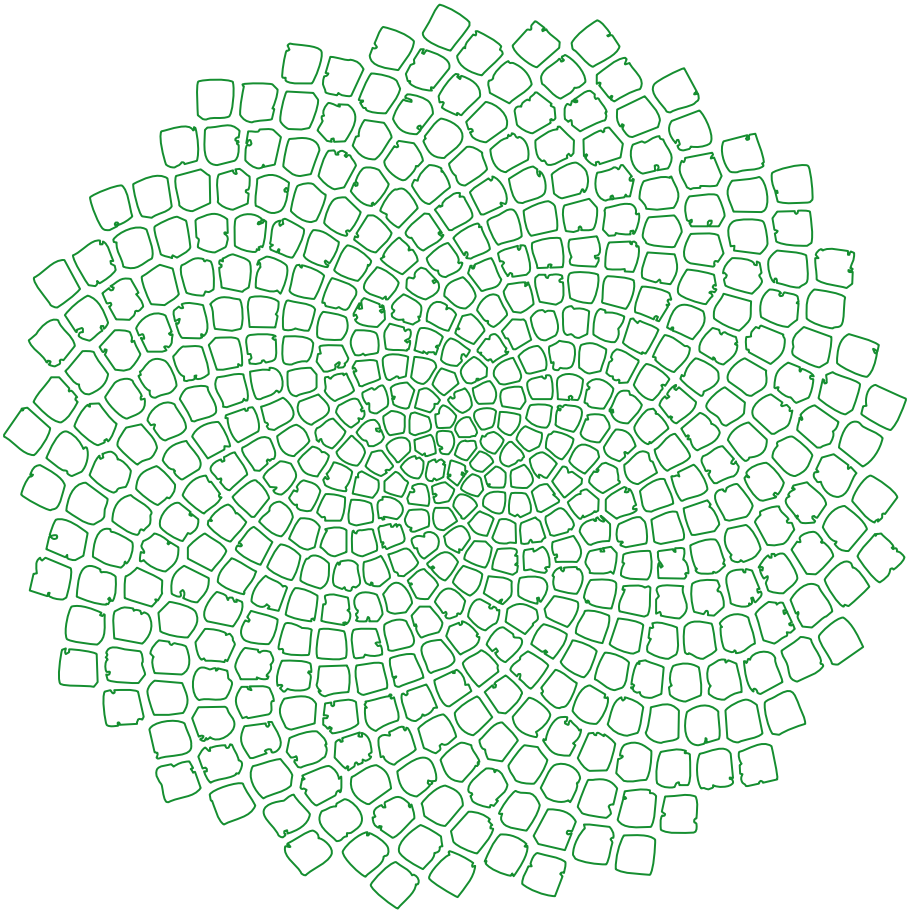
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3



Earth Mother: participatory theatre with indigenous peoples

N. Madhusudhan

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Geographical location: Telangana, India

Chapter highlights: This article should be read alongside viewing the film 'Bhutalli' (Mother Earth), available at: https://youtu.be/_9gwo8-uLPI. Non-Telugu speakers need to select the 'C' subtitle box on the bottom right-hand side of the screen.

The play was developed through many months of dialogue with local people using participatory theatre approaches inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Indigenous peoples.

It builds on dialogue process with the members of the communities.

Participatory theatre is a pedagogy that enables critical reflections and actions on situations faced by oppressed people. It creates critical spaces in which people can identify their experiences and shape their responses.

It plays an important role in popular education campaigns, through the creative expressions of people involved in struggles for their rights.

Keywords: Participatory theatre, conscientization, Adivasi, Dalit.

3.1 Introduction by the editors

Bhutalli (Mother Earth) is a play in street theatre format. It captures the relationship between Adivasis, Dalits, shepherds and peasants, and Mother Earth; interrogates the forces that are systematically dispossessing people from their land, livelihoods and resources; and celebrates the diversity of people's resistance. The play is performed by actors from Adivasi, Dalit, shepherd, peasant and co-producer communities.

The approach to participatory theatre taken by Madhusudhan and members of the Food Sovereignty movement, makes for a truly democratic mode of action research. Like many in this book, he was inspired by Paulo Freire's work. Like Freire, his approach to inquiry counters the lack of what has been called cognitive justice (Vishvanathan 1997) or epistemic justice (Fricker 2010) – when professional expertise is supported to the exclusion of other forms of knowledge. Expertise derived through life experience rather than professional training is typically side-lined (which Fricker labels “testimonial injustice”), while marginalised groups are also denied opportunities to develop greater knowledge (“heuristic injustice”).

This approach contributes to heuristic justice via a prolonged process of Frierean dialogue with the people as a play is developed. The performance of the play then provides a platform for testimonial justice, since the collective knowledge of the community is presented in front of a range of knowledge holders – from smallholder farmers to policymakers. This knowledge is not static, but is open to interrogation by the audience, both during and after the performance. As he does at the beginning of his plays, Madhusudhan opens the chapter with the historical context of how, where and with whom his practice evolved.



Figure 3.1. Still image from *Bhutalli – Mother Earth*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9gwo8-uLPI

3.2 Participatory action research and theatre

The approach to participatory action research used by the Food Sovereignty Alliance is fundamentally different to that used by academics. It is grounded in work I began with Girijan Deepika over land struggles beginning 25 years ago.

Girijan Deepika is a group of Indigenous people (Adivasis) who have been engaged in a long struggle against the requisitioning of their land by non-Adivasi settlers. At the beginning, I wanted to understand the role played by their culture in their struggles. I had been involved in street theatre before that and had produced three plays on issues such as child labour and gender. I felt that plays were not just for performing, but should become part of the movement itself. At the time, I didn't have a clear understanding of the legal framework of land. At the time, key players involved in the debates and actions about land included, (i) the legal routes to change provided by the government, (ii) political parties including the radical left, and (iii) non-government organisations.

I wanted to know the answer to three questions:

1. How do Adivasis see their representation?
2. How do Adivasis see their participation?
3. How are Adivasis articulating their issues?

This is what took me to Adivasi territories. The journey began in 1990. Adivasis from East Godavari invited me to be part of their struggles. When I went there I was in a dilemma. Theatre was a new form for the community. Three forms of performing art dominated among the people I visited – singing, dancing and story telling. These were part of their daily lives, their food production cycles, their collection of forest produce, and their celebrations and rituals. I was trying to understand these forms. I was concerned that if I introduced a new concept – theatre – people might not embrace it. It would be an alien form for them.

I was aware that mainstream theatre troupes did come into these areas, perform and then collect money from people. Thus, an introduction to some form of theatre was already there. This theatre was performed inside a tent. There were also commercial touring movies run by business people, who would tour with a 16mm projector and collect money from local people.

I spent time with a friend in the city of Hyderabad who directed street theatre through the Ethnic Arts Centre, an organisation he had started. I spent a lot of time with him as he worked with people living in slums, women's groups and other communities. He used to call the approach 'victims' theatre'. These were the people who had been victimised by the economic system, other social structures or any other injustices. He used to make them act in the plays. But I didn't want to call Adivasis victims. I studied the approaches to theatre of Augusto Boal. I was also inspired by Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

I was trying to do two things. One was to be a popular educator and the other was to be a theatre activist. I questioned the idea that Adivasis are victims, since these are not labels they apply to themselves. They feel: "This earth is ours, but it has been taken over by people from outside – we've been colonised. We have lost our lands to the Forest Department, but we are the original inhabitants of this land".

I wrote and produced a small play on land alienation, using actors who were already activists in the struggle for land. They were Adivasis from villages where land alienation had taken place. Because the actors were already involved in the struggle, the play was very easy to develop and perform. The people sat for half an hour, watched the play and participated in the performance, as it was being performed.

I was helped by the same friend from Hyderabad to make another play about land alienation. We extensively researched the land alienation question in Adivasi areas. We did a month of workshops, leading to a long play – a documentary play, as we called it. It was like a documentary film. The play was performed in several villages and in universities, which provided an impetus to academic research on the Adivasi land question. At the time, little academic research focused on Adivasis.

3.3 Traditional governance systems

Whilst I was working on theatre in these areas, we discovered the Gottis, the traditional governance systems of Adivasis in East Godavari. People come and sit for various purposes relating to the management of resources, as well as family and community life. Originally, we thought the Gotti system was no longer used and so we should revive it, but I then realised that this was wrong since they were already functioning successfully. I had to go through a process of un-learning the development mindset myself.

My aim as a political activist had been to use theatre to involve people in critical dialogue. I realised people must represent their issues, and lead their struggles, through strengthening the Gottis. Gottis became very central to Adivasi assertion. Theatre and REFLECT¹ were extensively used in Gottis, to enhance the participation of people in critical dialogues and action.

The post-independence struggle by rural people in India over the right to land has a rich history (Desai 1986). Theatre sharpened the ongoing struggle for land rights in this region, and over 250 acres of land was recovered from the non-Adivasis. Around the same time in the early part of the 90s, cash crops were being introduced and Adivasis were handing over their land to moneylenders and companies who came into the area requisitioning land for non-food crops. Sagari Ramdas, a livestock specialist and vet who has worked extensively with Indigenous peoples, joined us at that point. Discussions on livestock also connected the conversations to the larger linkages and interconnections between land, food, forests, water, animals, spirituality and knowledge systems. As part of this enquiry, Adivasi youth documented traditional songs, stories, festivals, crops, production systems, dances, and related knowledge systems. There were a lot of songs about produce from the forest and a lot about

¹ REFLECT is an approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire with participatory methodologies. It was developed in the 1990s through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador and is now used by over 500 organisations in over 70 countries worldwide. See <http://www.reflect-action.org/>.

seasons in agriculture and how the people worship their ancestors and Mother Earth. Festivals were rooted in the sowing and harvest of seasonal food crops. Gottis became a main dialogue forum in which these songs were sung and a range of issues were debated, such as the relative merits of cash crops versus food crops. These discussions became a storyline for my plays.

In 1995, we decided to start producing full-length plays which lasted between 1-2 hours. In our plays we never start with an issue, but start instead with some element of Adivasi history. We start with how this community was born on this earth – because there are various stories around this concept describing how the people came from fruits or animals. That became the introduction to my play.

Between 1995 and 2002 we completed and performed at least 15 plays – around two per year. The actors were always from the Adivasi community. We particularly involved Adivasi youth, since they were getting alienated from their cultural roots, their stories, songs and their relationship to their land and food crops.

The characters of the play are individuals who are easily identified by the audience, as their real stories become the content of the play. The audience respond to the characters, whilst they narrate their (the audience's) real story.

3.4 The making of a play: surfacing deeper themes

I lived with the people, and hence I was able to closely observe and understand their concerns and happiness, their ways of communication and expression, ways in which they engaged with conflicts, their participation in Gottis, their involvement in seasonal livelihood cycles, gender roles and decision making processes, their ways of relating to Mother Earth (their land, forests, water, and so on), and their intergenerational relationships.

We develop the play with around 15-20 people who become the main actors. So for each play we would spend about a month devising it with people, including making the props, choreographing music, songs, dance, the promotional posters and costumes. The play evolves through collectively (the actors from the community along with myself) deciding upon the issue/ crises we would like to explore. We create the story through sharing various real-life incidences, which bring out the subtle layers of the issue or crises. These are woven into scenes, dialogues are improvised, and finally fixed for each character. As a director, I work with the group to sharpen and fix scenes, dialogues, body movements, the use of space and so on. Whilst the characters' dialogue with one another on the stage space, they are simultaneously in deep conversation with the audience. From the beginning of the performance, the audience gets engaged with the characters and images as these are from their own lives. Our theatre draws upon the indigenous music, dance, oral narrations, stories, as also the vibrant body movements. Though the play is performed in the centre of people, who sit around in a circle, characters set the stage with props, as and

when these are required. The entire environment (the surrounding hills, the forests, the fields, the village huts, the cowsheds, the school premises) all become part of the play, with characters moving to and from these spaces. They also change their costumes according to the characters depicted.

We set the political context at the outset, and through the nineties and 2000s, our theatre captured and deconstructed the unfolding neo-liberal post economic reforms agendas in adivasi areas: privatization with decentralised community participation, the strong presence of World Bank in poverty alleviation programs, the aggressive entry of industrial agriculture and commodity production displacing food crops, plantations on community forests, new forms of colonisation, and specific education and skill building programs targeting adivasi youth, further alienating them from their histories.

The dialogues between the characters, whilst sounding like regular conversations, are different in that they reflect the various layers of oppression, as also in a simple fashion decode the oppression of the larger context. The oppressor's character evokes plenty of laughter from the audience, as people see how they are fooling them, and the oppressor's character describes the mode of oppression. In response to this the character of the oppressed always questions the oppressor. The audience too instinctively takes the side of the oppressed and individuals often enter the scene to add their views and voices, and become another character. Sometimes this new character from the audience remains till the end of the play. It is then the responsibility of the oppressed character to give the space to, and also facilitate on the spot, the role of the new character (from the audience).

3.5 Ending the play

Sometimes, the play ends as in Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, where the audience become part of the dialogue and decide how the play should end. In one play, a woman berated the actor who had taken a loan to grow cotton. She shouted that she had been saving food crop seeds for many years. How could he go to the shops and buy cotton seeds, which risked getting into debt and having to give up the land, without telling her? That led to a big discussion after the play ends. In other instances, the play raises various questions, and the post show discussions happen. Sometimes the community continues to discuss the play through the night in their homes and in smaller groups.

In the post-show discussion, the actors can react to suggestions from the audience and re-enact a section of the play including this extra element. Someone might say: "cotton is not rubbish – it is an excellent crop". So a dialogue can reflect on this.

People would come from 10 or 15 villages to see the play. Word got around that these plays were great. It meant that people would make a real effort to come. The plays would often go on late into the night and people would even bring along some bedding to stay through the night.

If they came too late they would extend the invitation for the theatre troupe to come to their own village, with the offer of food being provided. No food was provided as part of the play itself. The idea was that people came to the play after having their evening meal.

Bhutalli: A play involving diverse communities

This was my first experience as a director, working with diverse communities. The Bhutalli play at the February 2015 Food Sovereignty Summit (see YouTube video in Figure 3.1) brought together Adivasis, shepherds, Dalits and urban co-producers to make a play. The overall theme was how people treat Mother Earth. It makes the point that the money economy appears to be becoming more important than the food economy, thereby resulting in deep destruction and violence.



Figure 3.2. Images from the performance of Bhutalli at the Food Sovereignty Summit 2015.

In my experience, participatory theatre is a pedagogy that enables critical reflections and actions on situations that oppressed people are dealing with. It creates critical spaces for people to identify their experiences and respond.

A collective voice emerges at the end of the performance. The spectators wait for what the actors, or any one of them, are going to say. It is the continuity of a dialogue to work towards political transformation. In my view, theatre plays an important role in conscientization, through the creative expressions of people involved in struggles for their rights.

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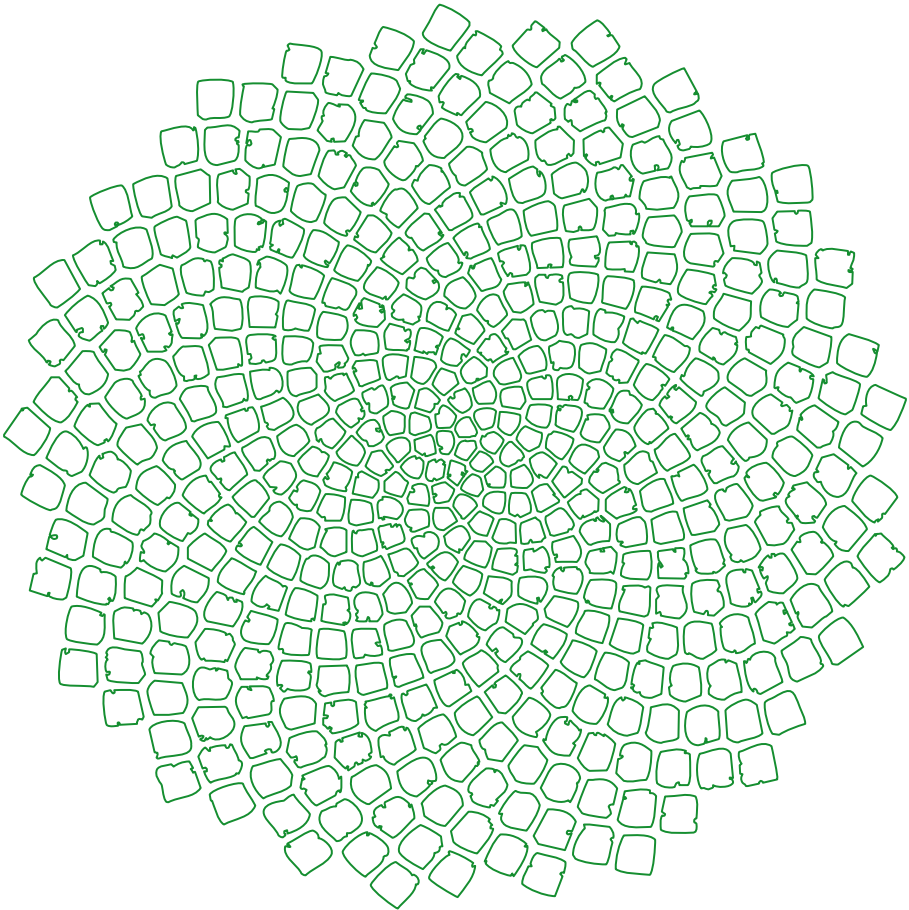
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4



CAIS Maloka: Researching our Campesino reality through critical reflection, participation, action and learning

Javier Sanchez Rodriguez and Maria Pastora de la Pava Cataño

Geographical location: Dagua, Colombia

Chapter highlights: Collective critical analysis helps us to understand our realities.
Participatory action research processes should go at the pace of the people.
Knowledge is power.
Critical education is essential for social change.
Collective learning assists collective farming.

Keywords: Critical learning, realities, collectivism, traditional farming, social change, participatory action research.

4.1 Introduction

We therefore declare that the common people deserve to know more about their own life conditions in order to defend their interests, than do other social classes which monopolize knowledge, resources, techniques and power; in fact we should pay attention to knowledge production, just as much as the usual insistence on material production, thus tilting the scales towards justice for the under privileged.

(Fals Borda 2001: 29)

We, the authors of this chapter, are small farmers, change instigators and the founders of Centro de Acción é Investigación Social (CAIS) Maloka, a centre for action and social change in rural Colombia. Writing this it quickly became evident to us that to talk about food and food systems, and our efforts towards collective planting of chemical-free food, *we must talk about people* – the people who break their backs every day, all around the world, producing food for everyone else on the planet, often in enslaving conditions. How can this be challenged?

In this chapter, we set out to give you a glimpse of our journey, of how we have learned to access and use radical, critical bodies of knowledge to bring Campesino people together, to generate authentic dialogue and to critically reflect and act upon their world with others.

We start with a scrutiny of the word and notion of ‘we’ – who are we? A short description of our project, CAIS Maloka, leads us to outline some of the early influences that led us to start the project. We then offer a glimpse of Los Alpes – the place where CAIS Maloka is based, and we follow that with reflections on our early months, recognising our need for connection with others who share our dreams, and thus introducing you to the International School for Bottom Up Organising (ISBO). We then go on to focus on our attempts to work with local people to develop a collective, organic vegetable farm. Later, this collective became known as Colectivo Organisativo Comunitario Los Alpes (COCA). Reflections on the first phase of this project lead us to share how we began to use collective, critical reading to support the people to re-engaging the collective and reviving the gardening project. Our conclusions are ongoing.

4.2 Who is the ‘we’? Building a ‘we’

Before proceeding, it seems important to talk a little about who is the ‘we’? For much of the paper, ‘we’ refers to the authors. We are two Colombians who lived in London and made a conscious decision to move to a rural community to begin a process of critical learning about the causes of poverty. This puts us in an interesting position. We, Maria, Javier (and our daughter Chia), must recognise the privileges we have. Although we are both from humble backgrounds, we were educated in London, speak English and Spanish, have seen the world outside Colombia, have a network of people that support us by facilitating resources through donations, and can travel to take up job offers in England that enable us to continue the work of CAIS Maloka.

However, as you will find in this chapter, ‘we’ also refers to our emerging collective of people from Los Alpes. These past eight years in CAIS Maloka have seen a process of creating a ‘we’ beyond the two of us. Our emerging collective activity can involve as many as 60 local people in Los Alpes, and numerous participants from other communities of Colombia who come to stay and work at CAIS Maloka. There is also ongoing involvement with groups in Jamaica and London, so an important question is always who is the ‘we’?



Figure 4.1. Colectivo Organizativo Comunitario Los Alpes (COCA)



Figure 4.2. Organic vegetable farming collective

4.3 Our project: CAIS Maloka

In October 2007, we left the United Kingdom to return to our country of origin (Colombia), to live on a farm that we had bought three years earlier. The farm is in Los Alpes – a geographically isolated place within a peasant community right in the middle of the southwest cordillera of the Andes.

In returning to live and work in Colombia, we had finally set out to realise our dreams of creating a project that would work towards social change for 'us' – the 98% who experience this world as one of inequality and injustice.

For reasons that will become clear, we named our project the Centro de Acción é Investigación Social Maloka – known as CAIS Maloka¹, with a mission to combat poverty in Colombia to prevent the negative experiences of migration to cities, and to other countries, by inspiring and supporting people to work together to understand the causes of poverty in their lives, to believe that change can happen, and to take actions to bring about changes, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Since then, through ongoing processes of reflecting, strategising and taking action, we have learned that to support and generate meaningful, authentic change locally, nationally and globally, we must live and work with people towards the following interconnected aims:

- To learn to reflect, think critically, explore and talk together
- To work the land together, both ethically and for mutual benefit
- To act together to challenge institutional and politically motivated wrongdoing
- To celebrate life together, living our culture, growing our creativity and meeting our needs for joyful expression and play

In addition, we have learned the value and importance of interconnectedness with communities in other parts of Colombia and other parts of the world – to find, reach out to, work alongside and learn with communities who also feel the necessity of creating a world from the bottom up, led by the most oppressed, those with the darkest hue, especially women.

4.4 Early influences

We first met in London, young adults in our early twenties, participating in a Latin American experimental community arts project called New Generation. This project helped us make sense of the world we had been thrown into, researching our lives and expressing ourselves through visual arts, music, dance and theatre. In the process we were often fired up by philosophical and political discussions, discovering Augusto Boal and his 'Theatre of the Oppressed'; Bertolt Brecht, the magical realist; Gabriel Garcia Marquez; Laura Esquivel; and Milan Kundera among others. Our performances were deeply influenced by these thinkers. In the process we began to be introduced to the work of a range of critical theorists, discovering Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, Galeano, Neruda and other great influential minds concerning Latin American contemporary libertarian movements.

¹ Malokas (maloca), are the long houses of the Tukano people– one of Colombia's first inhabitants who live in the south-eastern part of the country. Malokas are community dwellings where many hunter-gatherers live, eat and engage in rituals together.

In 2003 we joined a newly formed organisation called Refugee Youth where we were introduced to the concept of popular education and the work of Paulo Freire, and to some of the principles of participatory action research (Hall and Kidd 1978). It became clear to us that the way we worked in New Generation was very similar to the participatory action research processes proposed by Fals Borda (2001).

One of the most powerful experiences we had with Refugee Youth was the 'residential', when we spent several different periods of time in the British countryside with young adults from all over the world. Living and eating together and sharing our stories brought us closer, creating deep empathy and a powerful potential to work together. Like us, many participants were young adults running their own African or Latin American community groups, and so our learning was taken back to our collectives – we inspired one another.

While in Refugee Youth, we were introduced to Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School (Horton *et al.* 1998) and hence the history of the United States civil rights movement. We were spellbound by Horton's work in developing a place in the countryside, in the US racist south, where black and white people could be together regardless of segregation laws and defy racist society to learn, strategise and take action to bring about social change. It encouraged us to dream and we dreamed of developing our farm in Colombia into something like the Highlander Folk School. This would be a place where people could join together and engage in the collective discovery of our reality and our world, plan action to bring about positive change in our communities, and challenge injustice, inequality and oppression. It would be a centre for action.

4.5 Dagua, Los Alpes: our new home

Our farm in Los Alpes produces coffee, banana and plantain, among other crops. Los Alpes – a handful of hamlets – also breeds cattle and, very importantly, manages its own water source via an aqueduct.



Figure 4.3. Smurfit Kappa pine plantation

However, the land around Los Alpes is used mainly to produce raw material for paper and cardboard for Smurfit Kappa (Carton de Colombia), an Irish multinational. There are large areas of pine and eucalyptus plantations planted on the highlands of Dagua (and many other parts of Colombia) under the guise of 'reforestation'. It is the most recent colonisation of the Andes by a multinational corporation in the name of development and foreign investment. This so-called reforestation has the potential to cause a major impact on the water sources, and thus on the lives of the people of Dagua.

Over the years, the community of Los Alpes has also been subjected to the oppression of warring factions from paramilitaries, guerrillas and state forces. When we arrived, it seemed that social ties were in tatters, with high levels of distrust and resentment among people who were forced to support one group or the other, even leading to some deaths.

However, despite deeply complex feelings and unresolved issues among the community, people continued to rely on each other to meet the most basic need of the community – the need for water – by managing the aqueduct.

When we arrived, the Aqueduct Commission (Junta de Acueducto) and the Community Action Committee (Junta de Accion Communal) were established and functioning to a degree. The action committee is officially registered with the authorities and legitimises the commission. These bodies are encouraged by the national government in areas that lack state presence. While this arrangement gives communities so-called autonomy and responsibility for managing and providing services, we soon realised that local people are expected to manage these organisations with no training or support from the government.

4.6 Reflections in the early months: connecting with others

Interactions between our own personal histories and the different realities of the people and communities with whom we were meeting and working were beginning to paint a picture of disconnected realities for us.

Our worlds intertwined with history and struggle against colonialism, and the now neo-colonial powers. How was it that three sets of realities - the Campesinos (mestizo/mixed peasants), Indigenous and the African Colombians - all with similar experience of oppression, were disconnected? All three communities live in different areas, segregated since colonial times. Watching Colombian television, we began to understand how this segregation is maintained. News presenters tend to be white, soap operas are full of white actors and, when there is a black or Indigenous actor, they play the maid, the poor person or the baddie. The government is made up of white males and we (mestizos, mixed) are told at school that we are white. The social system is symbolically and literally telling us that dark skin is strange, ugly and something to distance ourselves from.

Early on we became involved with the International School for Bottom Up Organising.

During an international meeting in Caracas we were introduced to organising methodologies developed in the civil rights movement. These included such as the 'people's circle': a democratic way to conduct meetings and an indispensable tool for encouraging participation that gives people equal voice and time; and consensus decision-making, which enables dialogue and responsibility for communal decisions. Our general agreement in that meeting was that, *"our projects aim at building self-sufficient, egalitarian prototypes in communities of the most oppressed. Ours is an international struggle led by the poorest and darkest, among them women"*.

Involvement with ISBO gave us new tools and knowledge about our history. An in-depth study of the civil rights movement, conducted by elders who had been directly involved and taught by Ella Baker, opened our eyes. It grounded and positioned us in a struggle that was not new and that had a history, heroines and heroes that looked like us and were like us. ISBO provided us with a really valuable lens to analyse critically our social reality as Colombians and as humans. When we use the word 'critical' we align our thoughts with Stephen Brookfield's explanation of the concept:

When I talk of critically and critical theory in this book, it is the ideology critique tradition I am chiefly invoking. As a learning process, ideology critique describes the ways in which people learnt to recognise how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. As an educational activity, ideology critique focuses on helping people come to an awareness of how capitalism shapes social relations and imposes often without our knowledge – belief systems and assumptions (that is, ideologies) that justify and maintain economical and political inequity. (Brookfield, 2005: 13).



Figure 4.4. Children's celebration



Figure 4.5. Old Fools Day



Figure 4.6. International Women's Day

Our collective critical reflections have led to a wide range of projects in CAIS Maloka, primarily with young people, women and children. Community engagement has included collective farming, arts and theatre projects, and community celebrations such as International Women's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, football tournaments and fundraisers (see further information).

Among the change initiatives we have seen is the development of the collective Junta de Accion Communal for Los Alpes. We have also seen campaigns; for example, the fight for the rights of children to be transported safely to school and raising awareness

of the depletion of water. We have also visited and been visited by radical communities from other regions of Colombia. Finally, we have consistently participated in and hosted international ISBO organising schools, and regularly engaged, through Skype, with fellow ISBO members in Jamaica. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on our collective attempts to develop an organic vegetable farming initiative.

4.7 Collective learning for collective farming

In 2011, inspired by a collective chicken enterprise being implemented by the organising collective in Jamaica, 15 community members from Los Alpes (young and old, men and women) met to discuss starting an organic vegetable farming project. It was a warm gathering with laughter, excitement, a delicious meal and *guarapo* (a homemade fermented sugarcane drink). The children were running and playing while dinner was served. We sat around the table full and satisfied with such a feast. We began a discussion around how we each visualised the project and how we would work together.

We agreed to collect money each week for seeds and tools, and that our workday would be Monday. Our first concerns were how to work together equally, and how to reach agreement and make decisions as a collective. One of the youngest members said he thought we should make decisions by consensus and discuss things we did not agree on within the collective instead of mentioning them outside of the group. We decided to keep working on building principles that could continue to shape the way we work, building on the trust that existed amongst us, to keep nourishing the collective by talking with honesty and openness in the knowledge that we did not have all the answers.



Figure 4.7. Analysing pH level in soil - facilitated by SENA



Figure 4.8. Organic produce

The vegetable farming collective became very focused on the production project. We began to read Restrepo-Rivera's (2005) study: *The Moon: The nocturnal sun in the tropics and its influence on agriculture*. It was fascinating to read about the way we traditionally plant food by observing the moon phases. Now we understood why Campesinos always planted certain crops according to certain moon phases. Research helped us come across the concept of allelopathy, where certain plants attract insects whilst others repel them. We learned of plants in our immediate environment that could be used in biological control against plagues, and weeds that could be used for making fertilisers. The farming collective built a wormery to provide a steady supply of compost fertiliser. We experimented making Super Magro fertiliser, worm compost bio-soup and Urimiel made from our own urine. Using organic fertilisers and pesticides, our vegetable garden not only served as a space for cultivation, but as a living experimentation laboratory.

Since the introduction of the Green Revolution in Colombia, many traditional farmers have been persuaded to use chemicals to obtain higher yields. As farmers become dependent on chemicals, the prices of these products rise each year. Traditional farming seems to be disappearing and local government agricultural agencies are emphasising producing more, without a thought to the cost to our health and the environment. And with competing subsidised prices from the US, basic staples like maize are no longer being cultivated.

Mid-year, Indigenous Nasa families from El Cauca join our organic vegetable garden project, bringing their wisdom on planting clean food, their spiritual relationship with the earth and their traditional knowledge on working collectively, cooking and eating together. It was interesting for us to see how the women brought their children into the field while we worked.



Figure 4.9. Jamaican collective visiting Maloka, preparing Cebollin organic pest control

One of our main challenges was convincing some of the older men from the initial group to invest in organic cultivation. Many of them left because they preferred to do paid work as opposed to working on the vegetable garden and to buy their vegetables from the market. Firstly, they were not used to cultivating and eating a wide range of vegetables and, secondly, they had a hard time believing in growing food without applying agrochemicals. Those that stayed were the Indigenous participants, a couple of elders and the young people.

We began to share our knowledge with others. A collective from Villa Rica visited CAIS Maloka to learn about organic agriculture and ISBO's principles of working with the community. The mornings were spent on hands-on learning in the vegetable garden and the afternoons on studying. We explored creating different ways of living, the importance of producing our own organic food, creating a process of alternative education, researching our histories and reaching out to others in our communities. As always the gathering was full of cooking, eating, bonfire discussions and music, along with the company of the Los Alpes collective. Subsequently, an ISBO organising school in Villa Rica provided real opportunities for us to gather with our brothers and sisters from Jamaica to share our learning.



Figure 4.10. Villa Rica collective learning to make an organic fertiliser – SuperMagro



Figure 4.11. Jamaicans and Colombians planning an ISBO school session

4.8 Reflecting on learning

Concientizarse podría ser, entonces, pensar en las relaciones entre el significado propio de la existencia humana y la circunstancia histórica que determina, por lo menos, algunos de los aspectos mas importantes de esa existencia. Así concluimos que la “conciencia concientizada” es aquella capaz de pensar en su época histórica al mismo tiempo que se piensa y determina en esa época. El hombre (la persona) concientizado no puede dejar de ser, entonces, el hombre (la persona) comprometido con la historia de su época. (Barreiro, 1974: 53)

Translation: Becoming ‘conscientised’ could refer to thinking about relationships between the very meaning of human existence and the historical circumstances which determine at least some of the most important aspects of that existence. We conclude therefore that the ‘conscientised consciousness’ is that which is able to think about the historical era at the same time as thinking about and determining the history of the era. The conscientised man (person) cannot be other than the man (person) who is engaged with the history of their era.²

Having this interconnectedness with different communities allows us to share knowledge on our organic farming and exchange ideas on social enterprises, challenges within the community and as a collective – all of which has strengthened us. Learning has been at the centre of the CAIS Maloka experience for all involved, in one way or another, not just for us (Javier and Maria), but for all the local people involved, the visiting groups and the volunteers. However, this learning cannot be understood in the conventional sense where there are teachers and students. Our collective learning has been bound by the experience of knowing others like us, who have also been subjected to the experience of colonialism and capitalism. Some of us are able to voice what we feel and make sense of it now, but only because of the dialogue experience we have been part of. This dialogue, about our experiences and our different intersectionalities, has enabled us, as Freire (1972) puts it, to “name the world” – our world, our reality – in order to act consciously as participants in the changing of that very world that oppresses us. Saying this, one of the challenges we face here is the way in which poverty and oppression holds people down, and how it takes a constant and long process for people to rewire their thinking, raise their self-esteem and, not only begin to believe that they can be actors in these changes, but more importantly that they deserve better.

4.9 Changes: what role do ‘we’ play in this?

During 2013, we (Javier and Maria) left Colombia for the UK, leaving COCA space to get on without us, and allowing us to see the process from the outside (we Skyped regularly throughout the year we were away). COCA developed as a group after our

² Quote translated from Spanish by Fiona Hale

experience of managing the Junta de Accion Communal and, for a couple of years, replaced it in the community as a more horizontal structured organisation.

Throughout this year, COCA continued working independently with the community and on community projects. However, the farming project was challenged. The farming collective was made of two distinct groups: the young Campesino men and the newly arrived Indigenous women. It emerged that the young men were now working in one group and the women in another, and on different days. Slowly people stopped coming to the vegetable farm.

When we returned from England in 2014, COCA was still engaged in its community activities but the vegetable farm was a thing of the past. It was quite sad to see the overgrown patch where it had once been. Disagreements among some of the women participants of COCA had resulted in them leaving. The collective had also been under attack from some of the male elders. COCA was accused of not allowing the current Junta de Accion Communal to work, as young people had taken leadership roles and were active working outside what is considered the norm.

4.10 Reflecting on our roles: where is the 'we?'

One factor we often overlook is the role that we (Javier and Maria) play in this setting. It would seem that in our ambiguous role of outsider-insider, we can subtly mediate between people. Being 'different', as we are perceived to be, seems to make it OK for others to be different in our collective. When it works well, differences can be an amalgamating ingredient rather than a divisive factor. However, a conscious understanding of difference is needed, requiring reflection on the historical political process to which we as one people have been subjected. Our differences need to be talked about, studied and collectively analysed. For this to happen, "communicative spaces" as Reason (2006) and Pearson *et al.* (2016) argue, need to be created. It is in providing a space for processes of dialogue to develop, mediated by differences, that CAIS Maloka serves one of its main purposes. Our challenge was to find strategies to share our roles in this – to create the 'we'.

While working in the UK in 2013, Javier was invited to join a small team in Refugee Youth who had been asked to produce a paper for publication on Refugee Youth's experiences of working with Connected Communities, a project of the UK Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This proved difficult for a number of reasons, due not just to our inexperience, but also to the difficulty of representing the experiences of people who were not actually in the room. One team member suggested that we read something collectively as a way to get ourselves on to the same page. We took a paper by Reason (2006) about quality in action research, and spent a whole weekend reading together. We deconstructed almost every sentence, exploring the difficult concepts. We discussed the contents, relating them to the experience of the AHRC project and the history of Refugee Youth as a whole. Through this we

made sense of where we erred in the project and where we had been successful. A paper was subsequently produced and published (Pearson *et al.* 2016) to everyone's satisfaction – it was quite a learning experience.

So, on our return to CAIS Maloka early in 2014, we decided to start a similar process to bring people together to make sense of our work and experience as COCA, CAIS Maloka and ISBO. We agreed to meet every Tuesday evening at CAIS Maloka for collective reading. Participation always varies, with seven regular participants who at times bring a friend or family member.

We proposed three books:

1. *The Open Veins of Latin America* (Galeano 1971), an analytical masterpiece of the economic and political history of Latin America from the European invasion in 1492 to the contemporary times of the US invasion.
2. *Canto General* (Neruda 1990), the history of the struggle of this land from before it was known as Latin America, written in the most wonderful gut-wrenching and thought-provoking poetry we have come across.
3. *La Violencia en Colombia* (Campos *et al.* 2005), an investigation into one of the bloodiest civil wars in Colombia between 1948 and 1958. This really informed us about our recent historical reality in a very graphic and raw manner. Fals Borda's analysis has assisted us in untangling effects from causes, in understanding that poverty and underdevelopment are part of a historical economic process called capitalism, which needs poor people in order to maintain its dominion.



Figure 4.12. Critical reading

To make a start, we opened the reading circle with a poem from Neruda's *Canto General*, which had some relevance to our central text of the *Open Veins of Latin America*. We would follow this by reading from *La Violencia en Colombia*, which brings Galeano's writing to a more local context. Anyone who feels confident to read can. At the beginning, not many people read, but as time went on more people started participating. Every time there is a reference to a word, concept, historical epoch or character we do not all know about, we stop and discuss it. We draw examples about what the writing is saying from our own experience, or from the current national or international state of affairs. It helps if the people facilitating this process have some knowledge of history or how to research and find out about it. CAIS Maloka makes its minuscule library available as well as the Internet for this purpose. We also watch documentaries related to the subject we are reading. The more we read the more the collective develops an understanding of our history and begins to appropriate it.

4.11 Knowledge is power

Through this process, we have come to realise that “knowledge is power” as Gevanta and Cornwall (2001: 72) propose in their discussion about Foucauldian analysis. We need to learn to name our world as Freire (1972) proposes, but we have learned that ‘our’ modern world is not something that has been constructed by ‘our’ knowledge. It has been constructed by the dominant power of the elite and its discourse; therefore we need to learn about it, which means engaging with the different paradigms that exist about the modern world and its institutions in order to unmask it, denounce it and change it.

We know that our contribution towards social change is a small one, but we must start somewhere. Our critical reading has taken us (Javier and Maria) and the young people through painful paths, full of horrors about what has been done historically to Colombian Campesinos, and what we have done to one another. But this process also helped us understand the importance of what we are trying to do as a collective, and the ‘why’ we need to keep at it.

4.12 Back to collective farming

Towards the end of 2014 we had reached *King Sugar and other Agricultural Monarchs* in Galeano (1971). We learned how Columbus transported sugarcane, which became the ‘white gold’ that fuelled European mercantilism and sparked the transatlantic slave triangle. We learnt that coffee, cotton, cacao and sugar were planted as plantations, bringing enormous wealth to the colonisers and bringing hunger and death to the enslaved African people and the native Americans. Learning how people died of malnutrition in the middle of these plantations made us reflect on our diet, which is mainly potatoes, rice, beans and a bit of meat if we are lucky. We talked about nutrition and chemical-free foods, our vegetable farming experience, and why it had been abandoned. Someone said our parents did not understand the difference

between organic and chemical farming. Another described how his father cultivated chemical-induced *luo* (tropical fruit) for many years without protective clothing and how his father would complain from pains in his body, never connecting them with his regular use of agrochemicals.



Figure 4.13. Bio-digester project



Figure 4.14. Sharing harvest



Figure 4.15. Forestation practice with members of the community

We were motivated again by the discussion and agreed to revive the vegetable farming project because we wanted to resist the government discourse that we Campesinos need to become more industrially productive, and because we wanted to re-learn and maintain our traditional way of farming.

And so, we cleared the overgrowth where the vegetable patch had been and started our collective farming once more. We repaired the wormery and vegetable beds. We have been working every Monday since; we read together every Tuesday and for a while now there have been English classes every Thursday. Every last Saturday of the month we work on a reforestation project around the aqueduct intake. We are on track.

4.13 Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that immersing ourselves in the critical study of our reality at a local, regional and international level has, in so many ways, strengthened our epistemological perspectives. Firstly, to make sense at the local level, we must understand our historical process at the local level. Secondly, to make sense of the world, we have to look at the processes from where histories spring and how these are constructed at an international level. It is in the Praxis, the analysis of the micro and the macro, the study of relationships of these two juxtaposed configurations of reality that we, as Campesinos, can start to make sense of our world. By relating this learning to our lived experience we are able to start naming the world and identifying the oppression within it so that we can begin to change it.

We have discovered that it is important for us as traditional farmers to research our

own knowledge because it is being suppressed by 40-odd years of green revolution; our grandparent's knowledge of traditional farming is being lost. Our parents' generation has slowly become accustomed to using chemicals and ignoring the natural rhythms of nature, such as moon phase observation when planting, harvesting, cropping and storing seeds. It is important for us therefore to find literature or knowledge that others have produced on traditional farming. Knowing that many people do not read, or don't enjoy reading, we must also document and produce knowledge that is important to us through other means such as theatre, music, visual arts and video.

It is our belief that we can mutually benefit from partnerships with organisations with agroecological and scientific knowledge, as well as people in general who are interested in food production and consumption. This can help us understand the modern challenges that we are encountering in farming due to climate change, land depletion and proliferation of pests due to the prolonged use of pesticides. Alongside this, we must maintain constant study of our Campesino reality, working together to access the bank of knowledge that is already there. In dialogue, diverse people – some with technical and others with traditional knowledge – can generate new ways of understanding our environment and a more conscientious transformation of the relationship between food systems production and social reality.

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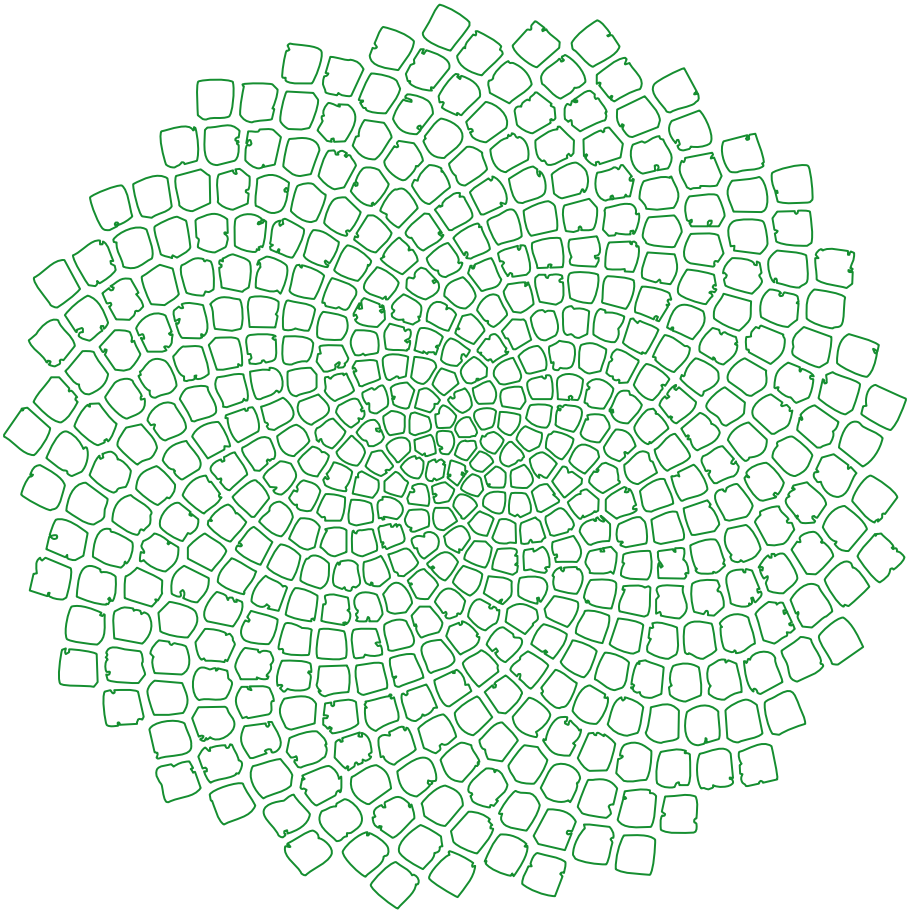
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Further information online:

ISBO: www.peoplesorganizing.org CAIS Maloka = Accion Comunitaria: www.youtube.com/watch?v=axUCBq7E23M

School transport campaign: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiPOlWKpXF4

5



Participatory workers: from tyrants to critical thinkers

Tom Wakeford¹

Geographical location: Various

Chapter highlights: The use of participatory processes to provide legitimacy for political decisions raises issues of transparency and the need for safeguards against their misuse.

The 'facilitators' in such processes can wield significant influence that is only rarely the subject of systematic self-critical reflection.

This chapter includes reflection by the author on his personal experience as a co-performative witness in participatory work.

He concludes that those who wield influence over participatory workers need to be exposed, along with power these workers exert over participatory processes, particularly with regard to issues of white male privilege.

Keywords: Participation, facilitation, engagement, cognitive justice, epistemic injustice.

¹ Although I name myself as the author of this paper, I see myself as a 'co-performative witness' in the initiatives in which I have been involved. This term was introduced by Dwight Conquergood in order to unsettle the conventional hierarchies of naming that are performed in processes of research (Donkor 2007). I owe many of any insights this paper provides to a number of people who have also been co-performative witnesses in the scores of participatory processes in which I have played a role over the last twenty-five years. These include, in no particular order, Jasber Singh, Fiona Hale, Jacqui Lovell, Hugh Kelly, Colin Anderson, Elizabeth Bragg, Graciela Romero Vasquez, David Archer, Kate Newman, Sara Cottingham, Sue Weldon, Ruth Hayward, Paul Nowak, Pauline Wilson, Patrick Mulvany, Jean Blaylock, Mama D, Michel Pimbert, Ijaba Ahmed, Ismail Mohamed, Iman Farah, Hinda Mohamed Smith, Fiona Macbeth, Fatma Mohamed, Asha Mohamed, Javier Sanchez Rodriguez, Sagari Ramdas, N.Madhusudhan, P.V.Satheesh, Kavitha Kuruganti, Vinod Pavarala, Andrea Cornwall, Jethro Pettit, Maria de la Pava Cataño, Dee Woods, Argane Fayisa Ibsa, Ros Norton, Rachel Pain, Peter Bryant, Maggie O'Neil, Bano Murtuja, Si Donnelly, Lucy Pearson, Tom Crompton and Rachael Taylor. There have been others over the years whose names I might have added. All mistakes remain my own.

5.1 Participation and the food system

Largely ignored by the mainstream media, a set of practices have become commonplace in some political systems that are moving towards democracy. Their supporters use the generic term 'participation' to refer to a range of approaches that attempt to include a wide range of people in making power more accountable (Cornwall 2011), including in the food system (e.g. Andrée *et al.* 2016).

Inspired by popular education initiatives in Latin America, led by figures such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, some, including several contributors to chapters in this book, have attempted to use participatory approaches to challenge the power of transnational corporations to continue the industrialisation of our food system (see also Wakeford 2016)

In parts of the Global South – particularly in Latin America - social movements using participatory approaches have helped provide a space for voice for millions experiencing oppression under more-or-less dictatorial regimes. Yet, to their critics, such approaches risk new forms of tyranny and oppression (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

If those of us working with social movements are to make use of participatory processes, it is vital that we have the tools to distinguish those that are capable of supporting liberation from those that are likely to advance tyranny. It is particularly important that those of us who take up specific roles in such processes are aware of the power we have over what takes place during and after them.

Box 5.1: Some examples of participatory work in which the author, along with some of those listed in Footnote 1, has been involved

Prajateerpu – a participatory action research process initiated by the Deccan Development Society, and other civil society organisations in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India (Kuruganti *et al.*, 2008 and Figures 5.1-5.5). Mostly funded by the Netherlands government international development agency (DGIS).

UK trade unions – a participatory research project looking at how to improve communication between union representatives and union management. Funded by the Trades Union Congress.

The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience – using participatory tools to explore the challenges of participatory action research with professionally trained researchers from various disciplines in social and ecological research (Wakeford 2016). Mostly funded by Coventry University.

Web of Connections – developing participatory action research with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds across the UK (Guzman *et al.*, 2016; Pearson *et al.*, 2016). Funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Though often hidden from scrutiny, those of us who carry out these participatory processes – the participatory workers – act as hidden power brokers within them.

We are central to such processes, but invisible, and rarely held to account. As co-performative witnesses of these processes, we need to acknowledge the influence we wield over them. We need to learn how to avoid being co-opted by institutionalised patriarchy, racism and scientism. We can do this if we work with, and learn alongside, established grassroots-led initiatives in order to jointly design participatory processes that contribute to social movements that are accountable to their members.

Here, I draw on my experiences as a participatory worker over 25 years, including various attempts to document the role of power in participation, in both the academic and public sphere (Box 5.1). The lessons throw light on those participatory action research initiatives that have the aim of transforming our food systems.



Figure 5.1. Members of *Prajateerpu* (Translates as “People’s verdict”), with participatory worker, Dr Vinod Pavarala, to the right

5.2 From civil rights to the World Bank

In the late 1980s, United States civil rights educator Myles Horton spent a few weeks with Paulo Freire comparing notes on their work during previous decades (Horton *et al.* 1990). It was then that Horton realised that many of the activities undertaken by him and his colleagues at the Highlander Center constituted what others were now calling participation (Horton 1998 p.208; Horton *et al.* 1990 p.116). While some may think the US civil rights movement was either spontaneous or the product of the charisma of leaders such as Martin Luther King, the reality is that it was shaped by a range of activities, and informed by participatory research undertaken over many decades. Meetings at Highlander included some of those who were, or who went on to be, key activists, such as Rosa Parks and King himself.

Horton and his many colleagues, female and male, of diverse ethno-cultural heritage, supported a process of action and reflection that allowed the movement to grow.

The media picked out the leaders, but behind them were people like Ella Baker, who supported a more collectivist model of leadership over the “prevailing messianic style of the period” (quoted in Abu-Jamal, 2004). She argued against the civil rights movement mirroring the organisation model of the Black church that, at the time, had largely female membership and male leadership. “Strong people”, Baker famously said, “don’t need strong leaders” (Mueller 2004; Lewis *et al.* 2016).

Ella Baker outlined three ingredients of participatory democracy that she believed were vital for social movements to gain strength:

1. Grassroots involvement of people throughout society in the decisions that control their lives.
2. Minimisation of hierarchy and the associated emphasis on expertise and professionalism as a basis for leadership.
3. Direct action as an answer to fear, alienation and intellectual detachment.

The participatory wing of the US civil rights movement was not as politically active in the Reagan-Thatcher era of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet their language and techniques have survived to be taken up afresh today by new movements such as #blacklivesmatter and the food sovereignty movement.



Figure 5.2. Commentator, Dr Partha Dasgupta of Syngenta, presents his perspective to Prajateerpu



Figure 5.3. One of three fictional newscasts, showing Prajateerpu participants what life could be like in 2025 under three different scenarios

I first encountered the term participation in 1999 when visiting the Participation Group at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. Its champion there was Robert Chambers, whose participatory rural appraisal (PRA) had become central to the stated missions of many non-governmental organisations, such as ActionAid, and government-funded aid, such as that directed through the UK Department for International Development.

However, his approach eschewed the third of Ella Baker’s three ingredients. Being used in the context of top-down interventions in countries whose populations were

largely rural and poverty-stricken, it also had little of her second ingredient and was unable to supply the first ingredient either. Participatory workers who rely on PRA alone are unlikely to be able to build stronger processes of participatory democracy, without which it is hard to build a long-lasting social movement.

By the end of the 1990s, those critical of the power of international agencies, such as the World Bank and the UK's Department for International Development, documented how PRA and other similar approaches had been co-opted by the very powers that were meant to be held to account (e.g. Cooke and Kothari 2001). Against this overall trend, some social movements established bottom-up participatory learning and action initiatives, often as a counterweight to the power of discriminatory use of funding and research.

Among these, two of the most prominent were the international movement of women living with HIV (ICW, 2008) and the movements attempting to democratise agricultural research and development (Pimbert *et al.* 2017). However, these efforts have often been drowned out by an ever-increasing trend for major donors and commercial facilitators to co-opt the language of participation for initiatives that were nothing of the sort.

A decade later, the 'doing' of participation has become professionalised (Bherer *et al.* 2017). Across the Western world participation is now a profession with trade associations, such as the International Association for Public Participation, which will recognise a practitioner as a Licensed Trainer if they pass a test and pay a fee. The majority of its activities, some suggest, are beholden to a scientific-industrial-government complex (c.f. Calhoun 2015; Kapoor 2008).

The participation industry collaborates with patrons within government in order to enable them to create an illusion of public consent through a range of processes – from online surveys to citizens' juries – that enable them to claim popular legitimacy for policies they had already formulated (Lee 2014).

5.3 Facilitation

Within both the commercial participation industry and among civil society organisations, the people who actually convene and run participatory processes have become known – at least in the English-speaking world – as 'facilitators'.

Increasingly some of my co-workers and I have found this word to be problematic. As I have studied other participatory workers in action, interviewed them, reflected on my own practice and reviewed the literature, I have found the range of work undertaken by people who 'facilitate' varies widely.

Take two sets of people with whom I have worked in recent years. One is a group of scientists of white European ethno-cultural heritage trained in a laboratory. The other is a group of young people of colour with refugee and migrant backgrounds who have

often been unable to pursue courses in higher education. If the term 'facilitation' means anything to individuals in either group, most would understand it in the context of being told what to do by people who do not share their background or identity. They would imagine a top-down process that they suspect will be driven by the interests of others.

In normal English usage, 'to facilitate' means 'to make easy'. The nouns facilitation and facilitator are not listed in most dictionaries. Despite the growth of interest in participatory approaches across the globe, the use of the term facilitation is generally limited to a small community of Anglophone practitioners whose values lie on a spectrum from the idealistic participatory democrats at one end to those in the commercial participation industry at the other (Lee 2014, p.75). The rise of participatory research has also become fashionable in many academic disciplines and research institutes in Australia, Canada, UK and US.

Those who consider themselves professional facilitators, along with those who have studied them, have developed a complex pseudo-technical vocabulary. They operate in a range of academic, commercial and educational settings (e.g. King 2016). For example, different interpretations of the term 'facilitator' often involve the use of terms that would appear obscure to the non-specialist. To all those uninitiated in the relevant jargon, words like facilitation and facilitator are already incomprehensible, as is the term participation itself, along with the associated terms 'public engagement', 'patient involvement', 'co-production' and 'deliberative democracy'.

The jargon that surrounds participation is particularly problematic for people from outside the profession who want to have their voice heard, but who are prevented from doing so by this language. It is ironic that an approach which often draws on the writings of the great proponent of popular education, Paulo Freire, has created barriers to popular understanding of participation itself. I now regret falling into the trap of using unnecessary jargon in the past (e.g. Wakeford 2001).

In countries where English is not the main language, the term facilitator is rarely used. In Germany, the term moderator is common. In Francophone and Spanish-speaking countries the term socio-cultural *animateur* (animateur/animadores) often refers to the same thing. Across the UK, particularly in Scotland, the term convener can be heard. The idea of meetings having a chairperson, chairwoman, chairman or simply chair occurs in a range of settings in many parts of the world.

5.4 A participatory proposal

Whatever we call our practice in our particular sector or culture, my proposal is that, when discussing the people who are resourced to work with participatory processes, we adopt the title 'participatory worker'. It refers to anyone who instigates or leads a participatory process. While jettisoning the term facilitator removes one confusing term, the adoption of participatory worker forces us to be clearer about what we mean by the term participation (see Box 5.2).



Figure 5.4. Participants in Prajateerpu watch one of three specially-commissioned newscasts, set in the year 2025



Figure 5.5. Participants in Prajateerpu give their vision for the future of rural development in the state of Andhra Pradesh

The need for such clarity was made plain to me during a two-year project involving around 30 grassroots-based activists in a process they were told was ‘participatory’. It was a hard lesson for us participatory workers to learn that we had developed a shared understanding of what it means to be participatory with only one or two of them. The frustration of the other 28 activists was palpable.

Box 5.2: Divergent perceptions of the word ‘participation’: a personal reflection

My colleague Jan (not their real name) and I agree on many things, such as the need to challenge unaccountable processes of policy making about scientific research and technology development. Where we have never reached agreement, however, is in our understanding of the word ‘participation.’ Jan’s understanding of the word is just the straightforward meaning as used in everyday English – allowing individuals and groups to have the opportunity to take part in a meeting or perhaps become involved in a larger project or programme. My understanding has always been different, as it has been inspired by politically-engaged traditions of research and action in Europe, North America and the Global South. I use the term because I can trace it back to grassroots-led movements for civil rights and democratic reform in these places (Freire 1972, Horton 1998; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991).

For me, effective participation means redistributing power in relation to the creation, validation and use of knowledge. It formed an important part, not only of social movements related to agri-food issues, but also of some of the most radical movements of the late 20th century, such as the US civil rights movement (Horton 1998; Mueller 2004) and the collective struggles organised by people living with HIV/AIDS (ICW 2008; Susser 2015). Jan, by contrast, does not identify with these struggles, regarding them as purely political, and thus would not use the word participation to describe them.

To those with certain socio-cultural and family backgrounds, particularly those from families with experience of working in solidarity with others in their community as equals, the term participatory can often be understood. To others, especially those

who had backgrounds as scientists, engineers and people from hierarchical societies, the term could just be another piece of meaningless jargon (Guzman *et al.* 2016; Wakeford 2016).

5.5 Participatory workers and 'facilitators'

From an historical perspective and defining the term broadly, the role of the participatory worker has existed for as long as people have met in groups to research or decide things. A term taken from the French *facile* (easy) makes for an easy process of decision-making. If written records existed, the distinctive role of participatory workers could be traced through many different civilisations over thousands of years, such as the Gotti in Adivasi areas of India (see Madhusudhan 2017).

Although records are absent in many cultures, there is evidence that 'benefit societies', which were organisations or voluntary associations formed to provide insurance relief from difficulty, have existed throughout recorded history. The European trade union movement has been traced back to these societies for mutual aid. Other examples include secret societies during the Tang dynasty in China and among African-Americans during the post-revolutionary US, such as those who organized the Free African Society of Philadelphia. Given their defining characteristic of members having equal opportunities to make decisions in the organisation, it seems likely that some sort of participatory process would have been necessary to ensure this.

Unlike many words that are used in similar contexts, such as involvement, consultation and deliberation, the origin of the word participation leads us to the participatory democracy movements of the 1960s (Adelman 1993; Cornwall 2011; Pateman 2012; Torres 2014). However, many academics see participation without any link to a set of emancipatory values (see Box 5.2). Following the rise of the participation industry, its workers have all too often been co-opted by people who do not subscribe to these values (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kapoor 2008; Channel 4 News, cited in Wakeford and Singh 2008).

Whatever the methodologies used and however skilled the participatory worker, there is no escaping the role played by power in participatory processes. Yet, compared to the number of papers published on participatory methodologies or their ethical principles, discussions of the actual practices of participatory workers are very rare. This messy and often controversial zone of action makes up only a tiny fraction of the literature (see Box 5.3; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Wakeford and Singh 2008; People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016).

The risk that funders with laudable intentions can generate participatory processes that create new forms of oppression is higher than ever before. This study should teach us the lesson that processes aimed at 'giving people a voice', however well-funded and linked to policy-makers, can actually weaken the voice of the groups that already have the least say in decisions (see also Kashefi and Keene 2008; Haq 2008; Singh 2008).

Box 5.3: Participatory workers – hidden power brokers

Between 2001 and 2004, Celia Davies, Margaret Wetherell and Elizabeth Barnett conducted an exhaustive process of observation of participatory process (Davies *et al.*, 2006). It involved interviews with a wide range of people involved in the process, from the funders and participatory workers to the 30 members of a citizen's council charged with helping shape policy making around the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, one of the UK government's health regulatory bodies. Their study illuminates the power-broking roles played by bureaucrats, commercial facilitators and paid citizen participants. All these types of participatory worker were forced, whether they realised it or not, to walk the moral tightrope between participatory ideals and the failure of those in power to value participatory democracy or to credit knowledge to people who have expertise, but are from a non-dominant group.

Their book-length study also sheds light on the challenge of dealing with demands for representative processes, which can lead to the token involvement of groups in society who are either in a numerical minority or normally excluded from policy debates.

5.6 Buying participatory work

Studies following the money flowing through participatory processes are rare, but vital, in understanding the power at work on and within them. To find out in whose interests the process is being run, we need to know who pays both the participatory workers and potentially each participant in the process, as well as the amount of money that changes hands. The failure of those who sponsor participatory processes to reflect on the motives and influence of themselves and other individuals and groups who fund participatory processes has weakened our ability to see how power pervades participatory work (Hildyard *et al.* 2001).

Rare exceptions to this general lack of reflection can occur when the political stakes are high. Examples I have encountered include a UK government-funded consultation on the future of nuclear power investigated by the UK's Channel 4 News (Wakeford and Singh 2008), an Indian grassroots-led *Prajateerpu* (people's verdict) on the future of rural Andhra Pradesh (Kuruganti *et al.* 2008 and Figures 5.1-5.5) and a citizens' jury on the future of food and farming in the UK (Wakeford 2016).

Participatory work deals with issues of power and privilege. To be a participatory worker is to be a power broker. Much participatory research also has roots in the company boardroom, particularly in the market intelligence that public relations corporations offer to their clients. The philosophy of market research (see Box 5.4) has played a role in creating the suspicion about participation that exists among many of those with whom we work.

Even if participatory research was purely a product of bottom-up social movements, then there would be issues of power, privilege and voice. Here, the exercise of power

might have been even more hidden than those we see in commercial participatory research (see Box 5.4). The corruption of the original ideals of participation by development agencies and some academics prompted a critical response from some analysts, most famously the provocatively titled 'Participation: The new tyranny?' (Cooke and Kothari 2001). A range of contributors outlined the way in which participatory projects and, by implication, their workers, were complicit in disempowering people. Published in the same year as the September 11 attacks and the rise of the US-led War on Terror, the book was received in a political atmosphere in the UK and US that was increasingly hostile to participatory democracy.

Hijacked by neoliberal market researchers and under attack from the political left (Kapoor 2008), the first wave of post-Cold War participation has largely lost its credibility among many (c.f. Cornwall 2011).

5.7 Alternative visions

Work by sociologist Shiv Visvanathan and philosopher Miranda Fricker helps clarify an alternative vision for participatory work to the one that comes from the participation industry. Visvanathan has proposed the concept of cognitive justice, based on the recognition of the plurality of knowledge and expresses the right of the different forms of knowledge to co-exist (Visvanathan 1997). The failure of the European system of 'post-enlightenment' science to recognise the knowledge of people outside its systems of control has clearly, to use Visvanathan's term, been a case of cognitive injustice. Fricker (2007) is also concerned about professional expertise being supported at the expense of other forms of knowledge, which she calls epistemic injustice. Historically, expertise derived through life experience rather than professional training has typically been side-lined (which Fricker labels 'testimonial injustice'), while marginalised groups have also been repeatedly denied opportunities to develop greater knowledge ('heuristic injustice').

Fricker's distinction between heuristic and testimonial injustice is particularly useful for us as we think about our motivations for our participatory work. Many participatory research projects run by academics in the field of 'development' prioritise providing their participants with education about an issue – new ways of detecting a health risk, for example. This is the provision of heuristic justice. However, there may be a trade-off whereby development programmes do this educational work at the expense of, rather than promoting, spaces in which people without professional training can share the expertise they have gained through their life experience. In denying them this space, the participatory worker is thus in danger of doing them a testimonial injustice.

Fricker's binary is also useful to critique many academic and commercial researchers who claim to use participatory approaches, but who prioritise the extraction of views of their participants – for example via focus groups – without allowing them to build their knowledge. Anyone who denies those with whom they work the capacity to build their knowledge are doing them an heuristic injustice.

Box 5.4: The commercial participation industry

"We believe in the power of participation: It is our ambition to supply ... insight into what people are thinking and doing ... so that companies, governments and institutions can better serve the people..." Mission statement of a UK opinion polling company (YouGov 2016).

Influenced by pioneers of public relations from the 1920s, such as Edward Bernays, the prevailing view among many large corporations in the mid-20th century was that the creation of irrational consumer desires was good. In short, stimulating people to find fulfilment through consumption and then supplying them with consumer products to satisfy their perceived need, even if the items were unnecessary, unhealthy or bad for the environment, was core to business success. People's consumption of mass-produced goods not only made the economy work, but also made them politically compliant, thus creating a stable society. Beginning in the 1950s, research with focus groups became key to designing advertising slogans – from the 'tiger in your tank' for gasoline, to the curves of a Barbie doll in the toy industry. The rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan was intimately linked to focus group research. Their job was to find out what their key voters wanted and then sell it to them. This tradition of participation worked in direct opposition to attempts by others at popular education.

US President Bill Clinton and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair formulated many of their policies, through the use of YouGov-style focus groups that allowed them to discover how to sell already formulated policies to a politically uninformed electorate. To political strategists such as Stan Greenberg (pollster to Clinton and Blair's close ally, Philip Gould), policies could be sold in the same way as new brand of car (Gould 1999; Greenberg 1996; Kavanagh 2012).

Instead, either leader could have used processes of popular education and critical reflection with voters, as took place in Brazil a generation before. Robert Reich, a member of Clinton's cabinet, believes that "Fundamentally here we have two different views of human nature and of democracy". One the one hand, "you have the view that people are irrational, that they are bundles of unconscious emotion... that's what marketing really is all about – what are the symbols, the images, the music, the words that will appeal to these unconscious feelings". But on the other hand, continues Reich, "politics must be more than that. Politics and leadership are about engaging the public in a rational discussion and deliberation about what is best and treating people with respect in terms of their rational abilities to debate what is best" (quoted in Curtis 2002). Politicians can use privately commissioned focus groups with the aim of shaping their policies or merely as a means whereby they are marketed to voters. Neither objective makes the policy-formulation process any more open or, therefore, democratic.

A key aspect of the participation industry that enabled Clinton–Blair populist electoral politics was the part played by academic researchers. Focus groups allowed the extraction of people's views in a social setting. This got closer to their political perceptions than if they were interviewed individually. Drawing on the work of Kurt Lewin and others, management schools had embraced focus groups as a marketing tool by the 1960s (Adelman 1993, Curtis 2002). Academics used the focus group approach to gain qualitative insights into how people think, not only to help political parties win elections, but also to further their own research.

While often calling their work participatory, many have carried out their research with no attempt to allow people an independent voice (Wakeford 2001; 2002; c.f. Caretta and Vaccelli, 2015). Their views only became public through the interpretative lens of a researcher, whose sole accountability has been to their academic peers.

Participatory workers were vital in helping corporate managers enter a dialogue with two groups essential to their success – their workers, to understand how to reach their corporate goals, and their consumers, to create a mass market for their products.

During the 20th century, few governments of any political persuasion supported participatory democracy or participatory research. Yet some people's movements and researchers struggling for social justice in several countries in Africa, Europe, India, Latin America and North America embraced these variations in approaches from the 1960s onwards. Key to their flourishing were the writings and practical work of Paulo Freire and those inspired by his work.

Freirean approaches underpinned a range of social movements that emerged as a response to oppression over the past four decades. In Latin America, these often focused on acquiring rights for landless peasants and building democratic alternatives to dictatorship (Branford and Rocha, 2002). In North America, the UK and now internationally, movements of people who have survived the mental health system (e.g. Wallcraft *et al.*, 2009) or are living with HIV/AIDS (e.g. Susser, 2009) have used participatory research to ensure that resources used in their name are deployed effectively.

Those following Paulo Freire's legacy of critical pedagogy often have motivations that are linked to those of liberation struggles. These workers may have an intuitive grasp of what this kind of justice means without having to comprehend the jargon that accompanies action research and participatory research in the academy (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

For emancipatory social movements, the motivation for participatory work – of being heard and gaining basic rights – is often clear. Even then, attempts to use participation for emancipation involve many challenges (Vadjunec, 2017). By contrast, those of us based in research institutions may find it difficult – sometimes dangerous – to separate our personal motivations to join forces with oppressed people from our collective liberation from the institutional pressures we are under to meet our corporate income or publication targets (Morrish, 2016).

5.9 Participatory work in practice

Reflections of a co-performative witness

OK, if you want we can jump straight to agenda item 12:

Diversity.

So

The background.

The facilitation group -

All of us -

Wanted to tackle

How white and middle class we are.

Guys, show me those jazz hands...

Yes, that's right.

It's all of us white folks...

You don't know this hand signal?

That's the signal that means we agree...

Sorry. It's a facilitation tool...

Yeah, yeah it's jargon.

But you'll pick it up.

So, anyway, there we were, white and mostly middle class.

And Hamish, here -

Yes, Scottish Hamish -

From a very normal background.

Very every-day,

Almost working class,

Wouldn't you say Hamish?

But a bit less so since you got your PhD!

Hamish wanted to do something about the consensus

We reached it at our last Gathering....

Yes, but we say, 'Gathering'.

It's just the jargon.

Everyone who spoke agreed that it was

High time

That we had some

Diversity.

We were so pleased to hear about...

You...

Sorry, I still can't

Pronounce your name!

Expenses, childcare, all sorted.

You asked to bring your friend.

And we thought

Great.

Double diversity!

But as soon as you joined our group

On the very first Skype call

You seemed angry -

Resentful -

That you were being made a spokesperson

For black people.

Well you are black.

Isn't that what diversity is all about?

Different voices.

Of course you can't speak

For all black people...

Oh?

People of colour is a better term, is it?

Thanks.

You see, you're helping already.

You said we were blind
To colonialism and slavery.
I think we all know that bad things
Happened in days gone by.

That's right Hamish,
William Wilberforce ended it all.
Jazz hands!
That's it ... though I don't quite see everyone's hands.

We're all *Guardian* readers here.
We were raised on Sesame Street!
You don't see us as racist do you...?
Oh, I see. More complicated...

But Stephen Lawrence was the fault of
A racist police force.
Incidents of racism in schools and universities are decre...
Oh.

They're increasing are they?
I guess they would be.
Given what's happening
In the world.

But the point is you are here now,
Representing those people.
We're more diverse, thanks to you.
That's good, isn't it..?

Sorry...? Tokenism?
Institutional racism?
You're being unreasonable...
Look – you didn't get any jazz hands.

So, we're running out of time.
I really hope we can have another diverse chat soon...
Being patronising?
I don't think that's fair.

I've been on a facilitation training course.
And one of the trainers
Was a person of colour.
Maybe both.

You see,
Now I'm learning
Your jargon
Too.

This satire draws on the experiences white middle-class participatory workers in contexts where the privilege associated with our skin colour and relative economic security gives us power. It also reflects conversations with colleagues of colour who have been at the receiving end of such processes. Speaking personally, it took me around two decades of working in multicultural settings to really understand the power a white person has in the context of facilitating a process where people of colour are present. It took many mistakes and patient explanations from my co-workers for me to accept my responsibility to question the source of that power.

For years, myself and other white colleagues have used the language of anti-racism, but putting it into practice has demanded more of us than just being sensitive to questions raised by people of colour with whom we work. It required us to ask difficult questions of ourselves about our power in the context of participatory work. Our mistakes often expose our ignorance of the depth of the colonial legacy that can underlie processes of dialogue between people of different racial backgrounds.

My personal identity, and those of other white participatory workers, remains invisible because it is so all-pervasive. It is the norm. Many of us wish to address the patriarchal and structural violence that underlay European colonialism. Yet these oppressive processes continue to be perpetuated through male researchers of European origin. Our task is made more difficult because we are caught in the same white-walled labyrinth as that encountered by people of colour (People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016). Unless we make a special effort, white people will continue to talk to people who mainly look and sound like ourselves.

5.9 Conclusions

To resist co-option by the powerful and being drawn into tokenistic, or even tyrannical, projects, participatory workers must systematically reflect on the lessons of the history of participatory work. Critical accounts of participatory processes, particularly as seen from the perspective of those of those co-performative witnesses labelled 'participants', barely exist in the published literature (though see Box 3). I am part of a Collective committed to documenting and reflecting this history (e.g. People's Knowledge Editorial Collective, 2016). Whether we are undertaking action research to transform the food system or in any other area, we must make greater efforts to share control with non-dominant groups in processes whereby we develop safeguards against dominant groups, including academic researchers, perpetuating existing forms of oppression.

Other chapters in this volume emphasise efforts to help build the capacity of people working at the grassroots, particularly those without formal training, to become participatory workers in relation to the food system (e.g. Vadjunec, 2017; Madhusudhan, 2017; Sanchez Rodriguez and de la Pava Cataño, 2017). Such

initiatives will help to ensure that they work on an equal footing with those of us based within institutions, some of whose larger motives may conflict with those of popular movements for social justice.

The pessimism of some who see participatory processes as inherently supportive of oppressive political systems should not give way to defeatism among the rest of us. The history of struggles in India, Latin America and the civil rights movement in the US shows that we can all be co-performative witnesses working together towards positive change. The rise of populist politics in the West, including the Brexit vote in the UK and the election of President Donald Trump in the US, are a product of those who might have shared the values and perhaps even been part of, earlier struggles for human rights. Lacking effective processes of participatory democracy that might have highlighted their concerns, they have gained a voice using the only means the current political system allows them. Attempts to bring about food justice must be seen within this fractured political context. Whatever the issue, the scale of current challenges should bring new urgency to all our efforts to work towards genuine participatory processes of change.

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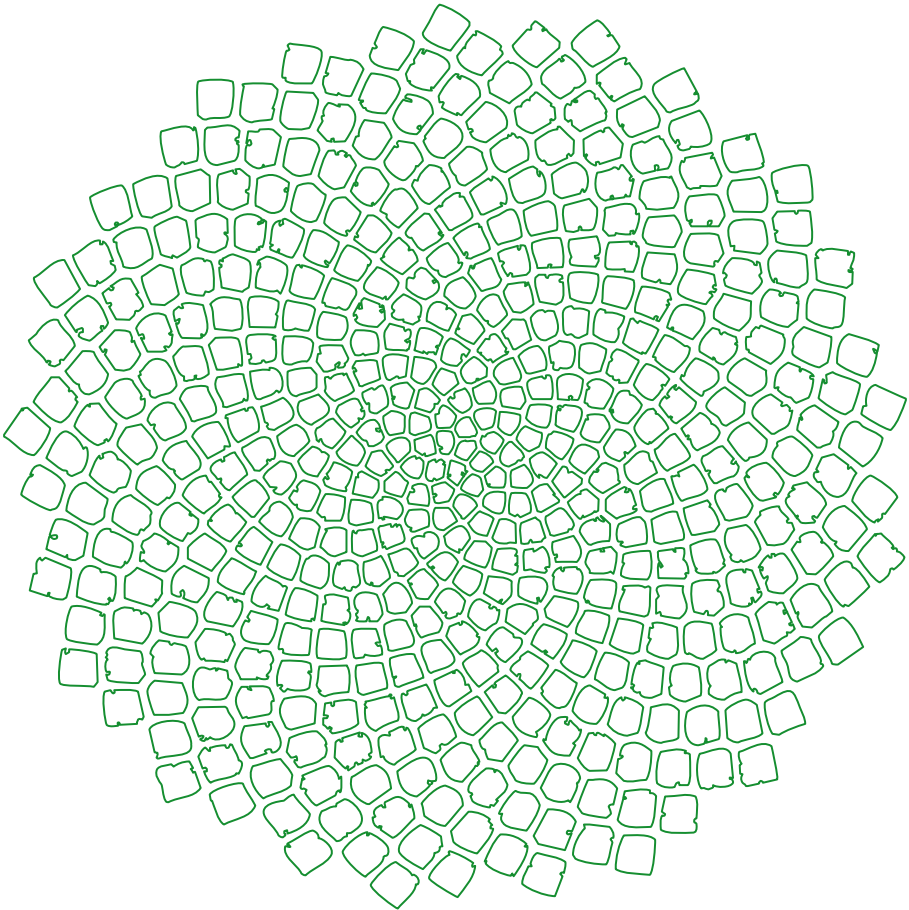
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6



Recovering Andean food wisdom: participatory methods and food sovereignty in the Peruvian Andes

Maruja Salas and Timmi Tillmann

with contributions/testimonies from Severino Mamani, Pastora Jinchuña, Presentación Velásquez, Rufino Chambi Sumi, Juan Vilca, Betzabé Baca, Basilia Quispe Hanco and Antonio Pineda

Geographical location: Peru

Chapter highlights: Wisdom dialogues allowed Andean farmers to have meaningful discussions with scientists about the farming issues affecting them.

These encounters stimulated ideas and feelings, opened up divergent points of view and put a new perspective on the meaning of producing healthy, tasty and sovereign food.

They also led to us appreciate the need to host small, private groups rather than mass events; the advantage of visualised outcomes and facilitator teams (acting as mediators); and the occurrence of unforeseeable surprises (both positive and critical).

Keywords: Wisdom dialogue, participatory action research, Andes, Indigenous knowledge.

6.1 Introduction

Since 2007, we have been part of the global initiative 'Democratising Food and Agricultural Research', which is located in the Andes, Iran, South Asia and West Africa. We address the world food crisis by surfacing the knowledge and practices of

Andean peasants in Peru as valuable contributions to redesigning food systems and agricultural policies. Participatory action research (PAR), that is creating favourable spaces for Andean peasants to reflect and act regarding their food systems, has opened up several processes and highlighted their complex cosmovision and culinary practices regarding the land, seeds, agricultural biodiversity and forms of governance (see Salas 2013).

From the vast PAR repertoire of methods, the following were applied:

- Workshopping, that is generating knowledge in interactive groups, including understanding about food and classification of systems of food
- Visualisation, representing and explaining knowledge in the farmers' own cultural graphic and oral codes
- Community video, including Andean peasant films in which they could see and reflect on their food practices
- Role playing, acting out meaningful experiences regarding food
- Wisdom dialogue, to bring people to a common understanding about food-related issues beyond the epistemological differences between knowledge systems

In our contribution to this volume, we focus here on the methodology of wisdom dialogues between the wise elders of the participating communities and scientists from academic institutes in Puno. Firstly, we explain the meaning of wisdom dialogue within the frame of PAR; secondly, we present the peasant actors and their livelihoods as well as the teams necessary for organising the wisdom dialogues. The third part consists of the wisdom dialogue process and, in the fourth part, we describe the four topics of the wisdom dialogue and the discussions, differences and outcomes. The final two parts present conclusions about the achievements of the wisdom dialogues and the longer affirmation process with Andean Project for Food Sovereignty (PASA) and we reflect upon our role and relations as external advisors. The biographies of some of the wise elders involved are presented in separate boxes.

6.2 Wisdom dialogues

PAR frames the wisdom dialogues that involve partners, in this case peasants (wise elders) and scientists, in a mutual construction of knowledge in which both parties learn and exchange ideas, feelings, images, beliefs, notions, concepts, practices, histories, wishes and experiences. The aim is to achieve a common understanding on which to base joint action. The wisdom of the elders is based on several principles: seeds are persons, the Earth is a mother, the mountains are sacred, the springs connect to the underworld and one can communicate with the wind, the stars and the frost. The elders construct time in agro-ceremonial cycles, celebrate rituals according to the flow of the seasons and, at every stage of farming, they ask Mother Earth and the sacred mountains for permission. Their knowledge is interwoven with a complex

repertoire of ideas, a sophisticated and dynamic universe of explanations that are impossible to reduce, quantify or simplify.

The underlying reason for these dialogues is that any person or knowledge system cannot know everything about a subject, because knowledge is incommensurable. We satisfy the desire to know by searching for meaning, questioning and making sense of our own way of thinking regarding a topic or issue that may take us through unexplored domains. Further along, we make sense by creating synergies between other forms of knowledge in a dialogic fashion. We see wisdom dialogue in the sense of 'intercultural translation' (de Souza Santos 2014: 215) as a learning process between different knowledge systems (Andean and scientific).

Dialogue sets up a scenario in which both partners are equally interested in their search for meaning regarding a topic. The interlocutors break the dichotomy of knower versus ignorant by means of personal conversation, which invites joint reflection. When dialogue takes place, both partners feel acknowledged and aware of their differences, which are considered with respect.

Authoritarianism, that is imposing one's truth or uncritical acceptance of other truths as one's own, suppresses mutual understanding and intercultural translation. Dialogue encourages mutual understanding of partners' views while noting the differences in knowledge; differences are perceived, but the desire to learn one from another is the same, at equal footing. Both want to gain insights and ideas that are long lasting for their experiences and actions. And that is the political resonance of dialogue, that out of different understandings, new, innovative perspectives are born from the encounter of both wisdom systems.



Figure 6.1.

To achieve a fruitful dialogue, conditions must be fulfilled by both partners: scientists and wise men and women. In the Food Sovereignty Initiative, a team of coordinators, facilitators and video-makers was needed to organise preparatory visits to the research centres and conduct dialogues before the first round of actual wisdom dialogues could take place. This interactive process included two central days with specific scenarios.

In the beginning, the wise men and women (see biography boxes) had mixed feelings about the dialogue. Although they had prepared themselves by graphically documenting their topics, the scientists were still unknown to them. They were unsure about things: would they be treated without arrogance? Were they explaining their food sovereignty topics in such a way that there would be no disillusionment or misunderstandings? One step to gaining confidence was that the elders established a code of conduct regarding respectful greeting, patiently explaining their knowledge, asking the scientists to listen to them like siblings and see their reality. They also offered the scientists the best food, reflecting together about the value of food from the fields and walking with them through the fields so that the scientists felt touched emotionally.

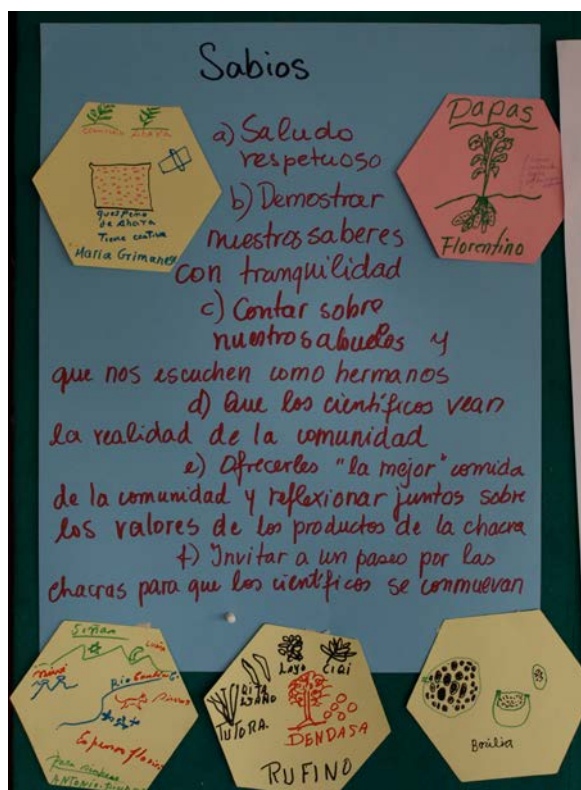


Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.3.

6.3 The farmers and teams that support the dialogue

The highland communities in Puno

Since June 2008, farmers from three ecological zones in the southern Peruvian Andes have been reflecting on their food cultures and transforming their ideas into innovative actions aiming for food sovereignty – locally and regionally. Along the shores of Lake Titicaca in Puno, four Aymara communities in the higher zones (Perka, Vilurcuni, Sanquira and Ayrumas Carumas) and the Quechua community of Aymaña from Carabaya accepted the opportunity to talk about their daily food. These communities articulated original ideas about how and to what extent they wanted to produce diversified food as the basis for the continuity of community life as well as Peruvian society more broadly. Working on these issues, they gained varying degrees of awareness and confidence in their culinary imaginations.

Five years later, the participants and their groups were able to clearly express and defend their particular life visions and food perceptions through a process that began with recalling their oral traditions. Individuals interpreted afresh the celestial signs that tell when fields need to be nurtured and when to increase their seed repositories; and they reconsidered their relationships within the family, the community and with nature. They have recreated permanent seed stores according to customary rules. Remembering how to ask the hearth to be steadfast, their yearning for traditional dishes made them recreate old recipes, with much appreciation for their earthen stoves, clay pots and wooden cooking utensils.

The focus on local gastronomy created a fruitful, sensuous space that was rich in ideas that encompassed a more meaningful whole: the continuity of the earth's life cycle,

the rugged mountain landscape and the people of yesterday, today and tomorrow. The cultural preference for food obtained directly from the generous soil re-established the ancient pact with *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), who is bountiful year after year in response to the devotion and respect that she receives from farmers. Sometimes she nurtures with her own blood – the *puka cachi* (rock salt); at other times, she offers *chajo* (clayish soil) with a high mineral content that nourishes people especially during times of scarcity. The Aymara and Quechua communities gathered together and exchanged their wisdom and practices in an ongoing recreation of the profound Andean belief that everything – plants, animals, landscapes, human and divine communities alike – is alive and therefore nurturing the cycle of life is a fundamental value.

Food became an empathetic space among the peoples of the shores and mountains surrounding Lake Titicaca as well as from the Vilcanota valley. They recognised the magnetism of sharing the taste of local dishes based on *mashua*, *oca*, *olluco*, *tarwi*, *kiwicha*, *cañihua*, *quinua*, and a wealth of potato varieties, both sweet and bitter. They acknowledged the importance of diversifying crops in the *aynoqas* (sectoral rotation fields), which look like gardens hanging from the steepest Andean slopes, requiring the use of local seeds and the collective coordination of farming and long-term territorial rights. They reconsidered *ara* (wild quinoa) in terms of its nutritional value, especially for children and the elderly when it is made into the drink *chicha* and eaten as porridge.

The supporting teams

This type of interaction requires a team of coordinators, facilitators and video-makers engaged in the organisation of the dialogue process. The implementation of the wisdom dialogues required the agile and efficient methodological support of teams with different roles. The members of the teams are local activists, often coming from rural families (Quechua and Aymara). They have professional backgrounds and are committed to the cultural affirmation of their communities, having a close and trustful relationship and speaking the same language as the wise elders.



Figure 6.4. Coordination team

Coordination team: this team is fully embedded in the vision and practice of dialogue and is engaged to ensure that it occurs in a transparent sequence of participatory steps that achieve the objective of exchanging knowledge. The coordination team sets up a plan with the consent of the facilitators and video-makers. This team stays in contact and communication with the scientists and wisdom networks, renewing the epistemological character of the event so that it does not turn into a political meeting or a top-down lecture.

The team of facilitators: the main task of the facilitators is to create a mutual learning space for the scientists and wise men and women. This is achieved through the elaboration of a detailed script of the central days of the wisdom dialogue using imaginative tools that reveal the philosophy and practice of dialogue. The sessions work best when facilitators divide large groups into smaller ones with no more than eight persons so that face-to-face interaction on a topic is possible. They encourage the scientists to pose questions to the wise men and women in a visualised way, using key words and mind maps, structuring questions and answers as they happen. At crucial moments, the facilitator can subdivide the plenary into pairs so that more ideas can be generated. For example, asking the question: which points of the research agenda do we want to contribute to?



Figure 6.5.

Video-makers team: the team of video-makers (trained community members and activists) take turns to document all sessions during a wisdom dialogue. Firstly, their task is to produce a video covering the highlights of the event to be seen by all involved as a reminder of the commitments made between scientists and the wise men and women. Secondly, the video can be used as a methodological experience for other groups, to disseminate the dialogic practice and to prepare the space for political dialogue.

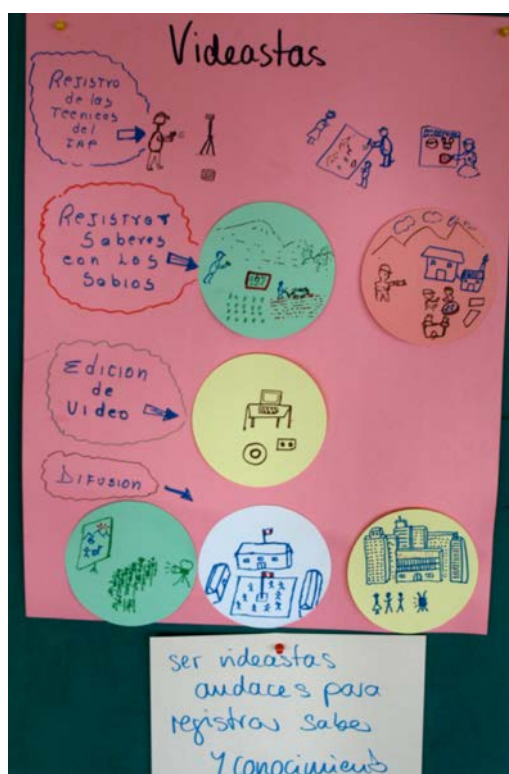


Figure 6.6.

6.4 The dialogue process

Previous visits

The members of the Alpaca Wisdom Network visited the National Agricultural Research Centre in Quimsachata. They were able to see where the intellectual life of the scientists takes place, their research methods and communication styles. They had a first glimpse of what they share in common and their differences regarding alpaca breeding and colour classification. They also visited the Dean and a professor of the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences in the Altiplano University of Puno. Both parties were surprised to find common topics of interest, which gave the scientists a reason to accept the invitation to the wisdom dialogue in Ayrumas Carumas.

Dialogue rehearsal

Before the actual dialogue in the communities, the wisdom networks attended a meeting in which they presented their knowledge to scientists from several disciplines. It was a preparation for both and allowed each side to witness the different ways of understanding topics. But most of all it generated a disposition to gradually enter into breaking the existing power relationships between scientists and farmers. The members of the wisdom networks presented their visualised inputs and the scientists listened: this represented a role reversal and a new egalitarian practice.

It was interesting also to break down stereotypical views about the scientists. They are not a bloc; on the contrary, among them are individuals who hold different views about the meaning of knowledge.

First dialogical encounters in the communities

The first day, wise men and women set up a display of their knowledge clustered in subtopics. In some cases, other members of the community, local authorities and schoolchildren got involved in complementing and validating the charts.

The second day, the scientists arrived and presented themselves in terms of their fields of knowledge and their sense of belonging to the scientific community. Among the scientists were anthropologists, agronomists, educators, university professors and development officials from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as from the state.

The facilitator renewed the reasons for coming together and the complexity of the wisdom dialogue, as well as the aim of engaging in a long-term relationship in the exercise of food sovereignty.

Moving experiences: one expectation of the wisdom network was to actively involve the senses and feelings and not just the intellect during the dialogue. Therefore, a moment of surprise and inspiration was prepared. This was the live presentation of alpacas of all colours. Each animal was presented by men and women who described the alpaca's colour, age and their attachment to it. They also spoke about the origin of the colours, the medicinal properties of the hair and, last but not least, the loneliness that herders feel in an unnatural all-white flock of alpacas. It was a magic moment.

Presentation of wisdom and the professionals' feedback: after each presentation of the Gallery of Wisdom, the facilitator invited the scientists to give a polyphonic feedback, which was shared in a visualised form. For the wise men and women this was recognition of their valuable efforts.

Face-to-face conversations: the classic dialogue situations included apparent encounters and contradictions, since they initiated a deep interest in the underlying reasons for differences of perception, which in this case were due to epistemological dimensions of the exchange. Such moments highlighting the evidence of differences are crucial and should be translated into the research agenda and the topics to be followed up jointly.

6.5 The topics for wisdom dialogue

The colour and natural treatment of alpacas

The whitening of alpaca herds has been taking place for more than three decades, pushed by the commercial wool industry. White wool earns higher prices in the market since it is more suitable for uniform dyeing processes and large-scale manufacturing.

While white alpacas fetch a higher price in the market, they are also highly vulnerable to disease. They are not adapted to the high altitudes, are genetically weaker and their abortion rate is higher. Scientific breeding methods do not fit with traditional alpaca-raising practices. When white alpacas get sick, the herders' natural medicine is unable to heal them (neither can veterinary treatment at times). Meanwhile, Peruvian gastronomy has discovered alpaca meat and it is offered in the menus of fancy city restaurants. This has created demand for large-scale alpaca meat production.

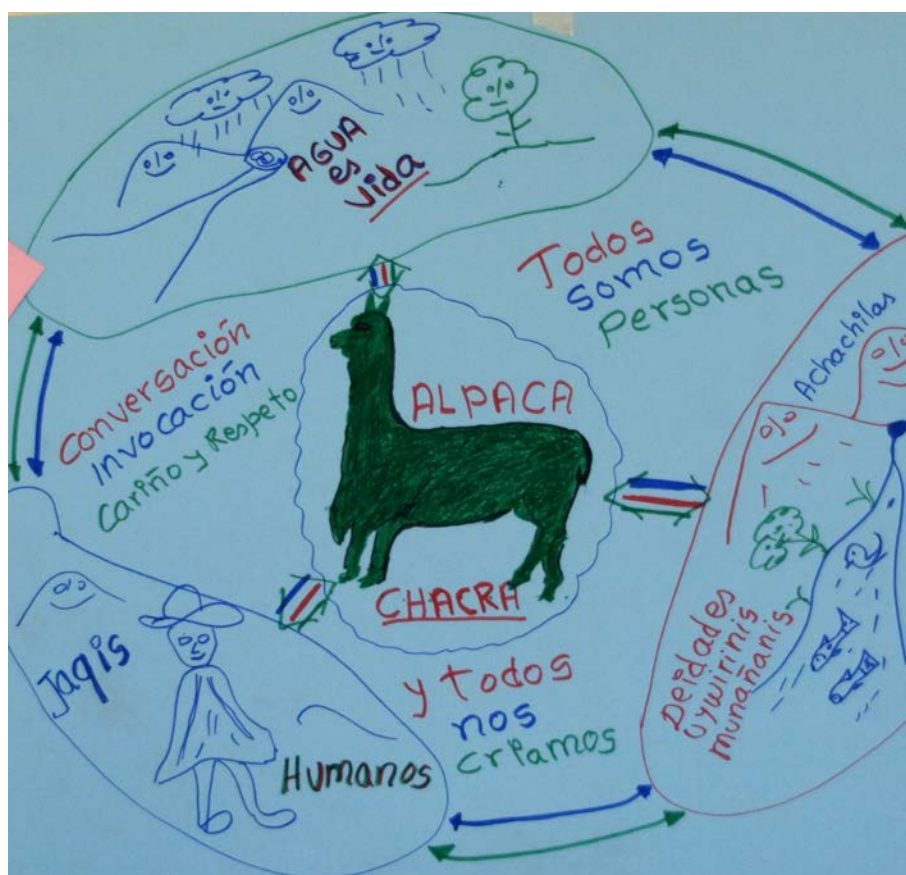


Figure 6.7.

All these challenges shake the epistemological basis of traditional alpaca husbandry. The wise men and women from Ayrumas Carumas, living in the watershed of the Rio Blanco in a wide and endless mountainous landscape, the perfect environment for flocks of alpacas and llamas, decided to stand up for what they knew. First, the varied colours of alpaca wool have a sacred dimension since they emanate from deep underground water sources. Second, breeding alpacas is not a simple technological matter, but requires the knowledgeable management of a highly complex combination of natural and ceremonial factors. In order to talk to scientists, the Andean alpaca breeders want to organise what they know, hoping to arrive at an understanding and developing natural methods of healing and breeding so that alpaca meat does not lose its flavour and nutrition, which derives from clean pasturelands and pure mountain air.



Figure 6.8.

In Ayrumas Carumas the dialogue focused on the cosmivision, the landscape, the herbal treatments and the colours of the alpaca. The alpaca networks arrived at the point of intercultural translation with the differences about the origin of colours. For wise men and women, it was due to the *ispallas* (water sources), whereas for the scientists the phenomenon is explicable through the concentration of melanin in the hair.

The diversity of potatoes

Since the 1950s, the Peruvian national extension service and the International Potato Centre (CIP) have been collecting genetic material from peasant communities to improve potato varieties. High-yielding potatoes are part of the national agrarian policy to promote market-oriented products for mass consumption and go along with the requirements of industrial agricultural technology. This policy is causing an alarming reduction in Altiplano agrobiodiversity as well as contaminating soils and the human food chain due to the extensive use of agrochemicals.

The lacustrine area of Yunguyo, where the wise men and women come from, is the cradle of potato domestication. Modernisation has not convinced the people from this area to stop valuing diversity. They cherish the more than 60 varieties of potatoes they farm, a heritage that is constantly augmented through the exchange of seeds, most of all because the potato diversity is the matrix of a rich Andean culinary repertoire.

The wisdom network is getting ready to exchange their ideas and practices about farming based on reading the stars, rainfall patterns and the worship of nature. They want to show scientists that having a wide variety of potatoes is important for the preparation and consumption of a large repertoire of dishes that communities can enjoy all year. In the dialogue, they wanted to invite the scientists to visit and walk around the *aynoqa* system, to learn the rules of mutual help and soil fertility achieved through long-term field rotation of seven, ten or more years, and to taste the incomparable flavour that comes from the local seeds and from growing in small plots on slopes fertilised with organic manure. In Yunguyo the wisdom dialogue focused on potatoes, the preciousness of each variety, and the *aynoqas*.

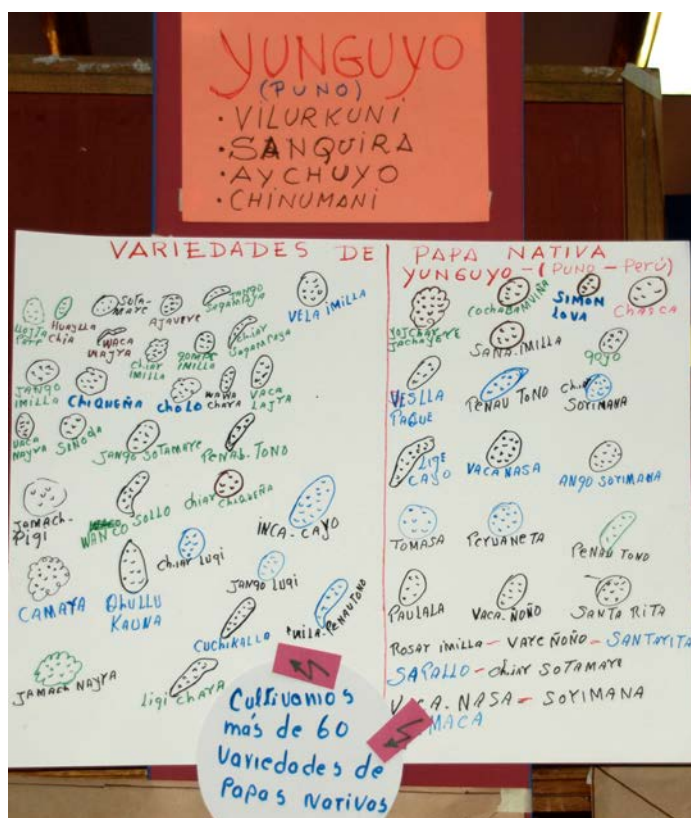


Figure 6.9.



Figure 6.11.

The endemic fish of Titicaca are related to the *pukaras*, a concept and a space in the lake that explains the ongoing regeneration of the local species. It is a sacred source of life that needs to be taken into consideration. For the scientists, repopulating endemic fish is a matter of establishing a well administered germplasm bank. Surprisingly enough, a shift occurred, with a wise man claiming the need for state intervention to declare the *pukaras* as sanctuaries or untouchable spaces, while the scientist proposed a bottom-up approach with communities taking matters into their own hands to repopulate the lake species.

Agropastoral life

Zones located higher than 4,000 metres above sea level are normally perceived as extreme areas for human habitation since diurnal temperature ranges can be as large as 30° C. One day in the Andes can be a sequence of the four seasons in other parts of the world. In such high altitude pastures there are special types of vegetation given the generic name of *ichu* and the trees are very small. The agricultural landscape consists basically of fields of potato varieties that the market has not yet discovered. From the point of view of infrastructure, the higher zones of the Carabaya region seem untouched due to their inaccessibility.

The communities of Aymaña and Chimboya are located at the foot of several snow-capped mountains. Climatic variations allow for the growing of a great diversity of Andean tubers and fruits; they also enable the long-term storage of food, such as *chuño*, used in a variety of Andean dishes for daily consumption. People from Ayrumas Carumas also have hardy alpacas and llamas, which provide them with wool, meat and much else. Llamas transport all the excess produce of meat, potato and cheese from the Altiplano across a mountain pass to the lower zones in Cusco department once a year to exchange with corn.



Figure 6.13.

The wise men and women are motivated to enter into a dialogue with the scientists to talk about the perspectives of a seminomadic life in the context of climate change, which is being manifested in the higher zones as a general warming. In Aymaña the wisdom dialogue concentrated on the cosmovision of alpaca breeders, the annual cycle for llamas and alpacas, the food calendar and the high-altitude Andean livelihood.

In the case of the potato network, the farmers explained that the *aynoqa* system is key to understanding flowering diversity. For the scientists, this was not convincing since they put more emphasis on the certification and management of varieties. Therefore, one of the farmers invited the scientists to visit her to see the reality of the varieties in the field, which formed new insights and research perspectives.

Research commitments

The closest we came to an agreement in collaboration was the invitation from the scientists to the wise men and women to hold a lecture at the university. They also were looking forward to publishing and disseminating the topics presented by the networks. The representatives of the Puno regional government proposed to declare Ayrumas Carumas an officially recognised ecological community, which will help to support the communities in cultivating their traditional knowledge and defending the sanctity of the environment. An officially recognised ecological community cannot be touched by the concessions of mining companies. As usual there were many development proposals without a direct relationship to the topics.

Evaluation

After three months, the wise men and women gathered in Chucuito (Puno) again to compare the phases of the process and to learn more about the dialogue experience. This evaluation evidenced the importance of a gradual step-by-step preparation to clarify how the wisdom dialogue would be carried out, in a way that was completely different from the classically asymmetrical relationship between professional development workers and rural people. The ongoing opportunities to meet their peers gave the wise men and women a sense of familiarity and security. Having different topics to focus on stimulated authentic learning.

The dialogue itself took different routes. In Ayrumas Carumas, the wisdom network divided into subgroups having their own dynamics of stimulating reflection. The community members, authorities and children actively took part in the presentations.

The endemic fish topic was a mass event of more than 300 persons, including community members, schoolchildren, teachers, government officials, visitors and observers. All who attended had great expectations. The handful of wise men and women who had been preparing for the process were overwhelmed by community members who thought trout fingerlings would be distributed. Local authorities elaborated petitions to the government officials.

In the case of the potato network, there was a linguistic coincidence in that both scientists and wise men and women could speak Aymara, which took them on a joint spiritual journey; yet they had opposing views on potato diversity.

Follow up

One commitment that was clearly followed up was an appointment to settle the differences over *aynoqas* and the nurturing of diversity during a subsequent encounter in February when the potato flowers would be blooming.

6.6 The revitalising impact of the wisdom dialogue

The dialogue has enriched the lives of wise men and women as they proudly admit. The personal, face-to-face encounters with the scientists confirmed to them that their knowledge is multifaceted and ritually powerful. At the same time, it is practical, such as their observations on natural indicators, nurturing potato diversity, reproducing alpacas of many colours, knowing how to call the rain, chasing away hail and cooking and eating what is produced in the fields and the lake.

The Andean farmers feel very encouraged that they had meaningful encounters with the scientists and established friendships. The high number of male scientists surprised them, whereas in the communities most knowledge is shared between men and women, with the exception that women are the guardians of seeds and food storage. Wise men and women realise that their knowledge is not private property and it cannot be sold, bought or stolen. Understanding and sharing is what mobilises

them to continue the wisdom dialogues. “We have learned from our wisdom,” they said. “We have recalled how we were before, now we will not forget what we are and that is how we want to continue to be in the future.”

The wisdom network members recognise that at the beginning of the process, everything was very different. Coming from an oral culture, the spoken word has always been the medium of communication – in Quechua, Aymara or Spanish. In the past, their knowledge and practices were conveyed to external interlocutors like researchers and development workers, and followed their script; this knowledge was then documented or edited in films by the interlocutors on behalf of the Andean peasants.

Therefore, in the PASA process, the generation of knowledge and actions about food sovereignty took place within a new power balance. Wise men and women first reflected inward deeply and then illustrated their ideas on big sheets of paper, their drawings triggered by a flow of personal, free associations and selected memories about agriculture and food. Their visualisations showed the plurality of their subjective experiences. In this process of the visualisation of ideas, an alternative form of knowing is emerging, that is, a mental itinerary of thinking individually but sharing as a group, legitimising testimonies by adding, welcoming and not censoring or criticising.

The wisdom dialogues stimulated ideas and feelings, opened up divergent points of view and put into a new perspective of time the meaning of producing healthy, tasty and sovereign food. The face-to-face interactions between representatives of scientific institutions and Andean farmers gave rise to unexpected feelings and spontaneous responses. It was especially rewarding to see the scientists acknowledging and positively responding to the food wisdom demonstrated by the network members. The sincere, attentive and mutual respect between the scientists and farmers when focusing on their knowledge differences was a pleasant surprise for both parties; this has set the terms of engagement for a common agenda in the future.

All in all, the spiritual bonds within participating Andean communities have been strengthened by greater observance of rituals related to animal reproduction, seed exchange and field clearance, since these are fruitful occasions for talking about the importance and practice of maintaining a good relationship with *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and the *Apus* (sacred mountains) who guard over what they eat. Community leaders who have joined the wisdom meetings have come to see the power of producing natural food from their own fields instead of depending on industrial foodstuffs.

Through the lens of their own life stories they explained what this knowledge was about, how they had acquired it, to whom it is being transmitted, why it is changing and who benefits. It is important to note that this reflexivity challenges some entrenched positions about the role of indigenous knowledge in development, in particular the view that Andean culture is a collective one in which individual thinking has no place. In the practice of action-reflection-action, the wisdom networks

have gained the power of their ideas, generated in groups. They found a common language to understand and defend food sovereignty, exploring their wisdom with growing confidence.

At that point of the process, the men and women of the Altiplano entered into a dialogue with some scientists who had the intellectual capacity and power to transform the subalternity of their wisdom into a foreseeable cognitive justice.

6.7 Our roles

We (Maruja and Timmi) are anthropologists from Germany and Peru, and have lived for many years in an Andean community learning about local agriculture, cosmovision, cultural traditions and ecological knowledge (Salas 1996, Tillmann 1997). We consider ourselves in the wisdom dialogues as midwives in a process of knowledge generation. We have accompanied the PASA communities and teams over the past six years. We have stayed in the communities, in the houses of the wise elders and have become close friends, sharing adventures, food and daily life. Our role consisted in giving methodological support to the different teams creating a learning environment.

Favourable conditions include the following:

- The mutual acknowledgement that the partners in dialogue are knowledge subjects.
- The use of continuous visualisation during the whole process involves all, helps interactivity, contextualises experiences and contributes to identifying the content and the meaning of knowledge.
- The core of a dialogical relation is the chance to construct, deconstruct, agree and recreate as a group the contents or themes approached. The partners are full of experiences, ways of thinking, feeling and meaning by which knowledge and action make sense to the knowers.
- Joint reflection among scientists and wise men and women brings about a transition through wisdom routes that has not been explored and breaks the intellectual barriers to empowerment
- Having sensorial intelligent and emotional experiences elicits synergy in the wisdom dialogue

Unfavourable factors to avoid include the following:

- A mass event and impersonal atmosphere full of official discourse that is degrading culture to folkloristic shows
- Confused expectations, roles, agendas, far from the wisdom exchange that should occur in the dialogue

- Allowing the distortion of the process by giving space to political demands or developmentalist projects
- Forgetting that part of the dialogue is to set up a common research agenda that is meaningful to both partners

The outcomes are diverse autonomous processes of personal, group or community engagement. Some members of the food knowledge network of wise elders are advisers in regional politics, others are engaged in NGOs and some continue their life as community leaders, spreading the learnings of the experience. The community video-makers continue to practise their skills. Some of the NGO facilitators have gained a new professional profile through this experience, while others have gone in the opposite direction to offer the skills learned uncritically to the labour market.

This was not our first and only experience with wisdom dialogue. In 1990 we organised a series of workshops, the first with farmers from Huancavelica recovering the history and characteristics of potato diversity and production. We then entered a wisdom dialogue with agronomists specialised in genetic improvement of seed potatoes and finally undertook a reflection about the dialogue with social scientists. We have learned all the way since then through diverse interactions between Indigenous peoples and scientists in Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia about the timing and steps of the processes (preparatory construction of wisdom, dialogue itself and follow up), the need for small private groups and not mass events, the advantage of visualised outcomes and facilitator teams (like mediators), and the unforeseeable surprises (both positive and critical) during this commitment with the people. We have never regretted being involved in such rich and meaningful experiences.

Life stories

Severino Mamani, Ayrumas Carumas, Ácora, Puno (Aymara) - Alpaca



Severino feels at home at elevations higher than 4,000 meters, sharing the landscape with several alpacas of various shades.

He has been an expert on the heights of Moquegua, Tacna and Arequipa since childhood, when his father took him on trips to cure the alpacas across the region. His fame as a healer grew and since he has never been to school he feels free to dream.

The communal, district and regional authorities recognise his expertise as an alpaca breeder and that is how he is able to provide his services in many places. As a member of the wisdom network he is also expanding his knowledge to wider regions, to Bolivia, Cuzco and even Asia.

Pastora Jinchuña, Ayrumas Carumas, Ácora, Puno (Aymara) - Alpaca



Pastora was born in Ayrumas Carumas. As a child she took care of the llamas but was more inclined to help her grandmother's alpaca flocks. The colours and many uses of alpaca wool attracted her attention and her grandmother tested her interest with a Llaulla, a rock that looks like an alpaca. Her curiosity helped her to become a natural healer and to gain traditional knowledge about breeding healthy alpacas.

Presentación Velásquez, Yunguyo, Puno (Aymara) - Potato



Presentación learned from her grandmother to cultivate Andean crops in the *aynoqas* as well as chase away hail by mobilising the community. She has promised her granddaughters to continue to work in her fields until the end of her life, so that all the family will have plenty of Andean tubers and grains to eat without having to buy them in the market.

Rufino Chambi Sumi, Vilurcuni, Yunguyo, Puno (Aymara) - Potato



At 65, Rufino has been a farmer all his life, following in the footsteps of his grandparents. His image cannot be detached from ploughing with a team of oxen. From his mother he learned to decode signs in nature and with the *yatiris* (charismatic spiritual leaders), he has learned to tie the wind, call the rain and chase away frost and hail.

With the wisdom network he has recalled the meaning of food so that now his wife Francisca Chachaque is cooking for all the family. His memories have made him feel stronger and full of hope because his sons and grandchildren are receptive to his knowledge. He feels that he is allowed to forget this knowledge now because all his memories are with younger members of his family and community.

Juan Vilca, Perka, Chucuito, Puno (Aymara) - Fish



Juan is from the community of Perka, and is a son and grandson of fishermen. He learned the rituals to avoid accidents and evil winds, and he knows where the *pukara*, the centres of fish life, are; here he makes food offerings to the lake. He has witnessed the diminishing of small-scale fisheries and community organisations in his lifetime. In spite of belonging to the wisdom network he is convinced that the NGOs and the state will have the last word in the lake's management.

Betzabe Baca, Chucuito, Puno (Aymara) - Fish



Betzabe was born in Perka, near Lake Titicaca. As a child she went fishing with her parents, and was in charge of the nets: these were unforgettably emotional and exciting years with good food. Betzabe and her sisters have revived the dishes that their grandmother used to cook and continue the tradition of devotion to the *mamaqota* (Mother Lake). She feels sad because of the contamination of the lake and the dwindling native fish species.

Basilia Quispe Hanco, Aymaña, Carabaya Province, Puno (Quechua) - Livelihood



Basilia lives in Chimboya, a highland Quechua community, where she tends a flock of llamas, a skill learned from her parents. The rhythms of her life follow the pattern of her care for her animals, especially in September and October. She heals them with natural medicine and celebrates timely rituals to keep them alive. Her moments of fullest joy are the birth of llamas, whom she welcomes to life with kisses and caresses. She keeps at bay the adult dominant males, who may threaten the baby llamas. Young llamas and their mothers prefer dry areas, otherwise they fall ill. Basilia's family and her herd of animals grew after she married at the age of 20.

When her first husband died, her herd dwindled, but now that she is remarried her flock of llamas is even larger. She has never attended school, but is able to cure several llama illnesses with medicinal plants; she can also weave and loves cooking.

Antonio Pineda, Aymaña, Carabaya Province, Puno (Quechua) - Livelihood



Antonio was born in Aymaña. He is highly knowledgeable about many things, including how to read natural indicators, llama herding, travelling and bartering, vegetable seed production, cultivating potatoes, and hunting. His main concern and hope is to engage young people to look at life in the community with respect. His grandchildren understand when he explains that food is like a person – the only difference being that 'food cannot speak'.

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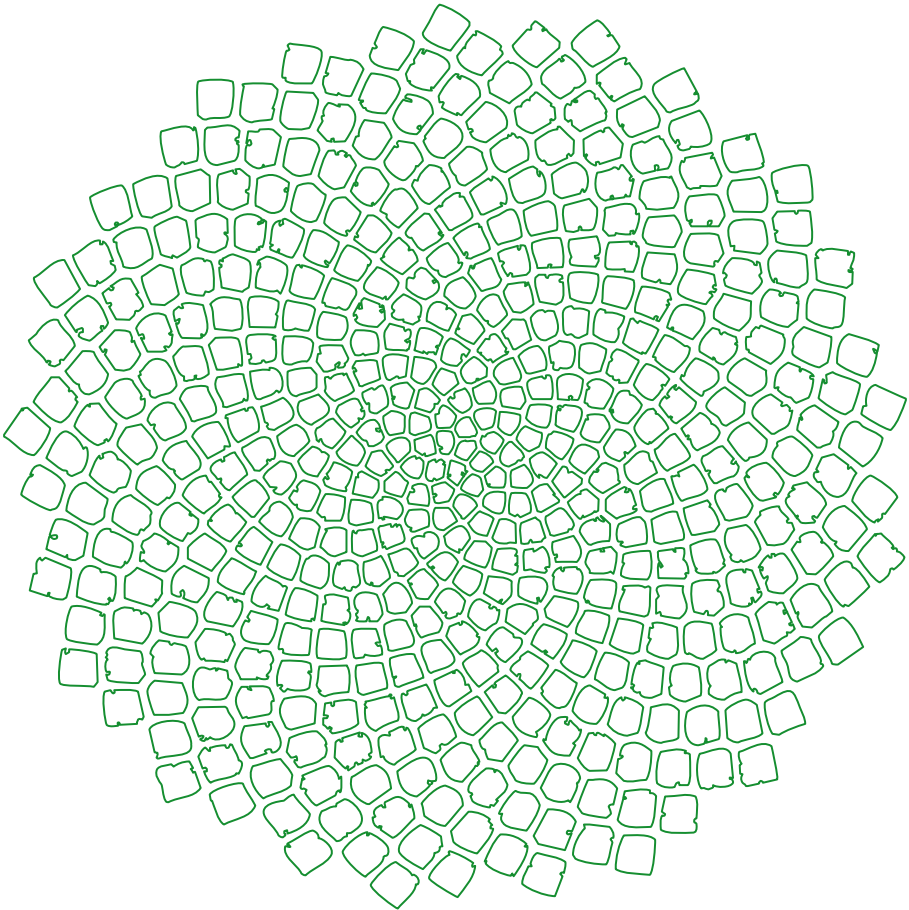
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7



Participatory action research transforming local food systems in India, Iran and Peru

Michel P. Pimbert, Periyapatna V. Satheesh,
Alejandro Argumedo and Taghi M. Farvar

Geographical location: India, Iran, Peru, Germany and UK

Chapter highlights: This chapter shows how the co-creation of knowledge for food sovereignty was part of a participatory process driven by a transformative logic of changing society – rather than just interpreting it. A diversity of complementary participatory methods – including citizens' juries and participatory video – were used to locate practice in an overarching, flexible, open-ended, inclusive, and iterative process of action and reflection for change.

It describes how three groups of traditional peoples are engaged in power-equalizing research in different geographical regions, including how local communities document their knowledge and share it with the rest of the world.

The authors discuss the importance of engaging in knowledge production from the perspectives of traditional communities, - respecting cognitive justice and other processes that give the least powerful actors more significant roles than before in the co-creation of knowledge.

They also describe how participatory action research can have a positive impact at several levels, including policy making, which has a direct influence on the lives and environment of the people conducting the research.

Keywords: Autonomous food systems, biocultural diversity, participatory action research, cognitive justice, food sovereignty.

Box 7.1. Women learning to use video through knowledge exchange

Following a request by the Quechua communities to better document their indigenous knowledge using video, a collective of women peasant video film makers from India were able to visit these communities in the province of Cusco (Peru), in the Potato Park created in 2001 by these Indigenous communities to conserve bio-cultural diversity. The Indian women shared their experiences using video, not only to record events, but also to look back and analyse, and to edit and make the choices on how to present information to people outside their community. The 12-day peasant exchange for mutual learning was a rich encounter for all those who took part. The Potato Park Women's Video Collective increased their knowledge of the research process and the project overall and its outcomes in the drylands of Telengana, from where the Indian peasant women had travelled. Following this peasant exchange in March 2002, the Video Collective worked with the Potato Park communities and barefoot technicians to document traditional knowledge, making documentaries that show how the park came into being and why a rights-based approach can help sustain local livelihoods, diverse food systems and culture as well as biodiversity – from genes to whole landscapes.



Figure 7.1. A community video film maker recording a village level participatory analysis by women farmers in Telengana (India). Photo credit Pastapur Yesu. Figure 7.2. Quechua woman filming a community meeting in the province of Cusco (Peru). Photo credit M. Pimbert

7.1 Introduction

Between January 2000 and June 2015, the Sustaining Local Food Systems, Biodiversity and Livelihoods initiative¹ has collaborated directly with local peasant farmers and Indigenous communities in regenerating biodiversity-rich farming and

¹ The Sustaining Local Food Systems, Biodiversity and Livelihoods initiative was funded by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands, Oxfam-Novib, The Christensen Fund, The New Field Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Between 2000 and 2012, this initiative was coordinated and facilitated by Michel Pimbert at the UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

Box 7.2. Disabling attitudes and behaviours undermine action research for transformation

In our conversations, we often spoke about how disempowering mindsets, attitudes and behaviours undermine people's knowledge and capacity for co-enquiry. For example, Alejandro gave us many examples of the enduring racist and prejudiced attitudes experienced by Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems in Peru when discussing issues of biodiversity, rights and culture with 'educated' decision makers and scientists of Spanish descent. Referring to everyday life in India, Satheesh would tell us how many urban-based middle-class researchers and decision makers believe that small-scale family farmers, women in particular, are backwards and ignorant – and that these peasants and food processors are a relic of the past that should be dispensed with as fast as possible. Taghi also described how in Iran, Indigenous nomadic pastoralists and their biodiversity-conserving practices are marginalised by powerful modernising forces in government and research. Deep-seated de-humanising attitudes based on a feeling of superiority for abstract knowledge learned in university courses and blind application of modern, yet outmoded methodologies, such as those used for assessment of carrying capacity of rangelands and forests, prevent respectful intercultural dialogue and action research for transformation towards sustainable and just food systems. New respectful approaches, such as 'non-equilibrium ecosystems', have shown most classical concepts of rangeland ecology to be erroneous and the indigenous knowledge of nomadic pastoralists to be far closer to reality. Although the fact of seasonal migration has shown itself to be valid ecologically for some 12,000 years, all modern approaches completely ignore this fundamental reality in indigenous rangeland and forest management systems.

locally controlled food systems in India, Iran and Peru. The long-term participatory action research seeks to analyse how – and under what conditions – decentralised governance, peasant and citizen participation, and capacity building can help sustain local food systems, biodiversity and livelihoods in the face of rapid social and environmental change.

The co-authors of this paper have accompanied this action research process as participants and co-enquirers in different countries: Alejandro with Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes, Satheesh with women peasant collectives in the drylands of south India, Taghi in the territories of Indigenous nomadic tribes of pastoralists in Iran, and Michel as overall coordinator providing conceptual and methodological support in each country as well as facilitating local to global links and farmer exchanges for mutual learning across the globe. Here we highlight a few experiences from the perspective of accompaniment, walking together and thinking together about some of the diverse actions and innovations co-produced with local food providers.

Respectful methodologies and processes for transformation

Guided by a common vision and a commitment to respectful participatory processes, this global initiative unfolded in different ways in each region. Local partners were able to decide on the processes, methods and timeframes they felt were most appropriate to their own unique situations.

This type of power-equalising research involves both researchers and non-researchers in close cooperative engagement, jointly producing new knowledge, with mutual learning from the process. Actors involved make sense of the world through efforts to transform it, instead of simply observing and studying peoples' actions and views about reality, in the hope that meaningful change will happen somewhere further down the road. As such, this form of action research is a significant reversal from dominant roles, locations and ways of knowing.

In each situation, participatory action research was the methodology of choice and the main way of knowing and learning together, i.e. a cycle of reflection–action–reflection largely controlled and decided by the peasants and Indigenous communities themselves (Fals Borda 2006, Fals Borda and Rahman 1991).

New knowledge was co-constructed by combining a range of hybrid methodologies and tools from different traditions and locations, each tailored to local needs and goals. These plural and hybrid methods included the following:

- Participatory learning and action methods, visualisation in participatory programmes, and community and participatory video
- Community radio and teleconferencing technology
- Multi-actor learning groups at different scales
- Scholarly studies for peer review publications and working papers
- Peasant-led audits and assessments of national policies and research programmes
- Peasant exchanges for mutual learning within and among countries
- Methods for deliberative and inclusive processes: citizens' juries, scenario workshops, future search, multi-criteria mapping
- Intercultural dialogues rooted in principles of cognitive justice
- Collective recovery of history through the use of prophecies and myths (where community processes and practices are communicated through myths) and traditional forecasting and back-casting techniques and indigenous information coding traditions
- Methodological exchanges between regions to enhance mutual learning and development of a robust research process
- Extended peer reviews to co-validate research outcomes in specific contexts
- Policy and media dialogues at a national and global level to bring local voices into decision making processes and wider debates on the public good

From the start of this process in 2000, all co-authors of this paper have worked with peasant farming and Indigenous nomadic pastoralist communities and their local organisations, making sure that at each stage those communities were able to say

whether they wanted to slow down or not, whether they needed more information, and whether they were happy with the process. In the end the decisions about what activities to pursue and prioritise were made by the communities themselves. It was up to local partners and communities to decide exactly what activities would be most helpful in their situation. Most of the time, the main roles of Alejandro, Satheesh, Taghi and Michel were to listen, facilitate, support, catalyse action, offer a menu of choices after searching for policy and technical information which communities asked for, and secure funds for mutual learning on topics such as participatory video film making in which women from India trained Indigenous Quechua women in Peru (Box 7.1).

As facilitators, we (Alejandro, Michel, Satheesh and Taghi) considered peasants and citizens engaged in this action research to be knowledgeable actors with the ability to be centrally involved in both the 'upstream' choice of strategic research priorities and the design of innovations, as well as in their 'downstream' implementation, spread and regulation. We were aware that viewing food providers and other citizens as knowledgeable actors is, in and by itself, an important safeguard in promoting more power-equalising research. Empathy, respect and solidarity with fellow human beings are important prerequisites here. Without these enabling values, enduring prejudiced views undermine the possibility of seeing ordinary citizens as knowledgeable actors (Box 7.2).

7.3 Research processes and outcomes grow out of each other

Grounded in a bottom-up approach, this participatory action research has advanced by combining traditional knowledge systems with modern science, strengthening agro-ecological production and biodiverse food systems, and spreading peasant-led innovations through horizontal networks and federations of small farmers, Indigenous tribal pastoralists, other Indigenous peoples and food consumers/citizens. Working as co-researchers with activist scholars and practitioners of action research, the farming and Indigenous communities in India, Iran and Peru have developed new institutions and technologies to feed communities sustainably and to influence public policy. Examples of the key peasant-led innovations that emerged through this process of action research are described briefly here.

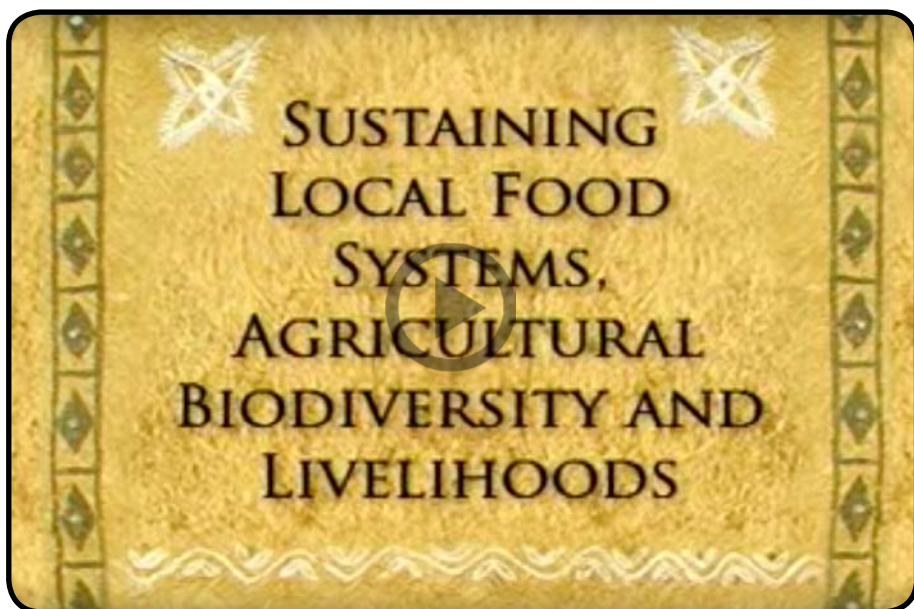
The drylands of southern India

Here, women peasant collectives from the Deccan Plateau have created an alternative grain distribution system, parallel to that of the national government. While the government ships rice and wheat from green revolution industrialised farms to feed this drought-prone region, the new village granaries are supplied with locally grown millet, sorghum and chickpeas.

Women farmers organised into *sanghams* – village-level associations of poor, often low-caste and non-literate women – have restored degraded lands by reviving

traditional drought-resistant crop varieties and farming systems adapted to the dry soil, eliminating the need for heavy chemical inputs and softening the impacts of droughts (Srinivas and Abdul Thaha 2004).

The women themselves manage the grain stores and offer subsidised food to the poorest households, deciding collectively how this safety net should be applied as part of an alternative public distribution system. The women peasants have enhanced local food and nutrition security as well as community self-organisation for resilience to climate change. Their empowering experience is vividly captured in a video film made by members of the women *sanghams*.

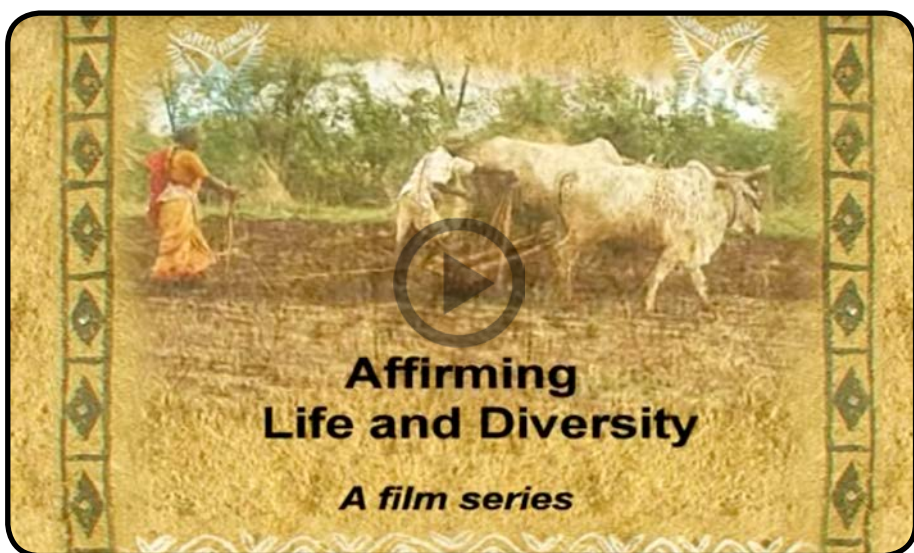


Video 7.1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7HHhZwX9pg>

Community video was an integral part of this participatory action research in which both process and outcomes were filmed through the eyes of marginalised women and other small-scale farmers. A total of 12 videos were produced by a collective of women peasants, including the story of the *sangham* women's visit to Quechua farming communities in Peru described in Box 7.1 (<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/6033/In-the-Lap-of-Pacha-Mama--Bhootali--Mother-Earth> - video 7.2) and a film on the participatory development of a millet machine (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulXmnq-zBAw> - video 7.3). All 12 videos are distributed as the Affirming Life and Diversity film series (DDS Community Media Trust *et al.*, 2008).



Video 7.2. <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/6033/In-the-Lap-of-Pacha-Mama-Bhootali--Mother-Earth>



Video 7.3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulXmnq-zBAw>

Rangelands in Iran

Nomadic tribal organisations are advocating the co-management of rangelands with the government, using indigenous knowledge and new insights from the science of non-equilibrium ecology to adapt to the impacts of climate change in fragile agro-ecosystems (Box 7.3).

Box 7.3. Re-empowerment of Indigenous nomadic tribes in Iran leads to policy influence

In Iran, there are over 100 Indigenous nomadic tribal confederacies and some 600 independent tribes. Prior to the start of our work the various governments had engaged in three different periods of forced and/or induced sedentarisation of the tribes within the last century. The ancestral domains of the tribes, consisting of rangelands, forests, wetlands and other natural resources, were nationalised by government decree under questionable circumstances and only temporary use rights were granted. Land grabbing by government and the private sector have become the order of the day ever since. An investigation by the Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA) showed the top 10 myths about indigenous nomadic pastoralism to be wrong (Farvar 2003). Indeed, Indigenous nomadic tribespeople are among the oldest conservationists on earth. The 2004 and 2008 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) resolutions on Mobile Indigenous Peoples (IUCN, 2009) have unequivocally acknowledged this fact. These resolutions, which make up IUCN policy, were a partial result of the work done. The co-enquiry in question led directly to recognition that the entire territory of each Indigenous migrating tribal unit constitutes an 'Indigenous peoples and community conserved territories and area' (ICCA) (www.iccaconsortium.org). In this manner, we have a unique situation due to the customary hierarchical structure of Iranian tribes, of nested ICCAs; at each level, tribal organisational units have their associated customary territory, together making up the area of the larger unit's territory.

As a primary result of the co-enquiry, a system was adapted for the reinforcement and formal registration of the tribes and tribal confederacies in order to make the government recognise the tribes and tribal customary structures. The statutes of each tribal unit registered are based on the customary structure and governance system of the tribe. A further step in the formal recognition of the territory-based tribal ICCAs is provided by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), with the assistance of the ICCA Consortium. WCMC is affiliated with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and keeps the universal database of protected areas. It has agreed to register ICCAs declared by Indigenous peoples and local communities. This is a great achievement for these groups everywhere. Another achievement resulting from the project is that ICCAs are now eligible for inclusion in the national obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) ten-year global strategy for biological diversity (Aichi Targets for protected and conserved areas by 2020). CBD published guidelines for the recognition of ICCAs in 2012, with a publication on the ICCA Consortium including a substantive case study on Iran (CBD 2012).

In addition to these global policy impacts, organised and federated Indigenous nomadic tribes in Iran are significantly influencing national policy. An example is their collective participation in redefining a new comprehensive natural resource management law that is due to be submitted to parliament by the government in 2018.

Finally, the team of Cenesta and the Union of Indigenous Nomadic Tribes (UNINOMAD) has been documenting the resilience of Indigenous nomadic tribes in the face of severe climate change. For example, the Abolhassani tribe has reinvented dryland agriculture, producing cash and fodder crops that help to avoid grazing pressure on the natural rangelands. Their practices have mitigated the risks of severe and frequent droughts and outmigration.

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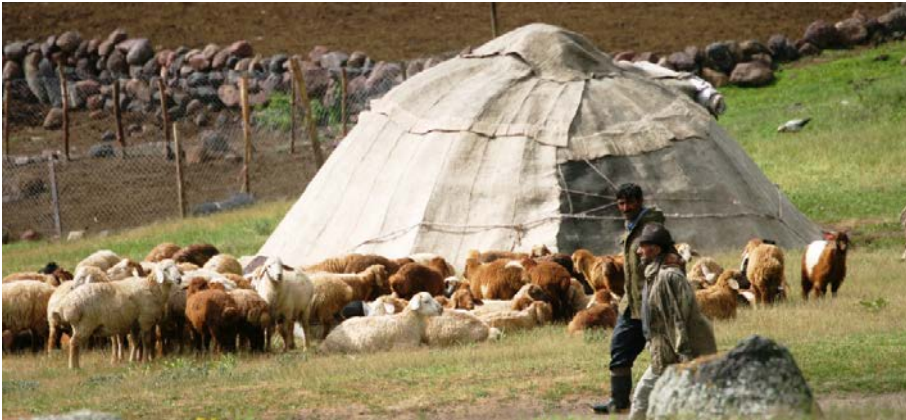


Figure 7.3. Shahsevan cold climate tent, summer pastures & flocks. Cenesta photo credit.



Figure 7.4. Participatory Action Research, Bakhtiari Tribal Confederacy. Cenesta photo credit.



Figure 7.5. Men & women share the milking equally in the Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy. Cenesta photo credit.



Figure 7.6. Qashqai tribal confederacy seasonal migration. N. Kasraian photo credit.



Figure 7.7. Qashqai tribes people learning to deal with maps. Later they will be creating their own participatory GIS maps to use in defence of their lands and territories. Cenesta photo credit.

The Potato Park in Peru

Early work in Peru led to the opening of the Potato Park in 2001. It is now well known internationally as a biocultural heritage territory and managed by Quechua communities. These groups grow more than 1,400 potato varieties in an important centre of crop diversity, thereby sustaining the socio-cultural systems that have created and preserved this biodiversity.

This participatory action research has systematically affirmed Indigenous peoples' biocultural rights and contributed to sustaining the capacity of agriculture and food systems to adapt to change by actively guiding crop evolution in the fields and landscapes of the Potato Park. Indigenous Quechua groups have extended the approach to several new community-managed areas, nationally and internationally. They are now seeking to link these into 'food sovereignty corridors' stretching across the landscape. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If_Ym5tYNRI (video 7.4).



Video 7.4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If_Ym5tYNRI

A rights based approach has created effective and proactive processes that support human rights and good governance (Argumedo and Pimbert 2005). The Potato Park was instrumental in the implementation of the first national Ordinances banning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (<http://dglocal10.blogspot.com/2009/01/ordenanza-contra-biopirateria-en-cusco.html>) and biopiracy (<https://biocultural.iiied.org/national-and-local-policy-and-law-protecting-biocultural-heritage>) in Peru.

Potato Park farmers were also the first group of communities to deposit their potato seeds in the Global Vault of Svalbard, exercising their right to self-determination (<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-12493970>). Tools for protecting rights over their traditional knowledge, such as biocultural protocols based on traditional resource rights principles, have been developed and implemented (<http://pubs.iied.org/16528IIED.html>).

Quechua cosmovisions have informed the development of new concepts around biocultural heritage and solidarity economy based on reciprocity. Rural women's organisations now manage a polycentric network of barter markets that is important for local food sovereignty and nutrition (Marti and Pimbert 2006). Quechua communities have also successfully negotiated with the International Potato Centre for a repatriation agreement on the return of more than 450 of their traditional potato varieties. These are now used in farmer-led participatory research on climate change adaptation (info.ippca.org), with local communities developing innovations to defend their Andean crops and indigenous knowledge against biopiracy (Argumedo and Pimbert 2006).

The park has been proactive in creating a strong network of territory-based organisations, focusing on conserving agrobiodiversity locally thus linking local and global constituencies for ecologically sustainable development, rejecting industrial farming and defending local livelihoods (<http://www.iied.org/indigenous-mountain-communities-call-governments-support-traditional-knowledge-based-adaptation>).

Global action

Globally, our participatory action research became increasingly rooted in the normative framework of food sovereignty as early as 2001. For example, the *prajateerpu* (people's verdict) was a participatory process designed to allow the people most affected by the Vision 2020 for food and farming in Andhra Pradesh to shape a vision of their own. The deliberative process combined citizens' juries and scenario workshop methods with safeguards, such as an oversight panel and witnesses as well as widespread use of the media. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABuezlaQ9ew> (video 7.5).

Prajateerpu was effective in linking excluded local voices and visions of food and farming futures with national and international policy making. After critically reviewing the evidence presented to them, the members of the farmers' jury – most of whom were women – offered a broad vision of a very different future compared to the one planned for them from above (Pimbert and Wakeford 2002). Their vision for the future of food and farming was widely shared by the media and the entire process had a significant impact on development policies in the State of Andhra Pradesh and beyond, including the UK Government's overseas aid priorities for Andhra Pradesh (www.prajateerpu.org).



Video 7.5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABuezlaQ9ew>

Throughout India, the policy impacts of *prajateerpu* inspired civil society organisations, peasant networks and activist scholars to organise other citizens' juries on topics of major importance for small-scale peasant farming in India. For example, the *Raita Teerpu* (farmers' verdict), which took place in the State of Karnataka in 2009, focused on the priorities and governance of agricultural research. The *Raita Teerpu* brought peasants (especially women) together with dalits and Indigenous people from different parts of Karnataka in a single platform to assess the benefits of ongoing agricultural research in India. It helped them to debate and analyse the relevance of research for small-scale and marginal peasants. After carefully listening to evidence presented by specialist witnesses from government, the private sector, research institutes, activists and the peasants themselves, the jury of marginalised small-scale farmers and landless farm workers presented their policy recommendations to decision makers and the media in Bangalore, the capital of the State of Karnataka (<http://www.raitateerpu.com>).

The extensive use of media (radio, television, newspapers, recordings in local languages, etc.) before, during and after the *Raita Teerpu* ensured that over 10 million households followed these citizen deliberations and heard the jury's recommendations on what kind of agricultural research is needed for marginalised peasants who represent the majority of the population in Karnataka and rural India (<http://www.raitateerpu.com>). In turn, the food and farming futures envisioned by marginalised peasants, Indigenous peoples and pastoralists from dryland India were fed into the international forum on the governance of agricultural research (www.excludedvoices.org).

Last but not least, the initiatives in West Africa, Latin America (www.excludedvoices.org) and Europe (www.agroecologynow.com) linked with Raita Teerpu continue to have an enduring and significant influence on the global food sovereignty movement.

Box 7.4. The Saint Ulrich workshop on democratising agricultural research for food sovereignty and peasant agrarian cultures

The *Raita Teerpu* is part of the Democratising Food and Agricultural Research initiative, which focuses on the transformations needed for the democratic governance of food systems and, more specifically, on the potential role for citizens in rethinking food and agricultural research for the public good. Since 2007, this initiative has unfolded in the Andean Altiplano (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka), West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal) and West Asia (Iran and Jordan). In September 2013, the partners of this initiative organised an international workshop to share lessons and reflections learned from Africa, Asia and Latin America with a wider community of European peasants, policy makers and representatives of the donor community. Known as the Saint Ulrich workshop on democratising agricultural research for food sovereignty and peasant agrarian cultures, this international workshop brought together 95 participants from a total of 17 countries. Over 55 per cent of workshop participants were peasants, and the other participants were activists, progressive scholars and representatives from local government, donor organisations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research. About half the participants were women.

The video film entitled 'Imagining research for food sovereignty' highlights the outcomes of the workshop deliberations. See <http://www.excludedvoices.org/st-ulrich-workshop-democratising-agricultural-research-food-sovereignty-and-peasant-agrarian-culture> (video 7.6).



Video 7.6: <http://www.excludedvoices.org/st-ulrich-workshop-democratising-agricultural-research-food-sovereignty-and-peasant-agrarian-culture>

At all times, this initiative has emphasised participatory and people-centred processes in sustaining local food systems, diverse ecologies, rights to self-determination, livelihoods and culture. In the language of sustainable livelihoods, the research

partners focused on the relationship between livelihood outcomes and the role of transforming structures and processes, such as organisations, institutions, knowledge, laws and policies that transform assets (natural, physical, financial, human, social, cultural) into those outcomes. Examples of indigenous transforming structures and processes in Peru include the development of community-to-community and peasant-to-peasant learning:

- Networks based on the principle of *Ayni* (reciprocity). Exchange is promoted through the sharing of information, practices and learning processes.
- Barefoot technicians, who are elected by their own communities, network with other communities and create opportunities to share and transfer traditional knowledge and innovations.
- The consolidation of local grassroots enterprises. These groups are anchored in Andean principles of reciprocity and a local definition of well-being (*buen vivir* or *sumaq kausay*), and work using the principles of Andean economy with the goal of reinforcing local food systems and self-determination.

Such transforming structures and processes produced outcomes that, in turn, often became new processes in further cycles of participatory action research for transformation towards just and sustainable food systems.

7.4 Theory of change

From the outset, this participatory action research was designed to directly empower communities to claim and implement more just and sustainable agri-food systems. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening local organisations and the federations they form to build countervailing knowledge and power. By linking local voices, experiences and co-constructed research evidence to public and private sector policy processes, this action research has informed debates and helped shape better policies and institutions. The process has created safe spaces to build capacity, knowledge, mutual understanding and alliances between different actors, using different formats for different audiences. In each country, the participatory action research process has combined local knowledge and cutting-edge science to develop alternative models and reframe dominant narratives, policies and practices for food, agriculture and land use. This approach has promoted local food systems and short food webs that are rich in biological and cultural diversity, that are decentralised and democratically controlled, and that combine equity with community and socio-ecological resilience.

In many ways, our theory of change also emphasises open-ended and emergent processes of transformation. We (the co-authors and local community members engaged in co-enquiry) never had clear plans in the form of logical frameworks and blueprints – and fortunately none of the donors that supported this action research asked for detailed log frames and five-year plans. As participatory action researchers

engaged in dynamic processes of emergent complexity and a praxis of emancipation, we did not care for the need to identify clear deliverables and measurable results years in advance. Although we were aware of the cutting-edge nature of our action research, we were not wholly focused on achieving research excellence and producing academic papers for top journals. Undertaking critically reflective work that was meaningful and relevant to local communities in search of social justice and ecological sustainability was always more important for us. While we were committed to methodologically rigorous research to generate valid and high-quality knowledge, we also valued flexibility and open-ended journeys with local communities. Our overall approach had much in common with the Theology of Liberation's commitment to *Se hace el camino al andar* (making the road by walking) and the Zapatista communities' *caminar preguntando* (to walk asking questions). We remain committed to this approach today as we (Alejandro, Michel, Saheesh and Taghi) continue to work and stand with the local communities with whom we have chosen to travel.

7.5 Lessons for the future: implications for policy and practice

This long-term participatory action research on sustaining local food systems, biodiversity and livelihoods offers some lessons and pointers for the transformation of agricultural research and development at a time when there is growing recognition that 'business as usual' is no longer an option (IAASTD 2009, EU SCAR 2012). For example, more open and respectful intercultural dialogue is needed to transform the dominant paradigm of food and agricultural research into alternatives for development and human well-being. Individuals and groups belonging to different cultures can come together to co-construct new knowledge and this can lead to transformative action. But genuine and effective intercultural dialogue and co-creation of knowledge must be based on processes that give the least powerful actors more significant roles than before in the production and validation of knowledge. The following enabling factors are important in this regard.

Free prior and informed consent, jointly developed rules of engagement and a mutually agreed code of ethics

In all countries, we first asked local peasant and Indigenous communities working with the Deccan Development Society (DDS), the Andean Association for Nature and Sustainable Development (ANDES) or CENESTA to carefully assess whether and how they wanted to engage in this collaborative research. Participants adopted an ethical code, emphasising that institutional partners would support local people in undertaking and owning the research and outputs, and established a steering group including people chosen by the communities. It is particularly noteworthy that, as part of the process of free prior and informed consent, women sangham members in India argued that they should use digital video to document the process and communicate findings to non-literate community members.

Formation of safe spaces for intercultural dialogue

These are non-threatening spaces in which actors can gain confidence and discuss, analyse, mobilise and act on the basis of a shared vision. These spaces are typically located in settings that are familiar to the communities (e.g. villages, fields, or nomadic tents and camps) and they rely first and foremost on local languages for analysis and deliberations (outside researchers receive translations). Creating and nurturing such safe spaces is essential to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual learning, and to embrace the experience, expertise, fresh thinking, energy and perspectives of hitherto excluded actors, including women and youth. But such popular spaces may also reproduce both overt and subtle forms of exclusion in the absence of a conscious social commitment to politics of freedom, equity and gender inclusion.

Reversals from normal professional roles, behaviours and attitudes

Change must begin with the self, from within. This culture of reversals from normal practice puts the perceptions, priorities, judgment and knowledge of members of Indigenous and local communities at centre stage. It consciously seeks to reorient and change the disempowering mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that undermine people's knowledge and capacity for co-enquiry (see Box 7.2).

Cognitive justice – acknowledging the right for different knowledge systems to exist

The idea of cognitive justice emphasises the right to the coexistence of different forms of knowledge and their associated practices, livelihoods, ways of being and ecologies. As Visvanathan argues, cognitive justice is “the constitutional right of different systems of knowledge to exist as part of a dialogue and debate”. This implies the continued existence of “the ecologies that would let these forms of knowledge survive and thrive not in a preservationist sense but as active practices” (Visvanathan 2005). It is noteworthy that the successful protection of biocultural heritage in the Potato Park in Peru has grown out of local communities' affirmation of their sovereign right to sustain their entire knowledge system, including the landscape and territories that renew biodiversity, culture and livelihoods (see Box 7.5).

Extended peer review and different gatekeepers of knowledge

Power-equalising research relies on a more inclusive and plural process of co-validation of knowledge that brings together representatives from different knowledge systems (western scientific, indigenous, local) in extended peer communities. These communities validate knowledge and can include scientists as well as members of Indigenous and local communities, including men and women of different age groups, classes, castes and ethnic groups. Under conditions of open-ended uncertainty and rapid change, all these different knowledge holders (e.g. peasants, livestock keepers, modern scientists) have a legitimate and useful role to play in deciding what constitutes valid knowledge in a particular context. We recognise here that there is a plurality of legitimate perspectives on every issue. Each actor has partial and incomplete

Box 7.5. Indigenous communities claiming cognitive justice in Peru

The concept of indigenous biocultural heritage territories (IBCHT) grew out of power-equalising research and has guided the successful community-led initiative known as the Potato Park in Cuzco, Peru. Located in a biodiversity hotspot for potatoes, the park is an IBCHT centred on the protection of potato biodiversity and related knowledge. The area is home to more than 4,000 varieties of potato as well as other traditional crops including quinoa and oca. The Potato Park provides an alternative approach to protecting traditional knowledge. It protects not only intellectual knowledge, but also the landscape, biological, economic and cultural components of knowledge systems, thereby halting loss of traditional knowledge as well as misappropriation of it. Communities' collective control over their knowledge has been strengthened by systematically affirming the holistic and indivisible nature of their rights to land, territories and self-determination. Cognitive justice is being claimed as the concept of IBCHT is increasingly recognised in national and international negotiations on the protection of biodiversity and knowledge.

Source: Argumedo and Pimbert (2008).

knowledge, modern scientists included. The academic and narrow disciplinary-based peer review system, with its privileged power to decide what is true science, is no longer seen as the only legitimate and relevant route to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. Today, we all face open-ended uncertainties associated with a fast-changing world under the influences of environmental and climate change, the spread of new diseases, unstable markets and political change.

Communicating for change

This should not be seen as the sole prerogative of communication professionals working in public and private scientific and policy research institutes or agricultural extension departments. There is a need for a new communication praxis and appropriate allocation of resources that emphasises the devolution and dispersal of power. Advances in new communication technologies (digital video camera, radio, the mobile or smart phone, the internet), as well as in popular theatre, mapping and visualisation techniques, offer new opportunities to decentralise and democratise the production of knowledge and communication messages. These trends allow even remote village communities to share stories and messages that can influence policy and practice at local, national and international levels.

Flexible and long-term funding

For donors, the innovations sprouting from grassroots initiatives underline the need to move away from rigid blueprint project planning and short-term funding. Flexible funding, open-ended learning by doing, commitment to long-term collaboration and 'handing over the stick' to local people are vital in regenerating diverse food systems and harvesting their benefits for ecosystems, economies and human wellbeing.

7.6 Conclusions

Many of the methodologies, processes and outcomes of this participatory action research continue to inform the development of the food sovereignty paradigm and the search for autonomous food systems. Power-equalising research that strengthens local organisations' capacity for voice and agency, inclusive participatory methods such as citizens' juries for policy making, extended and flexible timeframes for iterative cycles of action research, transmedia knowledge mobilisation, and many other of the co-enquirers' innovations described here offer practical means to regenerate a diversity of sustainable food systems, enhance justice and social–ecological resilience, and deepen democracy. More broadly, our transformative approach affirms a grassroots post-modernism (Esteva and Prakash 2014) based on a radical pluralism that honours and nurtures cultural diversity by enabling many paths to the realisation of self-defined aspirations.

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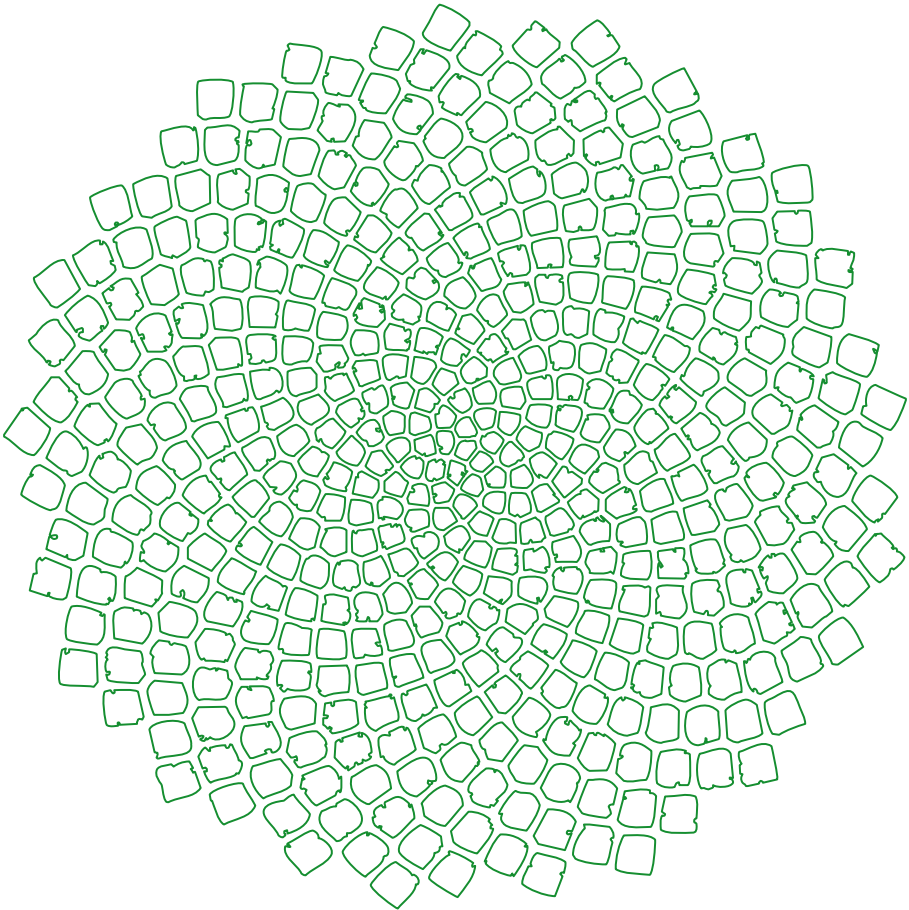
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8



A farmer-to-farmer agroecological approach to addressing food security in Malawi

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Geographical location: Northern and central Malawi

Chapter highlights: This chapter describes food systems transformation through farmer-to-farmer participatory research in Malawi.

It draws upon more than a decade of community-based collaboration between farmers and an interdisciplinary group of researchers.

Through first-hand experiences, the chapter demonstrates how agroecology combined with transformative learning could be used, not only to increase food production, but also to produce food that is safe and deliver it to the chronically hungry, and adopt agricultural practices that respect the earth.

Keywords: Agroecology, food security, food systems transformation, farmer-to-farmer participatory research, Malawi.

8.1 Introduction

Despite remarkable growth in global food production, over 840 million people, most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are chronically hungry. Many more suffer from hidden hunger due to a lack of essential micronutrients (Akram-Lodhi 2013, Herring 2015, Von Grebmer *et al.* 2014). According to recent data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), one in every four persons in sub-Saharan Africa is malnourished, and more sub-Saharan

Africans are killed by undernutrition and hidden hunger than by HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined (FAO 2015). Undernutrition has risen partly because we have a food system that is geared towards large-scale monocultures, with diets that are monotonous and limited in diversity (Akram-Lodhi 2013). Alongside not being able to feed the world properly, these large-scale monocultures have negative ecological consequences, including the loss of plant species diversity, fertiliser runoff, and silt loading of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (McIntyre *et al.* 2009). In many respects, the current food system is deeply contradictory, because it is not only failing to address nutrition, but also undermining the biophysical foundations of agriculture (Weis 2010). The contemporary food system needs to undergo significant change to become more diverse, sustainable, resilient and healthy.

In this chapter, we discuss an innovative example of how such a new food system is being created using farmer-to-farmer participatory research in Malawi. Over the past 15 years, we have embarked on a project of food system transformation that focuses on participatory agroecology, social relations and gender equity. We describe the processes of participatory research and show some significant impacts over time. Our approach is highly participatory, with the active involvement of the women, men and vulnerable households whose lives we seek to transform. For us, participatory research includes not only how research problems are defined and investigated, but also how scientific knowledge is produced and disseminated. In view of this, most of our peer-reviewed articles are written and published with the project staff and farmers (e.g. Bezner Kerr and Chirwa 2004, Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2016a, Nyantakyi-Frimpong *et al.* 2016a), with farmers occasionally serving as lead authors (e.g. Msachi *et al.* 2009). This chapter has been written in the same spirit. The chapter outline and the materials presented were drafted based on meetings held in June and August 2015, which included researchers, project staff and farmers.

We begin by providing a brief background on the research setting. We then shift our attention to describing the processes involved in our participatory action research with farmers. We describe in detail such strategies as soil fertility management, intercropping, formation of farmer research teams, seed banking and recipe demonstration, and how gender is infused into all these strategies. Next, we share some significant impacts documented over the past 15 years. In the concluding section, we critically reflect on the challenges associated with using participatory action research for food systems transformation in rural Malawi.

8.2 The setting

Malawi is a small landlocked country in southern Africa, bordered by Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia (Figure 8.1). It has a current estimated population of 16.7 million, approximately 85 per cent of whom rely on agriculture for their incomes and food security (World Bank 2015). Maize is the dominant staple crop, accounting for about 70 per cent of total calorie intake and 60 per cent of area planted (Ellis and

Manda 2012). The rate of food insecurity is very high, with estimates showing that about one-third of the population lacks access to adequate, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active life (Ellis and Manda 2012). Almost half of Malawian children under five years suffer from chronic undernutrition, as reflected in current rates of stunting (47%) and of being underweight (13%) (NSO-Malawi 2011). The country's high rates of food insecurity and undernutrition are deeply rooted in a number of historical, political and environmental factors (for a review, see Bezner Kerr and Patel 2014, Bezner Kerr 2010, Vaughan 1987). These factors include colonial and post-colonial governments that have fostered an unequal system that benefits large landholders, emphasises maize monocropping and supports gender-based inequalities. The country also has a high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate and large climatic variations (Bezner Kerr 2010, Vaughan 1987).



Figure 8.1. Location of project sites

Source: Map drawn by Karen Van Kerkoerle, Western University, Canada

In this context, we initiated the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) project in northern Malawi in 2000, as a collaboration between Canadian researchers and staff at the Ekwendeni Hospital. We began our work as an outcome of a partnership between Canadian researchers and hospital staff, at a time when fertiliser prices were skyrocketing and child undernutrition was rampant. An initial set of in-depth interviews with families whose children had been admitted to the hospital for severe malnutrition surfaced issues of a lack of knowledge of alternatives, as well as major issues with gender inequality and low dietary diversity (Bezner Kerr 2005). Discussions between the Malawian hospital staff and a Canadian graduate student after the interviews led to the idea of a participatory pilot project to test organic alternatives to chemical fertiliser, paying attention to gender inequality and nutrition (Bezner Kerr and Chirwa 2004). A major aim of the project was, and still is, to help farmers address a number of crucial socio-ecological challenges that affect food security, nutrition and health (Msachi *et al.* 2009). Our initial focus was on the Ekwendeni catchment area in Mzimba district, northern Malawi (Figure 1). Due to the remarkable impacts of our participatory research in this region and support from the communities we work in, community leaders and researchers in Malawi have become interested in our approach. As a result, we have expanded our work from the original 130 to over 10,000 farming households to date. We have continued working in Mzimba district and have also started working in Kasungu and Dedza districts in the central region of Malawi. Since 2012, we have been implementing the Malawi Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology project with over 6,000 farming households in Mzimba and Dedza districts. Below, we describe our participatory approach and other key aspects of the project.

8.3 Our approach: farmer-to-farmer participatory research

Our farmer-to-farmer participatory research can be considered as a concrete example of a move towards food sovereignty (Bezner Kerr 2013, Msachi *et al.* 2009). Our participatory approach to improving food security and nutrition, by improving soil fertility, diversifying crop production and using agroecological methods relying on local sources, has four main areas of focus:

- Farmer-led experimentation and innovation
- Improved access to a diverse range of seeds
- Community recipe and demonstration days and farmer exchange visits
- Gender equity

Farmer-led experimentation and innovation

As part of our participatory methodology, we do not use a top-down approach to impose farming methods on households. Instead, farmers experiment with a range of practices to determine the best option that will suit their skills, knowledge, resources and labour demands. Based upon several years of experimentation, farmers have

recommended that the most effective intercropping methods for northern and central Malawi include groundnuts with pigeon pea, maize with pigeon pea, maize with beans or soya beans, and millet (see Figure 8.2). Farmers working with us have also confirmed scientific studies indicating that, through its long taproot, pigeon pea in particular plays a strong role in intercropping and soil fertility management. It improves aeration and is able to syphon leached nutrients up from lower levels of the soil. Farmers have been sharing these results with their peers. The use of organic materials is being promoted in two ways: firstly, compost making and application; and secondly, burying of crop residues. Once legumes are harvested, the remaining roots, stems and leaves are incorporated into the soil to provide organic matter.

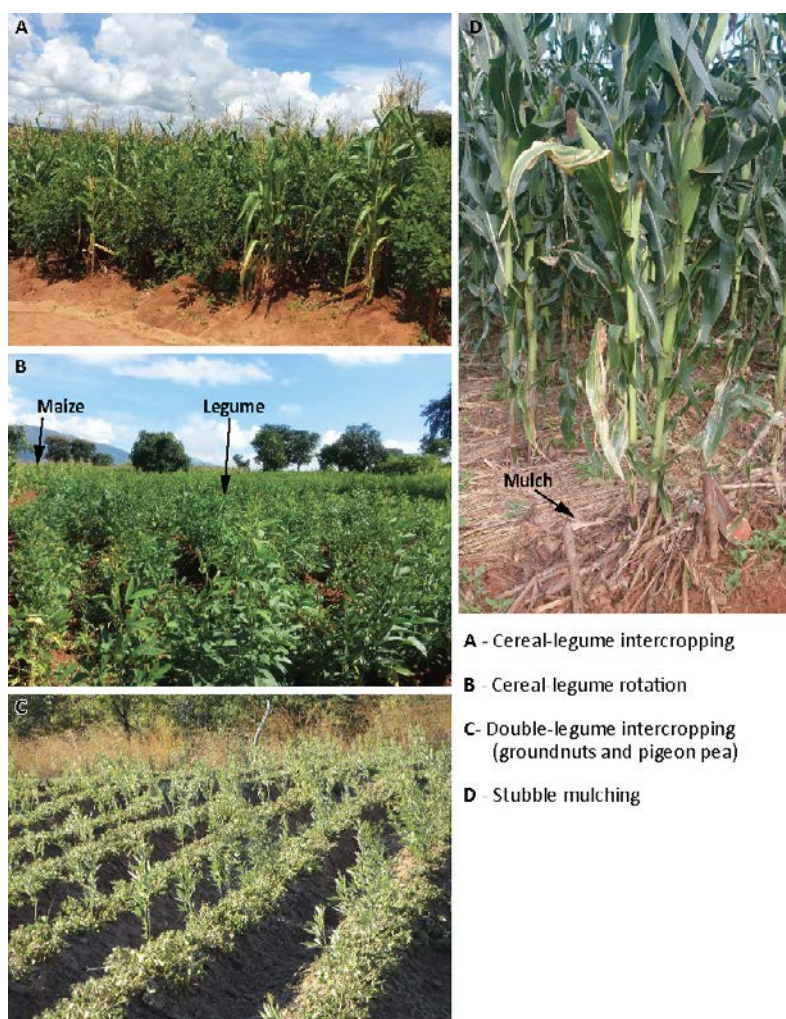


Figure 8.2. A range of agroecological practices

Source: Photos taken by SFHC staff and researchers, 2013, 2014, 2015.

Another way to enhance organic matter in the soil is to make compost. Composting is a process of breaking down organic materials into humus by using macro- and micro-organisms. Some of the leguminous plant materials that are not incorporated in the soil are used to prepare compost manure combined with other materials. In order to enable agro-ecological experimentation and farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge, we have formed Farmer Research Teams (FRTs). These FRTs are groups of farmer leaders from each of the communities we work in who lead the experimentation of farming methods, including legume intercropping and the use of organic manure. They provide peer support and mentoring to the farmers we work with and relay information about training and how to use a variety of farming techniques (Figure 8.3). Using this type of participatory approach to provide information, training and support empowers the farmers to decide the best possible methods to adopt for their own context.



*Figure 8.3. Field teaching by Farmer Research Team members about planting methods, Lobi area
Source: Photo taken by C. Hickey, December 2014. Used with the permission of project participants.*

FRT members are selected using a participatory approach that ensures equal opportunity for every member of the community. Farmers elect their representatives through a democratic process, ensuring women hold a minimum of 50 per cent of all FRT positions (Table 8.1). Farmers are selected to join an FRT based on multiple factors, including whether they are hardworking, their willingness to try new methodologies and their ability to teach other farmers. All new FRT members receive training from project staff and members of other FRTs who are experienced in the use of agroecological farming methods.

Table 8.1. FRT members by year and gender

Total	Women n(%)	Men n(%)	Year
395	230 (58)	165 (42)	2015
149	87 (58)	62 (42)	2014
150	75 (50)	75 (50)	2013
150	75 (50)	75 (50)	2012
70	42 (60)	28 (40)	2011
70	40 (57)	30 (43)	2010
70	38 (54)	32 (46)	2009
70	48 (69)	22 (31)	2008

Source: SFHC FRT Reports, 2008-2015.

8.3.2 Improved access to a diverse range of seeds

Beyond experimentation with natural systems of replenishing soil fertility, access to good seed varieties and knowledge of how to save and store seed is important for the success of smallholder agriculture. We therefore work with participating farmers to access local varieties of seeds that can promote soil health and improve yields, and we provide training in seed multiplication and storage. Saving seed is a critical component of food security in Malawi, since most farmers cannot afford to purchase expensive hybrid seed and the required inputs that are promoted by the government.

We built a seed bank where we assist farmers to sort, grade, process and store local seeds for each planting season. Women and men volunteer to provide labour to sort and grade seeds for storage (Figure 8.4). Our participating farmers currently manage two seed banks, one built in 2005 in Ekwendeni, and another created in 2013 in Lobi. Over the past ten years, we have seen a significant increase in the storage of and access to local seed varieties (Table 2). Additionally, we hold seed fairs in the communities we work in and invite farmer participants and other community members to showcase their seeds. Farmers meet and discuss the varieties they are using and the benefits and difficulties they have experienced when using these seeds. The seed fairs have also enabled project staff, including coordinators and community promoters, to explore different varieties of seed that can be considered when purchasing seed for the next year's participants.



Figure 8.4. Women farmers harvesting seeds for the Ekwendeni Seed Bank
Source: Photo taken by Carl Hiebert, 2004. Used with the permission of farmers.

Table 8.2. Seed varieties stored in the seed banks (2005-2015)

Pigeon pea seeds	Sorghum seeds	Cow pea seeds	Orange maize	Bean seeds	Soya bean seeds	Ground- nut seeds	Total seeds in seed bank	Year
1	-	1	76	45	111	46	120	2015
5	-	6	79	36	177	63	182	2014
3	-	4	37	18	806	485	1250	2013
2	2	2	9	9	360	240	624	2012
2	6	1	-	4	125	102	240	2011
1	8	1	-	5	94	55	164	2010
1	4	2	-	3	60	40	110	2009
2	-	-	-	2	45	30	79	2008
1	-	-	-	-	36	24	61	2007
-	-	-	-	-	28	19	47	2006
-	-	-	-	-	18	15	33	2005

Note: Each bag weighs 50 kilograms; 2013 to 2015 include data from two seed banks.

8.3.3 Community recipe and demonstration days and farmer exchange visits

Our participatory project is also predicated on the understanding that food production and access is important, but alone is not sufficient to ensure children are well nourished. Other crucial factors include sufficient knowledge of healthy child care and feeding practices, and adequate time to care for children. To further promote a more diverse diet and provide information about using different crops, community recipe and demonstrations days are held to allow farmers to participate in preparing and tasting a wide range of foods produced on their own farms (Patel *et al.* 2015). At each recipe day, farmers prepare different recipes using a diverse range of crops from their farms and share them with other farmers. This passes skills and knowledge from one farmer to another, thereby providing an effective local approach to improving nutritional wellbeing among the communities. Other activities during recipe days include the provision of nutrition messages that support child feeding and caring, as well as hygiene and sanitation. Attention is also given to nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. The recipe days target both men and women. Men are especially encouraged to be more involved in food preparation, since one of our goals is to foster gender equity in the division of labour, decision-making and leadership (Figure 8.5, Chilanga 2013). The first recipe demonstration was organised in 2003 and, since then, the FRTs and farmers have organised over 100 recipe days. We consider gender equity to be at the heart of food sovereignty, since it addresses inequalities over the right to control and access food at multiple scales (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2013). Advocates of a food sovereignty approach have long incorporated issues of gender and other social inequalities into its conceptualisation and application (Desmarais 2007, Patel 2012).



Figure 8.5. Recipe day at Lobi

Source: Photo taken by C. Hickey, December 2014. Used with the permission of project participants.

Gender equity

Gender issues are incorporated at all levels, including the household, community and project structures (Figure 8.6). Women are particularly encouraged to take up leadership positions, as they are especially marginalised and at risk from food insecurity, inadequate nutrition and health, and domestic violence as well as having few livelihood options (Bezner Kerr 2008). In general, Malawian women are responsible for most household and agricultural tasks and have very little decision-making power with regards to allocation and use of household resources (e.g. seed, crops and money). Often, this means that crops are sold when cash is needed to buy other foods, and revenues used for non-household purposes (e.g. alcohol). When women are juggling multiple responsibilities, such as taking care of a sick relative and farming, and do not have older children to help, the food security of the entire household is affected. Furthermore, when food runs out, women are the first to skip meals, and they are often responsible for finding alternative sources of income (e.g. by working on neighbouring farms). Food insecurity is a high risk for female-headed households, who are less likely than men to have access to additional labour, resources (e.g. cash and seeds) and land. This is particularly the case in the northern region of Malawi, which follows a patrilineal system of land inheritance (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2016a).



Figure 8.6. Drama about gender inequality during gender campaign, Ekwendeni area

Source: Photo taken by C. Bezner Kerr, March 2014. Used with permission of farmers and project staff.

In our work, we promote gender equity in the division of labour and decision-making at the household level by encouraging men and women to participate in project

activities together (particularly in recipe days, as outlined above), and by training farmers and project staff to help redefine what gender roles mean. We also empower women to take leadership positions by having active women leaders at all levels of our project, from principal investigators to project team members, as well as members of the FRT. We also have an explicit policy of a minimum of 50 per cent representation of women when selecting beneficiaries. We also ensure our research methods are gender-sensitive, including gender and age-specific focus groups and interviews. We have found that this approach allows men and women to speak freely about complex gender issues affecting food and nutrition (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2016a).

8.4 Some significant impacts

What has changed since the inception of SFHC? Using the approaches described above, we have seen significant ecological and social impacts on soil health, resilience, food security, dietary diversity and gender equality.

Increased yields, food security and dietary diversity

Using farmer-led experiments, we have shown that maize yields can be increased significantly by using nitrogen-fixing legumes like pigeon pea and groundnut instead (Snapp *et al.* 2010). Moreover, we have seen that farmers who use legume residues to improve soil fertility are significantly more food-secure than those who do not (Nyantakyi-Frimpong *et al.* 2016b). Many farmers have also shifted from maize monocropping to cereal–legume intercropping, with positive nutritional outcomes. Over time, we have seen that farmers who plant a greater crop diversity, including a mixture of cereals and legumes, are more likely to be food-secure than those who grow crops in monocultures (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2014). Dietary diversity is also significantly higher among our project participants than with non-participants (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2014).

Improved child growth

We have documented significant improvements in child growth (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2010), which is one of the most persistent and challenging problems in rural Malawi (NSO-Malawi 2011). Between 2001 and 2007, we collected data on the height and weight of more than 3500 children before and after their households joined the project (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2010). Our results showed that weight-for-age and height-for-age Z scores increased significantly among children whose households had a long-term participation in the project (Figure 8.7). These scores were also significantly higher in communities where project involvement has been greatest (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2010, Figure 8.7). Indeed, within the Ekwendeni catchment area, rates of malnutrition “have declined substantially in the region, to the extent that the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre at Ekwendeni Hospital has closed, due to a lack of acute cases” (Patel *et al.* 2015, p.38).

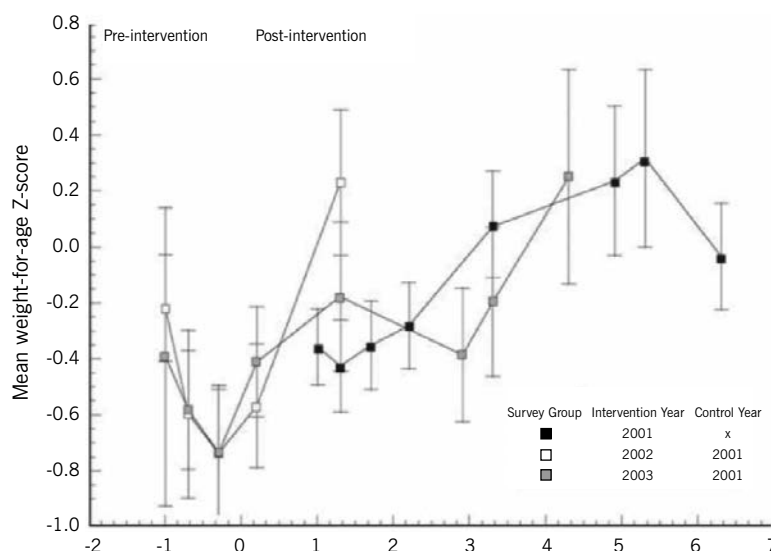


Figure 8.7. Child weight-for-age Z score for participating households (2001-2007)
Source : Bezner Kerr et al., 2010, p. 1470).

Reduced labour constraints for the most vulnerable households

In 2010, we extended the SFHC project to target vulnerable groups, including HIV-affected households, especially those including widows and orphans. Our recent qualitative research with these households showed that their food security and dietary diversity have improved considerably (Nyantakyi-Frimpong *et al.* 2016a). As a result of legume intercropping and stubble mulching, which significantly reduce weed growth, HIV-affected households have reported a significant reduction in labour demands (Mambulu 2014). For these households, reduced demand for labour in the fields allows them to allocate time to caring for household members who are ill. Additionally, our research shows that by using agroecological approaches to suppress weeds, many HIV-affected households are able to counter the side-effects of anti-retroviral therapies, which limit their physical ability to work hard for long periods (Nyantakyi-Frimpong *et al.* 2016a).

Improved gender equity

Our focus on gender has also yielded significant results. Using baseline and follow-up surveys, we have seen greater improvements in food security for female-headed households, which are considered to be at higher risk of food insecurity, than for male-headed ones (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2014). Other important social outcomes include improved relations between husbands and wives, and among co-wives in cases of polygamist households. As a result of our community recipe days, which include education on nutrition and gender roles, we have seen greater involvement of men in

child care and feeding (Chilanga 2013, Patel *et al.* 2015). Many of our participating farmers have developed more equitable gender roles and responsibilities in their households, in terms of cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood and attending child health clinics (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2016b, Chilanga 2013). Our participants have confirmed that the success of the project is due partly to a strong emphasis on gender and social relations, since improved farming practices alone cannot completely address chronic hunger and undernutrition (Mambulu 2014).

Stronger and more resilient communities

Beyond the farm household level, we have also seen improved cohesion and social relations within communities (Bezner Kerr *et al.* 2014). In participating communities, farmers – including those in HIV-affected households – have started their own seed-sharing networks that are independent from the SFHC seed banks (Mambulu 2014, Nyantakyi-Frimpong *et al.* 2016a). By freely exchanging local seed varieties that are hardy and well-adapted to the local environment, these farmers now circumvent the difficulties in purchasing costly hybrid seeds each season. HIV-affected households in particular feel empowered when having control over seeds and farming practices (Mambulu 2014), which could be considered a part of building food sovereignty (Bezner Kerr 2013).

8.5 Reflections and conclusion

The significant impacts outlined above have not come without challenges. Since beginning this work in 2000, we have experienced a number of difficulties, both environmental and political/economic, which have affected the use of participatory agroecology to transform food systems. For example, the process of improving soil fertility is lengthy. It takes time for farmers to see gradual improvements in soil health and crop yields. We also work in fragile agro-ecosystems, since Malawi suffers severe climatic variation including erratic rainfall and other environmental threats. Thus, if there is drought or flooding, crops may not perform well even when farmers have invested significant labour in soil improvements. When vulnerable farmers struggle to make a living under difficult conditions, they might be discouraged and impatient with the incremental changes that come with agroecology.

There are also significant power differences between academics, development staff and farmers working with the project, which has made it challenging at times to maintain a shared vision. Competing interests – for publications versus maintaining community development work for example - has at times created significant tensions within the team. Some key approaches, such as open communication, efforts to establish shared values and regular face-to-face interactions, have been crucial to the continuation of the action research project.

Given Malawi's high rates of food insecurity and undernutrition (Ellis and Manda 2012), there is active involvement of non-governmental organisations, local governments and

grassroots groups in promoting different agricultural solutions. While some stakeholders emphasise local knowledge, experimentation and incremental learning, others are calling for agricultural intensification using high-input methods. The government of Malawi, for example, has implemented an input subsidy programme that distributes free fertiliser coupons to farmers. At times, participating farmers have found these different and “competing knowledges” (Mambulu 2014) challenging to align with the agroecological and participatory perspectives brought forward by our work, in terms of how to address issues related to hunger and undernutrition. We always leave it to farmers to determine which available options will best suit their skills, knowledge, resources and labour demands. Over the past 15 years, we have come to realise that confronting all these challenges stands at the heart of a commitment to participatory research, rural development and food systems transformation.

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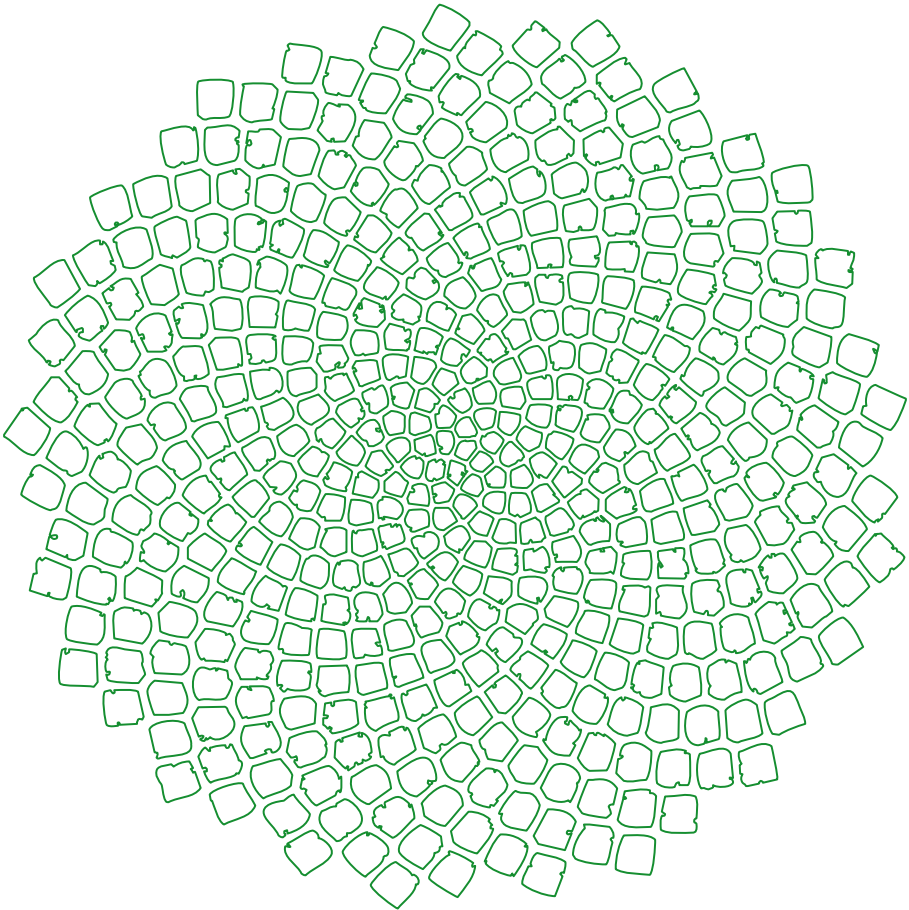
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9



La Vía Campesina and academia: a snapshot

Josh Brem-Wilson and Paul Nicholson

Geographical location: Various

Chapter highlights: This chapter offers a unique insight into how La Vía Campesina's relationships with researchers inside and outside of academia are understood and perceived by movement actors at the movement–researcher interface.

It relays how La Vía Campesina's relations with academics have undergone a profound shift since the movement's early years.

It communicates the importance of solidarity to successful collaborations between movement actors and academic researchers.

It captures the fact that, for La Vía Campesina, the majority of its energy invested in knowledge activities is directed towards the autonomous development of training-, education- and research-capacity, with La Vía Campesina's member organisations leading the way.

Keywords: La Vía Campesina, solidarity research, academic–social movement relations.

9.1 Introduction

Between 2008 and 2010 Josh Brem-Wilson conducted collaborative research with the global social movement La Vía Campesina as part of his doctoral research. This experience was deeply formative for him, establishing the foundations of his research agenda (Brem-Wilson 2015) and his commitment to participatory or 'solidarity' research (Brem-Wilson 2014). The first part of this chapter focuses on the actors on the other side of that experience. It provides a snapshot of the perspectives of movement participants on La Vía Campesina's relationships and experiences with academics. It is based on an iterative writing process between Josh and four-term member of La Vía Campesina's International Coordination Committee and Basque farmer Paul Nicholson, supported by insights from the movement's technical support staff Nico Verhagen and Xarles Iturbe. All quotations are Paul Nicholson's, drawn from

a series of discussions with Josh during winter 2015/16. In the second part of the chapter, Josh provides a researcher's perspective, reflecting upon his experiences of collaborating and attempting to collaborate with activists from La Vía Campesina and other movements.

We have to create another logic. We have to generate another science. Not an anti-science, not an anti-technology, but we have to develop our own science, our own technology, our own knowledge, based on food sovereignty and agroecology.

A contemporary snapshot of La Vía Campesina and its member organisations would reveal a movement enjoying active and ongoing relations with a wide range of researchers, both inside and outside the university system, with whom it collaborates in a myriad of different ways. These include working on funding bids for joint research projects, shaping the curricula of progressive institutions that want to offer courses of relevance to the peasant struggle, generating concrete inputs for La Vía Campesina's activism, and more. It would also reveal a movement autonomously attending to its own knowledge interests, perhaps most significantly through the creation of an international network of agroecology schools and peasant universities. Examples from Brazil, India, Paraguay and beyond, often bearing the imprint of Frierean critical pedagogy, show a commitment to dissolving traditional university hierarchies, bringing peasant education and training needs to the fore and providing education programmes that attempt to equip current and future activists with the tools they need to realise the movement's food sovereignty vision.

We don't like being objects. We are the subject and, as the subject, we have to have that role also, of being the subject and not the object of interest.

To those familiar only with its early history, this contemporary picture might seem quite surprising. One key event from the movement's early years – indeed, from the time when it was launched – was a meeting in Mons, Belgium in 1993. This was organised by actors from a Dutch non-governmental organisation (NGO) who wanted to create an international farmer-driven participatory research project. This would include a range of rural actors with diverging and contradictory interests, including both large-scale industrial producers and small-scale family farmers in the same space. The goal of this project, conceived originally by the organisers following dialogue with some farmers' organisations, was to carry out research focusing on agricultural policies. However, for the vast majority of the 46 progressive international farmer leaders assembled for the network's inaugural meeting, this was insufficient. Through previous encounters via organisational exchanges and participation in shared meetings, they had developed momentum towards establishing an international peasant and farmer *movement*, in part to project a 'peasant voice' into international food and agricultural policy debates. This difference in perspective provoked resistance from the organisers, who responded inflexibly by attempting to persist with their original vision. The founder members of La Vía

Campesina were not deterred, however, and the movement was born. It emerged, in other words, from a conflict between small-scale farmers and researchers over who had the right to define the interests of progressive rural peoples and envision mechanisms to promote those interests; the farmers themselves, or a supposedly 'well-intentioned' research actor.¹

I think what's important is to understand that we, as Via Campesina, distrust the university, generally speaking, because it considers that it's the principle ideological instrument, of putting up, of strengthening the neoliberal model in society.

Some 22 years later, the contemporary La Vía Campesina still maintains a high degree of distrust towards institutionalised research, seeing the university, for instance, as a key instrument in the promotion of the neoliberal and capitalist project. But since that inauspicious early encounter, the movement has gone on to develop positive relations with many *individual* academics, many of whom it regards as being located in a somewhat porous space between activism and the academy. Moreover, a number of research-active NGOs working on various issues, from climate change to biodiversity and peasant rights, are key La Vía Campesina allies, providing the movement with valuable inputs and *evidence* in support of its activism.

In part, this shift in relations can be explained by two parallel sets of dynamics. On the one hand, as the movement consolidated itself and emerged from its early years with a strong sense of its own identity and interests, this made it easier to shift into collaborative postures with other actors (e.g. NGOs and academics) with whom previously, based on historical experience, it preferred to maintain a distance. At the same time, attitudes of individuals *within* the academy towards La Vía Campesina were changing, resulting in growing engagement with and support for food sovereignty amongst these actors. From the movement's perspective, this initial shift in attitudes amongst academics to their activism was visible in two clear waves. The first involved individuals with very strong movement links migrating *into the academy* and taking their commitment to the movement and its struggles with them.² These individuals were at the vanguard of the academic interest in La Vía Campesina, and helped to build confidence within the movement regarding the possibility of positive movement–academic relations. The second wave reflected a growing enthusiasm towards the movement and food sovereignty amongst *established academics*, whose research perhaps had aligned historically with the positions and struggles that La Vía Campesina had emerged to defend and promote. To La Vía Campesina activists – emerging and existing in a space of radical marginalisation – these were surprising developments, and communicated to the movement that individual academics could be a source of support.

1 See: Annette Desmarais, (1997) *La Via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 74-103 for a fuller account of this episode.

2 Such as Annette Desmarais, Jun Borras, and Nettie Wiebe. Whilst the latter attained her PhD before La Vía Campesina's emergence, she took up her post as professor of church and society at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan only after her work as a rural leader.

Today, it would not be inaccurate to say that there has been an explosion in the amount of academic and researcher interest being directed towards La Vía Campesina and its issues. This is reflected in part in the number of journal articles, book chapters and other outputs addressing the movement and its activities, and food sovereignty in general. This growth can be tracked by the fact that when co-author Josh began his PhD in 2006, it was difficult to locate academic material on food sovereignty. Now it is virtually impossible to keep up with it. The trend is also reflected in the number of requests for access received by La Vía Campesina from doctoral researchers, with those having to negotiate these requests describing themselves as being 'swamped' by their volume. Perhaps nowhere though is the growth of academic attention in La Vía Campesina and food sovereignty more visible than in the two food sovereignty colloquiums hosted at Yale, 2013, and the International Institute of Social Studies, the Hague in 2014. Attended by many hundreds of academics, students, and movement and civil society activists, these generated over 90 articles on a diverse range of food-sovereignty-related topics, from peasant rights and the role of gender in food sovereignty to the relationship between food sovereignty and specific crops, and much more.

Generally, insiders within La Vía Campesina at the movement–research interface differentiate between four groups of researchers with whom the movement has relations. In the first group are research-active NGOs that are very close to the movement, and whose work supports and inputs directly into La Vía Campesina's activism on an ongoing basis. Crucially, this support includes providing *evidence* for La Vía Campesina's positions and arguments. The membership of this first group varies according to the issues being addressed (e.g. peasant rights, climate change and seeds), and the location of the struggle (e.g. Rome, Geneva and New York). In the second group are academically-positioned researchers who maintain active contact with the movement, who enjoy a high degree of movement trust and who, through dialogue and collaboration, seek to ensure that their research agendas support La Vía Campesina's work. La Vía Campesina's relations with this group might sometimes involve joint delivery or implementation of research projects. In the third group are academics who, although politically close to the movement, pursue autonomous research agendas. These individuals do not necessarily seek to actively develop joint research priorities with the movement, but their work is aligned broadly with movement goals and can be of use. The final group comprises the wider research community that is aware of and following La Vía Campesina and is potentially interested in learning more about and engaging with it, but that for the moment takes a mostly passive role.

From the perspective of La Vía Campesina, therefore, academically positioned researchers can support their activities in different ways. They can be engaged directly with the movement, discussing and seeking to tailor research outcomes to movement needs. Or they can be more distant, although still providing valuable, indirect support on the *issues* of importance to La Vía Campesina and its allies in the wider food

sovereignty movement. Whatever the degree of its engagement with researchers, the movement attaches a high priority to ensuring that these relationships unfold in a spirit of autonomy and solidarity.

For La Vía Campesina, autonomy in this context means a number of different things. Primarily, it means freedom of choice for the movement to participate in research or not, and to define its own interests and needs. For academics, it might mean freedom to develop autonomous and even critical analyses of La Vía Campesina and its issues. Indeed, from the movement's perspective, such critical feedback is vital. Conducted in a spirit of solidarity, which might affect *how* an academic chooses to share his or her insights, such critical friendship can be an important aid to the movement's development. Autonomy also means acknowledging the distinctive identities of academics on the one hand, and the movement on the other. Respecting this difference, for example, means that at no time at all does an academic acquire the right to speak 'on behalf' of La Vía Campesina.

There's no common rule, but I think everybody has an understanding of there must be confidence, there must be autonomy, there must be solidarity, and that of course isn't given through a signing of a document, it's given through common experience.

Despite the breadth of contact between La Vía Campesina activists and researchers, La Vía Campesina's engagements with academics have largely been a matter of *personal relations*, proceeding on a case-by-case basis. These personal contacts are the foundations of the movement-academic relationship, and have been key to promoting the confidence that such collaborations require. Through its extensive encounters with academics, the movement has acquired an appreciation of the importance of academics being *embedded* within the movement, in contrast to the researcher who does two or three interviews with a movement representative, and then is never seen again. This distinction speaks to the extent to which the researcher aligns their objectives with the movement interests, understands movement positions and key dynamics, and seeks to generate research outcomes that may be of use to the movement. Such embeddedness may involve non-glamorous tasks including writing press releases, rapporteuring at meetings, copy-editing reports, and so on.³ It is of course important to recognise that the possibilities and trajectories of La Vía Campesina's and its member organisations' relations with academics vary considerably from location to location, from one country or region to another. For example, in India, La Vía Campesina member organisations receive virtually no support from the formal university sphere, while in the Basque country, they have been able to shape the content of a university curriculum.

It is possible to imagine a spectrum of ways in which the movement's interactions with academics could be potentially structured. At one end would be informal and ad

³ Thanks to Laura Valencia, La Vía Campesina South Asia Secretariat, for emphasising this point.

hoc individual relationships founded upon *implicit* principles of solidarity, autonomy and mutual respect. At the other end would be more formal relations, perhaps codified explicitly via research protocols and similar instruments. It is clear that until now the movement has exhibited a preference for the former over the latter. This, coupled with the fact that the movement has not allocated dedicated capacity in the form of staff or leadership time to its relationships with academics, means that on occasion it is not always clear to movement insiders or allies who is responsible for representing La Vía Campesina positions to academics. It also means that there have been times when La Vía Campesina has lost control over important artefacts from its history, which have been shared with a researcher, only for the individual to subsequently claim patrimony over and deny the movement access to this artefact. The movement is also aware that for some researchers, at least, the temptation is there to instrumentalise their relationship with La Vía Campesina in the pursuit of questions that are not of shared relevance, or as a source of publishable content.

Vía Campesina is very conscious that we have a certain responsibility with our allies. With our academic allies too, and there is a mutual relationship, and mutual support.

Of greater significance to La Vía Campesina however, is the fact that its lack of dedicated organisational capacity for relations with researchers means that it is not in a position to *direct* the activities of its research allies, and is limited to largely *reacting* to their proposals and initiatives. This is a source of frustration, as the movement is aware that it would benefit from supporting analysis to strengthen its positions. However, while La Vía Campesina's historical experiences with researchers does include some positive cases, these have not on the whole left the movement with a clear sense that increasing its organisational capacity in this area is a high priority. For example, even when a strong collaborative commitment is present, the ways that academics work often pose great difficulties for movement actors, who have neither the time nor capacity to negotiate the specialist language and dense information flows that are typically a feature of such processes. And even when the movement has successfully participated in the joint formulation of research objectives with academic researchers, the rather slow rhythm at which academics work at (as they negotiate what are regarded as more immediate priorities like producing PhD chapters, teaching or writing articles) means that by the time that any promised outputs emerge (if they do at all), the movement has often moved on to new issues and challenges. And when they do come, the format of outputs or educational materials produced by researchers is often inappropriate for the movement, being either too long, too scholarly, or only produced in one of the movement's three working languages. Finally, the existence of inter-academic competition – as clear to La Vía Campesina as it is to the academics themselves – also makes the movement wonder about the degree to which its relationships with academic researchers can be truly optimised.

[P]eople have come and started doctoral thesis with us and who have remained in the movement. And many others who have done the thesis, we haven't received what they've studied on us, we don't know what they've done, and we don't see them again.

Looking forwards, while La Vía Campesina maintains an ongoing wariness towards the development of a research protocol and the 'bureaucratisation' of its relationship with researchers, it has contemplated various ways in which it can use these relationships to better promote its knowledge interests. These reflections have included the possibility of organisational innovations to better align researcher activity with movement priorities and capacity, although for the moment no concrete action is underway. Some movement insiders argue that the movement is still very young and, looking at the historical trajectory of its relations with academics, suggest that it is perhaps only a matter of time before these relations do indeed become a matter of organisational and leadership priority.

Vía Campesina is developing a different agenda.

It is absolutely crucial, however, to recognise that La Vía Campesina's engagements with academics are just one small part of its overall knowledge-based activities undertaken in pursuit of its food sovereignty vision. This vision places the needs and capacities of rural and other peoples at its core, a commitment that shapes the building and undertaking of research, training and education programmes from the farm up. By far the greater part of the energy expended by La Vía Campesina and its member organisations in pursuit of this vision is channelled towards their *autonomous* activities, from farming organisations engaging in research on climate change, to international *campesino-a-campesino* (farmer-to-farmer) exchange programmes sharing agroecological and related farming practices,⁴ to the creation of an international network of agroecology schools and peasant universities. Whilst an exhaustive census has yet to be conducted, it is estimated that there are approximately 70 of La Vía Campesina's peasant universities and agroecology schools located in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and Canada⁵. The most emblematic of these are the Instituto Agroecológico Latino Americano (IALAs) located in Venezuela (IALA Paulo Freire) Paraguay (IALA Guaraní) Brazil (IALA Amazonas) and Chile (IALA de Mujeres). Another example is Amritha Bhoomi, the La Vía Campesina Agroecology School for South Asia. These schools and institutions provide a mixture of formal and informal training, and seek to address both the *political* and *technical* aspects of food sovereignty and agroecological production.

Through all of these activities, La Vía Campesina and its members are developing a distinctive agenda, differentiating themselves from the productivist, capitalist

4 The *campesino a campesino*, or farmer to farmer knowledge exchange process has a long history outside of La Vía Campesina but has in recent years been a focus of movement attention, particular via the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), La Vía Campesina's member organisation in Cuba (see: Rosset *et al.* 2011, Holt-Giménez 2006).

5 We would like to thank Peter Rosset for this information.

orientation that the movement sees as dominating the mainstream university system. And by far the greatest part of this activity is being conducted by La Vía Campesina's *member organisations*, with women and gender issues often pushed to the fore. And it is at the membership level, again, where relations with academics are being most nurtured, developed and maintained. Indeed, it is predominantly from its *members* that La Vía Campesina's innovative and knowledge-training practices emerge. Given that La Vía Campesina is a member-driven, rather than top-down, centralised entity, this should come as no surprise.

Looking ahead, La Vía Campesina activists identify the need for a range of training to help guide its future work. This includes supporting the movement's inter-generational leadership transition in a way that preserves the movement's historical memory; preparing peasant and rural representatives for participation in the challenging context of international food and agricultural policymaking; and exploring novel organisational forms to enable knowledge transmission amongst its diverse membership, particularly its youth. Given the widespread and continued presence of gender violence in the rural world, a gender perspective, the demand for which is being led by La Vía Campesina's women activists, will be crucial in all of these activities.

The women have developed their own training schools, and there too, women academics are very important. Because it's a question of empowerment, not only on the issue of women, but in the whole organisational perspective.

9.2 Collaborating with La Vía Campesina: a researcher's perspective

I identify myself as located across the second and third categories used by La Vía Campesina to understand their relations with researchers (identified above). I have undertaken research for La Vía Campesina in the past, the focus of which has been explicitly defined with movement actors, and which sought to generate outcomes in support of La Vía Campesina's activism in the transnational policy sphere (Brem-Wilson 2014, p.121-123). And whilst I maintain an ongoing dialogue with the movement, and am committed to developing projects and mechanisms that support its work, I have also developed an *autonomous* research agenda. Though I have independently conceived the focus and design of this work, it is heavily informed by and seeks to concretely support the ongoing struggle of La Vía Campesina (and other actors from the food sovereignty movement representing marginal and resource-poor communities) seeking voice in transnational policymaking.

My collaboration with La Vía Campesina, however, did not get off to the smoothest of starts. Not long after the commencement of my scholarship-funded PhD in September 2006, although a movement outsider, I wrote confidently to La Vía Campesina, announcing to them my plans to look at their relationship with the World Trade Organization, and requesting access to the movement and its spaces. Their

subsequent rejection of this proposal came as a shock, and posed a fundamental existential challenge to my PhD (and by extension my career aspirations). Over time, however, I came to appreciate the huge inconsistency between my values and political commitments (committed to valorising the subject-hood of La Vía Campesina and other marginalised non-elites) and my research practice (seeking to impose a pre-defined research project upon them). Following this insight, with encouragement from Annette Desmarais – who was acting as my liaison with La Vía Campesina – I re-engaged with the movement, but this time in a spirit of open dialogue, stating my desire to identify with the movement a mutually agreeable area of research. This time the exchange was productive, and in May 2008 I began a research project for them.

The purpose of this project was to help increase La Vía Campesina's understanding of United Nations (UN) food governance by conducting an analysis of the institutions and actors that constituted this complex space. Over time, this was narrowed down to focus upon just one institution: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The execution of this project involved me doing independent research, seeking to answer a number of questions of importance to La Vía Campesina, and checking in regularly to provide updates and seek clarification and guidance from my counterpart in the movement, Technical Support to the La Vía Campesina's International Operational Secretariat, Nico Verhagen. It also involved me being absolutely transparent about my PhD research objectives, and Nico and I being very clear that I understood La Vía Campesina's key positions on a number of issues, and what therefore their expectations for global food governance were. The project lasted approximately 18 months (although with the generation of outputs continuing for much longer) and resulted in the production of a number of briefing papers for La Vía Campesina and their allies, and a training session for La Vía Campesina leaders in 2010.

As well as being of some practical benefit to La Vía Campesina, the project had a profound impact upon my development as a researcher. Firstly, as already stated, it allowed me to recognise the importance of maintaining coherence between my political commitments and my research practice, something I have aspired to achieve and continue reflecting upon ever since. Secondly, it enabled me to obtain an understanding of the field of global food governance (or transnational food and agricultural policymaking) that would not have been accessible otherwise. By entering into this field of relations along the trajectory defined by La Vía Campesina and their research interests, I was able to appreciate the inherently contested nature of transnational food and agriculture policymaking, and the new democratic possibilities that were emerging as a result of the encounter between transnationally active social movements representing marginal peoples (such as La Vía Campesina) and UN food governance. In my PhD and since, I theorised these developments as embodying the properties of a nascent transnational public sphere (Brem-Wilson 2011, 2016). The collaboration with La Vía Campesina, in other words, had a *methodological* value, being an important part of a political ethnography the insights of which have shaped

my subsequent research trajectory. The current focus of my research, for example, upon the challenges facing social movement activists from La Vía Campesina and elsewhere seeking to participate effectively in transnational policymaking, builds directly upon the insights I obtained during my doctoral research.

At the conclusion of this project I did not conduct an explicit evaluation. I regret this now, as it would have been very useful for me to identify whether the outputs that I produced for La Vía Campesina did provide any practical benefit, and how my counterpart in the movement, Nico, experienced the collaboration. Informally I knew that he and others in the movement were very happy with the process and its outcomes, as was I, but this was not systematically captured and that was an oversight. Such an evaluation, for example, would have sought to make explicit the theory of change that informed my commitment to doing research, not just *on*, but *with* and *for* La Vía Campesina, the types of impact I expected to follow from that, and whether in practice these were visible or not. I believe this type of evaluation is absolutely vital to scholar-activists' attempts to understand the meaning of the support that they can and do provide to social movements, and the factors that enable and constrain it. I regard the fact that I did not do this at the end of my PhD therefore as a real missed opportunity.

However, as I have said, it was the case that Nico and others in the movement were generally happy with the process and outcomes of our collaboration and, in a context where they had experienced difficulties when working with researchers in the past, I regarded this as important. With this partly in mind, at the conclusion of the PhD, I began to reflect seriously upon the factors that had enabled this collaboration (Brem-Wilson 2014).⁶ Some of these were structural, and included me doing a PhD and therefore having the time to invest in the fairly lengthy process of establishing agreement with La Vía Campesina on the focus and terms of a collaborative research project. The fact that I had a scholarship (with substantial fieldwork allowance), moreover, meant that I had the freedom and confidence to 'follow the dialogue'. I was confident, in other words, that whatever we decided to focus upon, I had the resources to cope with it. An enabling supervisor who did not just encourage my methodology, but who was able and willing to protect me from the demands of institutional progress monitoring (which were largely incompatible with an inductive ethnography of this nature, where the research question comes very late into the process), was another very important part of the structural context.

Crucially, I also identified the presence of a number of methodological principles that I had been unconsciously adhering to, and that retrospectively I could see had played a very important role in the collaboration. For example, *actively identifying* with the movement enabled me to access their situated knowledge of their subject position and the field of relations within which they were positioned. This was crucial to helping me understand the democratic project inherent within their mobilisation.

⁶ These reflections represent a condensed version of the reflections presented in Brem-Wilson. (2014).

Given the amount of time and the number of documents, interviews, meetings and writing I engaged with to obtain it, I am certain it would have been impossible for me to arrive at this perspective via a more 'aloof' research posture.

Likewise, *dialogue* (with the movement at all stages of the research process) and *reciprocity* (reciprocating for the access afforded to me by the movement by firstly conducting a research product for them and secondly fulfilling the role of rapporteur at the civil society meetings I attended) were also both highly important. These allowed me to establish and maintain the trust of the movement and ensure that my presence as a researcher generated practical benefits for La Vía Campesina and their allies.

Theoretical openness (conducting the research without any preconceived ideas about what I was observing and experiencing) meant that when I did come to theory, I was theorising from the 'bottom-up'. This again was vital to me being able to recognise the democratic project implicit within La Vía Campesina's mobilisation, and the meaning of their contestation within transnational food and agricultural policy making.

The final methodological principle I identified as enabling my collaboration with La Vía Campesina was *reflexivity*. As well as the struggle to ensure coherence between my values and research practice, this referred to my ongoing efforts during the research process to interrogate and understand my own positionality, seeking to make explicit the biases and assumptions that affected how I understood, or did not understand, La Vía Campesina and their struggle. It also involved maintaining the awareness that, as a researcher, I had to be careful to not overstep the terms of my participation in the meetings and spaces into which I had been admitted. For example, although I often had things to say on the topics under discussion, because I was there as a researcher (and not, for example, as a representative of a constituency or organisation affected by the issues under discussion), I was absolutely clear that when attending meetings, I had no speaking rights. Therefore, unless it was a context in which I was explicitly requested to make a contribution, I never attempted to speak. This made my participation in these meetings non-obtrusive for the other participants, something that was recognised at the time by the actors in those spaces and again, contrasted with their past experiences with other researchers.⁷

It is important to note, however, that the capacity and self-awareness of La Vía Campesina were two fundamentally important factors that enabled our collaboration. When I contacted them, La Vía Campesina had: a) a clear idea of what they wanted researched; and b) a full-time staff person they could allocate as my counterpart during the research project. This is in part a function of La Vía Campesina's status as a movement active at the transnational level, where a high degree of organisational

⁷ There was one occasion though when I didn't quite get this right. This occurred at a meeting during which my status was blurred because I had been called upon to make a number of interventions in relation to the research project I had conducted for La Vía Campesina, and another issue upon which I had relevant insights. Perhaps carried away by this speaking opportunity, in a breakout session later I continued talking, and it was only when I noticed the tense expression on the face of the meeting convenor I realised I had overstepped the mark. I stopped talking, and during the break apologised and we cleared the air.

structure is required just to exist. However, as I have learned through other attempted collaborations with social movement activists, these attributes are not shared universally. Indeed, I have attempted to form collaborations with other groups and some of these did not go anywhere, predominantly because they lacked the ability to stay in the dialogue, or did not have a particularly well-developed sense of their knowledge interests (and therefore, what they wanted researching). As is captured in the first part of this chapter, La Vía Campesina themselves also struggle to generate the capacity required to fully express themselves in their collaborations with solidarity researchers (from academia and elsewhere).

In the past I have tended to expect that the movements and activists I am attempting to collaborate with should have their own autonomous capacity and a predefined sense of their knowledge interests, but now I am increasingly wondering if this may be somehow the responsibility of solidarity researchers also. That is, I am wondering if it is *our* responsibility to support movements and movement activists to define and promote their knowledge interests through the provision of processes and spaces for reflection. For a significant number of my colleagues at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, the provision of such spaces has been a key part of their work. I am lucky therefore that as I continue learning and reflecting upon my attempts to collaborate effectively with social movements such as La Vía Campesina and others, I can benefit from the prior experience of my colleagues. Indeed, being located in a centre where the commitment to collaboration with social movements and other non-elite food system actors runs very deep, means that I enjoy a degree of institutional support that is quite atypical. Of course, this doesn't neutralise the question of how to raise the funds required to support this kind of work, an issue about which, on its own, I am sure many chapters and articles could be dedicated.

9.3 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Christabel Buchanan, Lauren Kepkiewicz, Annette Desmarais, Laura Valencia, Josefina Ayala and Dora Maria Chamorro for their very useful suggestions about how to improve both the content and presentation of this chapter.

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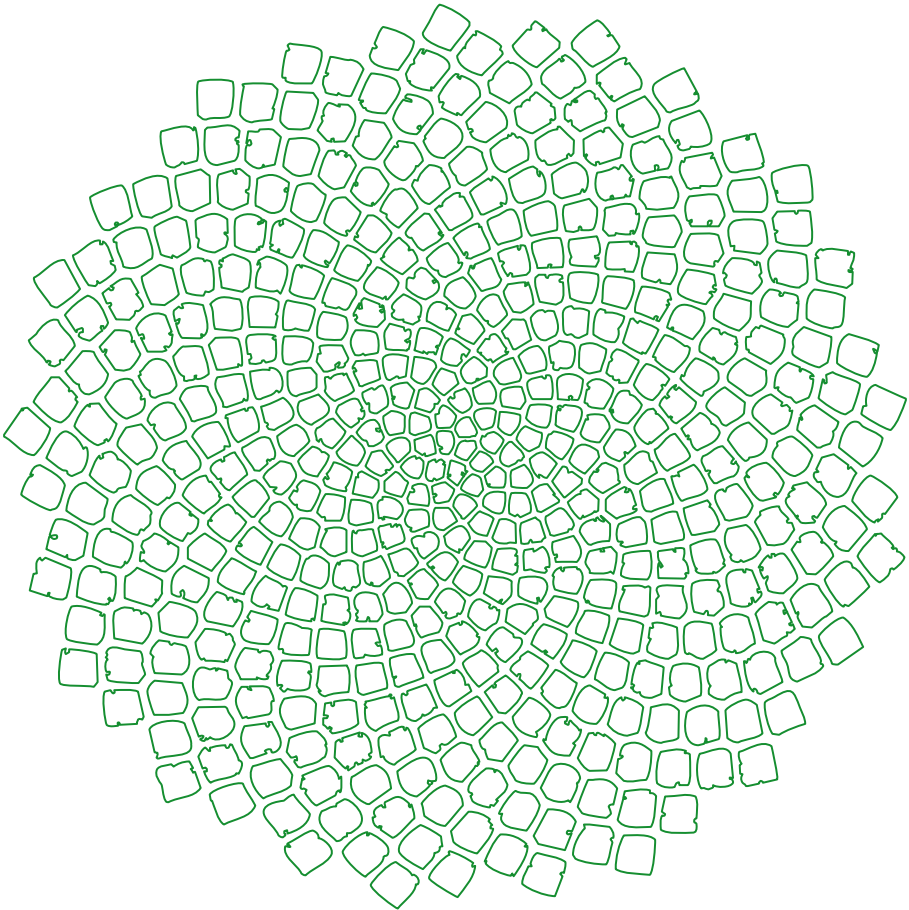
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10



The role of trust in building alliances of social movements: organising the International Forum on Agroecology

Maryam Rahmanian and Thierry Kesteloot

Geographical location: Global, transnational

Chapter highlights: Trust is an important but often 'invisible' issue in social movement processes.

Trust between social movement leaders and non-governmental organisation workers is the result of long-term institutional and personal relations over many years built on shared values and objectives, and the engagement of taking risks collectively, with shared understanding of roles and responsibilities between the social movements and non-governmental organisations.

Keywords: social movements, non-governmental organisations, social facilitation, transnational meetings, trust.

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter we seek to shine light on the crucial role of trust in building and strengthening social movements, a topic that tends to be discussed only in private, if at all. Organisations and individuals working within social movements normally work under conditions of high pressure and high stakes, where trust within and between movements, and with outside supporters and allied organisations, is a key component of being able to move forward. What role does trust play in social movements, how is

it established and what is needed to maintain it? Since both authors of this chapter work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), we will look specifically at the issue of trust between Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) and the NGOs that seek to support them (Box 10.1), taking the case of the International Forum for Agroecology held in Nyeleni in 2015¹ as a specific example. We intend this chapter to be an invitation to reflect further on this important and 'invisible' issue. We are fully aware that there is much more to be said about trust than can be uncovered by one fairly short account of a single event. We are also aware that some examples of building – and losing – trust are sensitive and cannot be shared with a wider audience at the risk of further endangering trust. This is a necessary limitation to this contribution.

Box 10.1. Social movements and NGOs

It is important to distinguish between social movement organisations (SMOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Both are non-state actors and are, in general, recognised as part of civil society. The most crucial distinction between them pertains to the issue of membership. SMOs are constituted by their members, organised formally or informally, and engaged collectively from grassroots protest, resistance and change in a political project. The membership is central to the legitimacy of SMOs, their leadership and their ways of working. NGOs tend to be functionally specialised, with paid and professional staff, defining their work by their organisational goals rather than by their membership. This distinction is crucial in the context of food sovereignty, where there was an early rejection by the SMOs of the tendency of many NGOs to speak on behalf of social movements and grassroots organisations. In this context, social movement organisations have managed over time to assert their protagonism in relation to their NGO allies, giving them a supportive role. This support can be diverse in terms of political solidarity, expertise, funding, facilitation or media support. It is also essential for NGOs to respect the differentiation of roles and responsibilities between them and the SMOs, and accept the need to adapt to the SMOs often slower and more complex decision-making and implementation processes.

10.2 Background and context

Achieving food sovereignty requires the co-creation of many forms of knowledge. The movement for food sovereignty has emerged and developed through multiple processes of collective knowledge sharing and knowledge creation, building on small-scale food producers' experiences, needs and struggles. It brings together and develops common analysis among peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, the landless, women and NGOs. Over the years, these processes have evolved into strong alliances with other movements, including consumers, trade unions and environmental groups. They have also led to engagement in common strategies for change at global and national levels on such issues as trade, corporate power, land reform, biodiversity,

¹ A description of agroecology can be found in the Forum's final declaration: <http://www.foodsovereignty.org/forum-agroecology-nyeleni-2015/>

peasants' rights and agroecology. Working with diverse organisations from different cultural backgrounds and in diverse languages means that periodic regional and global meetings are some of the most important spaces permitting the co-creation of knowledge. The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC, see Box 10.2) has organised regular meetings of SMOs and convened their collective participation at international events since 1996. These fora have allowed large numbers of actors from a wide range of regions and constituencies to come together to develop common positions and to find inspiration and solidarity. There is often continuity from one event to the next with the same participants attending. Issues are discussed in plenary sessions and working groups, and the final synthesis of the most widely accepted knowledge is expressed through a declaration or statement that is then used to spread the knowledge among members of the movements and beyond.

Box 10.2. The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)

The IPC is an alliance of social movements and organisations of small-scale food providers. It receives support from allied NGOs. It has existed loosely since 1996 but was established under the name of the IPC in 2001 to organise civil society participation in the World Food Summit five years later. This was achieved through the organisation of a parallel forum, the Forum for Food Sovereignty. Held in 2002, this drew the attendance of more than 500 participants from social movements and NGOs. Since then, IPC has facilitated several meetings at international and regional levels on different issues related to food sovereignty. The IPC was also one of the co-organisers of the Nyeleni 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty, which took place in Mali. It is structured as working groups and regional processes.

10.3 International Forum on Agroecology

The International Forum on Agroecology was organised by an alliance of small-scale food producers and consumers, most of them members of the IPC. Held in the Nyeleni Centre, Selingue, Mali in February 2015, it was the largest ever global gathering of social movements on agroecology. As a global and diverse alliance, the IPC offers an important case for examining trust issues. The global nature of the platform raises questions and challenges relating to intercultural dynamics in building and maintaining trust. These are examined below.

Trust can be conceptualised in multiple ways, but most definitions coalesce around the idea that trust is a psychological state, in which one actor (the trustor) accepts some form of vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another (the trustee), despite inherent uncertainties in that expectation. Trust can be described as a tripartite relationship, in which entity A trusts entity B to do action C. In other words, trust is context-specific and concerns a trustor (entity A), a trustee (entity B), and a potential action (action C) (Stern and Coleman 2015).

Consequently, the trustor is not sure about the outcome, and mainly develops and evaluates expectations. The uncertainty involves the risk of failure or harm to the trustor if the trustee does not behave as desired. In this case, the trustor is the steering committee of the Agroecology Forum (made up almost exclusively of IPC member organisations) and the trustee is the 'methodology group', established by the steering committee and tasked with preparing the programme and methodology of the Forum according to its values, vision and objectives. The methodology group was chosen on the basis of a long-term partnership in previous experiences demonstrating common understanding, respect and shared objectives. Theoretically, the trust between the steering committee and the methodology group can be described as a form of affinitive trust. This is trust based primarily on judgments resulting from either cognitive or subconscious assessments of the qualities of the potential trustee and its integrity and/or benevolence resulting from assumptions of shared values or concerns, feelings of social connectedness or shared positive experiences (Stern and Coleman 2015, p. 122).

The *ad hoc* steering committee, comprising representatives of social movements, was established to take all strategic decisions as well as to provide political leadership for the event. Due to numerous close collaborations over several years,² the authors were invited by the steering committee to set up a 'methodology group'. Establishing a methodology group has become a standard procedure for organising IPC meetings and fora. The methodology group (also *ad hoc* and usually composed of a small handful of people who have proven experience with facilitation) proposed the programme and methodology for the event. The programme of any event, as well as the methodologies used in implementing it, play a key role in shaping the outcomes of the event and, therefore, the approval of the programme and methodology rest with the steering committee. Unlike the steering committee, the methodology group tends to be composed mostly of NGOs and staff members of the movements.

10.4 International Forum on Agroecology: objectives and challenges

Here we describe the process of designing and implementing the programme, highlighting the context and the challenges that occurred in this process.

The two initial members of the methodology group, Thierry and Maryam, met briefly in October, five months before the forum, with some members of the steering committee who were political leaders of social movements. The steering committee defined and shared with us (the authors) the main objectives and expectations of the forum, and explained why it was important to organise a global forum at this time (it had been

² Maryam was a regional focal point for the IPC from 2002 until 2012 and represented the IPC in the steering committee of Nyeleni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty. Thierry was part of the Methodology Group of this Forum. Both Maryam and Thierry were members of the methodology group of the Agroecology Forum. We have both played various supportive roles to the IPC and its member organisations.

postponed once due to the ebola crisis). The steering committee felt it was important to hold the forum before the three Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) regional conferences on agroecology – the first one taking place in June 2015 in Latin America. After some discussions between Thierry and Maryam, we shared an initial draft programme with several new members of the methodology group (proposed by the steering committee³) and continued to work through email and conference calls. There was very little further feedback or instruction from the steering committee until days before the Forum.

One of the key objectives set by the steering committee was that the Forum should result in a common set of principles rather than a single definition of agroecology. A further critical objective was to build alliances across sectors (e.g. farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, nomadic pastoralists, consumers, etc.) and regions. The steering committee trusted the methodology group to understand and respect its objectives and to deliver a programme that would achieve both objectives.

Reaching these objectives was complicated by several limitations, including time and financial pressures, which made it necessary, but also challenging, to maintain trust in relations. Due to the limitations, the steering committee was not able to meet before the Forum (as is usually the case for a meeting of this scale) and most members were not very responsive to email and teleconference. Although these communication patterns are often normal conditions for social movements, they do create uncertainty and undermine the ability of the steering committee to control the planning process or to respond in a timely manner to questions, including those from the methodology group. The programme we had drafted was discussed in depth by the steering committee only one day before the Forum started and was adopted with very few changes, indicating that the programme met their expectations and the risk of placing their trust in the methodology group had been worthwhile.

The inability of the steering committee to give direction in the face of unforeseen issues confronted the methodology group with challenges. For example, the organisers learned late that the Malian partners had been preparing a national forum on agroecology and that this was somehow to be merged with the international event. There seemed to have been insufficient communication between the international and the Malian processes and it fell partly to the methodology group, which incorporated one person from the host organisation Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP), to make the best of the situation by delivering a programme that met both sets of expectations and incorporated both sets of objectives as much as possible. Nevertheless, some of the local organisers felt that they had lost the opportunity to organise the national Malian event in the way they had hoped. This was linked to a second challenge, which

3 One staff member from La Via Campesina responsible for their agroecology project ensured the programme was compatible with La Via Campesina's objectives, and a staff person from Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP) made the connection with CNOP and Mali. A member of the IPC Secretariat, although not officially part of the methodology group, gave feedback on strategic/political issues.

was that the steering committee, arriving days before the Forum, realised that many more representatives of Malian organisations wanted to participate than had been foreseen. The IPC normally organises participation based on a quota system, in which steering committee members negotiate amongst themselves the number of participant slots allocated per region and sector. The quota system has demonstrated its use in avoiding some sectors or regions feeling under-represented and preventing any one group dominating the gathering through having large numbers of participants. Despite the last-minute organisation and far from being optimal, the major regions and sectors were present (with the exception of the trade unions). The gender balance and youth participation was also globally respected. The fact that Mali was highly over-represented could have been disruptive, but the steering committee responded with a lot of flexibility. Logistically, solutions were found to enable their full participation (e.g. food, translation material, number of working groups). The methodology group proposed to the steering committee, with people from the different sectors and regions, to play a more visible role in introductions to the plenaries. This helped to facilitate a process and achieve the objective of building alliances across sectors, despite imbalances in numbers of participants between sectors and regions.

10.5 How was trust present in the process?

We believe that there was a good deal of trust between the different stakeholders of the Forum through a diversity of means and that this proved to be an essential ingredient for the success of the Forum. There was trust between the steering committee and the methodology group, manifested in flexibility and adaptation during the whole process of preparation and the course of the Forum, and this helped to create a sense of trust between the participants and the steering committee because the participants were willing to be led through the programme presented by the steering committee. We believe that we would not have met the objectives of the Forum without a good deal of trust, although we do not claim that trust was always present or was never challenged. However, we maintain that, if a certain degree of trust had not existed, the final declaration would have been either very weak or not endorsed by all participants. Lack of trust could also have prevented the participants from using the declaration in their advocacy work and they may even have denounced or tried to delegitimise the process.

The relationship of trust between the steering committee and the methodology group was required in a context where there were high levels of uncertainty and a need for flexibility. Adapting collectively to external conditions and respecting each other's roles were key features of trust that contributed to the success of the Forum. It was often up to the methodology group to adapt and anticipate the infrequent feedback of the steering committee, and for the steering committee to trust that the methodology group would work within the remit and procedural norms of the IPC. The methodology

group was fairly independent and influential, not only in designing the programme but also in choosing the authors of the background documents, speakers and facilitators.



This and following photos: Food producers and citizens from around the world meet in Mali at the International Forum for Agroecology. February 2015. Photo credits: Colin Anderson

The fact that the steering committee adopted the draft programme with very few changes the day before the Forum demonstrates that there was a shared understanding of the objectives of the Forum. Despite having little contact with the methodology group, the steering committee did take ownership and adopted the political leadership of the programme. At the same time, they recognised implicitly that the methodology group had responded to their needs. Facing high levels of uncertainty around funding and participation, the steering committee implicitly expected a high level of flexibility from the methodology group. In addition, it was understood that both the steering committee and the methodology group shared a common responsibility and understanding of the potential need to adapt the ambition and methodology according to the real and rapidly changing circumstances. Although this shared understanding was implicit, it was critical to developing an environment of trust between the steering committee and the methodology group.

This trust was established partly through a strong differentiation of roles between SMOs (who provide political leadership) and NGOs (who support the technical side of processes). However, it must be recognised that roles that are, in principle, strongly differentiated, can become confused because the division between political and technical roles is sometimes difficult to maintain. This lack of clarity of roles emerged at the Forum through the inclusion, at the request of the steering committee, of two persons from the methodology group in the drafting committee of the final declaration, which included a number of leaders from social movements. In this case, the dual

role did not create any problems, and this testified to the trust that has been built up over many years of working together and getting to know each other on a personal as well as political level. However, it is important to recognise the value, but also the limitations, of a clear division of roles.



Building trust among the participants was a key concern when designing the programme and methodology. Respect for the other, being open to listening and learning, creating a common language and understanding, and building mutual trust

were unstated objectives of the Forum and they were put into practice throughout the event (although we do not claim that this was true of every participant and at every moment). It was important to have a programme that built trust among the participants and there were many moments dedicated to this, even if this was not explicit. Given the very different backgrounds of participants, in terms of constituencies, geography, gender, age and their role in the movements, building a common understanding amongst a diversity of experiences, expectations and expressions was an important objective of the programme. We tried to achieve this by dedicating the first day to sharing testimonies from different constituencies and by sharing experiences, in particular through presentations on practical agroecology from Malian peasant farmers. We believe this was one of the strong points of the programme because the Malian peasants were motivated and had many experiences to share. It was the participation of one person from the local host organisation (CNOP) in the methodology group that ensured that we included this in the programme (building on their ideas for a national forum on agroecology). Later on in the programme this was reinforced by the sharing of experiences of people from other regions. This built the feeling that we were all starting from a common place and all had experiences, achievements and struggles to share, despite their similarities and differences. Rooting ourselves in local experiences helped create a sense of togetherness, with shared values and expectations strengthening trust among participants. It also served to remind all participants that people with a diversity of cultures and worldviews, if able to work alongside each other, are some of the greatest assets held by transnational social movements. Specific spaces for discussion between participants from the same constituencies and regions helped to recognise the variety of actors and their contribution to the process, although the organisation of the women's and youth caucuses could have been better planned (see further discussion below). Finally, two caucus spaces for women and youth were included during the first day of the programme to provide a specific space in which to discuss their contributions to the Forum.

Trust was enhanced by avoiding one group dominating the others. Confronting the fact that Malians were over-represented helped to maintain trust with the Malian partners. Perhaps it was the fact that Africans are often under-represented in global gatherings that permitted this flexibility (the steering committee may have been less flexible, for example, if the meeting had been held in Europe and an unexpectedly large number of European participants had shown up). As the Forum proceeded, we felt that the Malians contributed greatly through their impressive, though fairly recent, field experience of agroecology, through their tolerant culture and ways of discussing things openly, and through their sense of calm in moments of organisational difficulties.

Non-verbal communication was an important ingredient of the methodologies we used to build trust. Throughout the forum there were important moments of non-

verbal communication, with songs, mysticas⁴, seed fairs and agroecological cooking exhibitions. These interactions built a sense of togetherness, which can be difficult to achieve with verbal communication. The location of the Forum also played a significant role: the Nyeleni village was built by a global platform of social movements to host the Nyeleni 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty and, as such, represented a legacy of working together. Being in a rural area, it was also a place that respected the host organisation, the local population and village authorities, as well as the culture in general.



It was important to establish trust between the participants and the steering committee, and a number of interventions and presentations by members of the steering committee and methodology group ensured that all participants got to know who they were, heard their views, and implicitly accepted their leadership. This was important because there were key moments when the steering committee had to act on its own authority. For

⁴ A mystica is a symbolic, creative or emotional way to connect in a group using song, arts, collective movement or other non-rational ways of expression.

example, while the Forum was able to develop and validate a shared vision and common articulation of principles of agroecology through a bottom-up process, it was a challenge to arrive at concrete and shared strategies given the breadth of the participants, their varied backgrounds, levels of political experience, and the short duration of the Forum (three days). Eventually, the steering committee took on the responsibility of further shaping the strategies that had been developed by the participants to improve their relevance and these were validated by the participants even though some were new additions made by the steering committee.



10.6 Challenges to trust

While there were many important achievements, several situations challenged the basis of trust, demonstrating that trust cannot be taken for granted but must be actively built and maintained. The tension between the expectations of the Malian organisations that had been preparing themselves for a national forum on agroecology, and the international steering committee who insisted on giving priority to the need to have a declaration from the international forum, were never totally resolved. For example, firstly, the Malian organisations came prepared to share their rich experiences (such as a cooking fair to celebrate local foods and cooks), but they felt they were not given sufficient space and time to do so. The process of developing and adopting a declaration from the international forum was time-consuming and dominated the programme design. Secondly, the steering committee decided to use the term 'agroecology', rather than 'peasant agroecology' or 'peoples' agroecology', as some participants were suggesting, including those from Mali. While this decision was essentially validated by the participants through the adoption of the final declaration, some participants felt that there had been insufficient discussion and they did not understand the grounds for the final position taken by the steering committee.

There were a number of additional cases in which certain groups did not feel they were being heard adequately. As mentioned above, the system of quotas for participation is a crucial tool for establishing trust by ensuring that no region or constituency feels under-represented. This was challenged (as is often the case) by the fact that funding, invitations and visas became available so late in the process that some constituencies, particularly indigenous peoples, were not well represented. This led to a feeling of exclusion. In addition, two caucus spaces for women and youth were included in the programme, but they were not well timed or planned in advance. It was not clear who was responsible for organising these spaces and again, it was done at the last minute by those who were willing to take the responsibility. While some of the concerns raised by the two caucuses were included in the final declaration, better preparation and integration in the programme could have strengthened their voices and led to a feeling of greater inclusion.

10.7 Reflections on the role of trust

Based on our experiences, we believe that trust is the result of long-term institutional and personal relations, particularly between social movement leaders and NGO workers. As shown by the experiences described above, trust with allied organisations allows social movements to adapt collectively and constructively to unfolding and unpredictable situations. It is achieved through openness, creating a common language, learning, listening and contributing to a common endeavour. It means organising concrete initiatives, often under challenging conditions, and thus taking risks when organising initiatives together. It requires a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, and of the objectives and ways of working. The challenges are taken under collective responsibility, which nurtures the feeling that civil society organisations will either succeed or fail together.

Trust between SMOs and NGOs is based on a long-term partnership with shared values and objectives. The history of working together and the trust built between NGO staff and SMO leaders and staff (between the methodology group and the steering committee) allowed us to work quickly and effectively under challenging conditions. Since 2001, the IPC has been building a community of shared values and objectives, creating mutual understanding, translating food sovereignty into specific strategies for change in respect of the diversity of its membership. It developed specific ways of working favouring collective ownership and participation.

The methodology group was fairly independent and influential, not only in designing the programme but also in choosing the authors of the background documents, speakers and facilitators. This is a testimony to the trust that has been built up over many years of working together and getting to know each other on a personal as well as political level. We feel that the steering committee was able to accept most of our proposals and therefore delegate a lot of the work to us because this basis of trust already existed. If it had not, then they would have had to do the work of the

methodology group on their own, or control the methodology group very closely. Over years of working together as SMOs (leaders) and NGOs (staff), we have learned the importance of being flexible and adapting. While keeping the overall structure of the programme, we were flexible, for example, in terms of timing and which speakers to include in the programme; many of them being recruited at the last minute. We believe that their willingness to be involved shows a sense of common responsibility as well as a flexibility and aptitude to adapt to emergent and uncertain processes. Those with experience in SMOs understand that this is a necessary mode of working in this complex, multi-actor and highly political context.



At the same time, incorporating new people into established circles of trust can be a challenge. The IPC has built a community of values and a common language and ways of working that are often based on implicit understanding, capitalising on former agreements. The fact that these are mainly shared in an informal way means that misunderstandings could appear with new participants who are not aware of them. It would be useful to reflect on how possible alienation could be mitigated, for example by identifying experienced mentors for the newer participants.

We also wonder whether the delegation of tasks by SMOs to trusted partners is always a good idea. There may be instances when relying on trust between certain partners in an unreflective way could become a weakness. We refer here to the example of the people from the methodology group who were invited to be part of the drafting committee for the final declaration. There is a risk that individuals playing dual roles could gain excessive power, which could be abused in some cases. In our experience, trusted individuals who play dual roles take advantage of their role (or not) in different ways, based mostly on personal attitudes. Normally such individuals are trusted to not abuse their position, but this may not always be the case. At the same time, the way that SMOs assign such dual roles can sometimes

appear opaque and it is not clear who is given this privilege, who is not, and why. This was not a problematic issue at the Agroecology Forum, but it could become so in certain contexts and therefore deserves to be discussed. Even if trust could be seen as building on each other's strengths, it could also hide the need to address important bottlenecks in decision making and leadership that arise from the limited numbers of, and time available to, social movement leaders. Looking at a longer-term process, these bottlenecks could impede the work of broadening the political basis and ownership over a transformation process towards agroecology.

While there were challenges, it must be remembered that events like the Forum are one moment in a process that began before the conference and that will continue long after it. The existence of the IPC mechanism allows the participants to situate the Forum in a longer-term process. Trust is often a critical factor in the success of collective endeavours. However, the elements of trust, and the underlying assumptions on which they are based, are largely implicit. We believe that collectively trying to understand them and making them more explicit would certainly contribute to strengthening alliances of social movements, including the alliance for agroecology.

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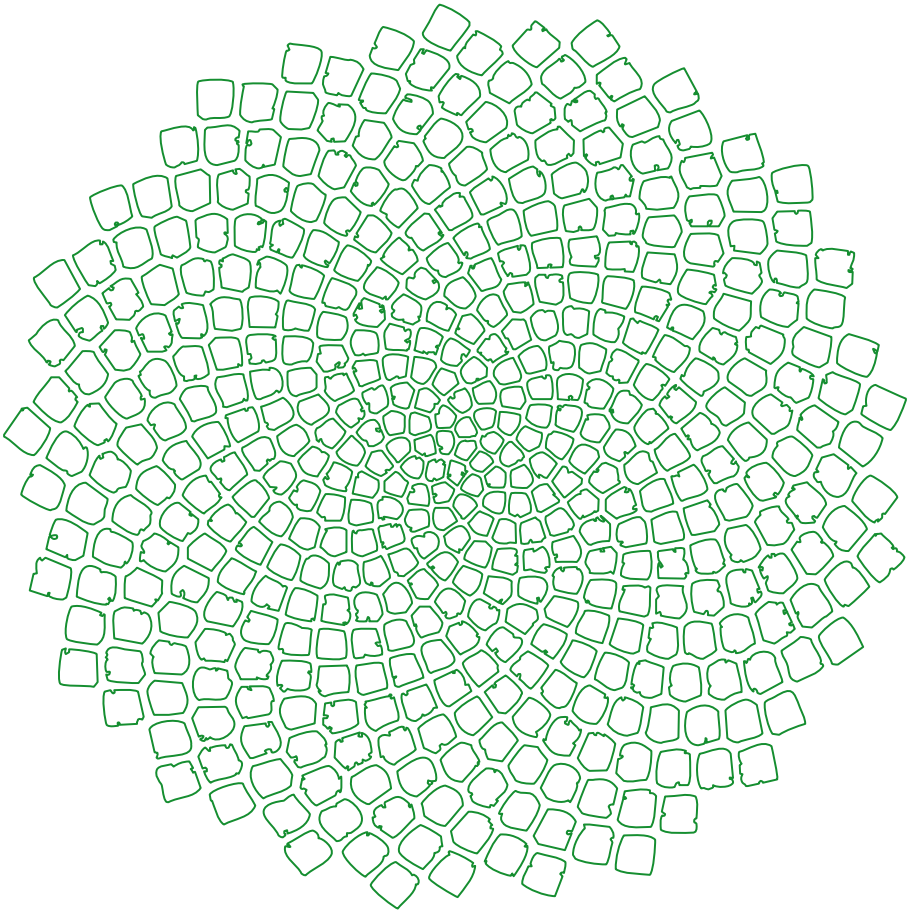
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11



Community organisations for food systems change: reflecting on food movement dynamics in Manitoba

Colin Anderson, Jeanette Sivilay and Kenton Lobe

Geographical location: Manitoba, Canada

Chapter highlights: This chapter presents a case study illustrating farmers and engaged citizens working collectively to better their communities, challenge government policy and fight for a more just and sustainable food system.

The case chronicles and analyses the creation of different organisations or 'mobilising structures' in the Canadian Province of Manitoba. These emerged in response to a controversial food safety raid on a local farm.

Through critical self-analysis, participatory action research can open opportunities for protagonists in social movement organisations to critically examine their own practice in order to strategically resist being co-opted and to move towards more transformative change.

Keywords: food sovereignty, compartmentalisation, legitimacy, local food, mobilising structures, participatory action research, non-governmental organisations.



Farmers and allies share a meal at an urban farm in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo Credit: Colin Anderson

11.1 Introduction

Discontent with the shortcomings of the global corporate food system is giving rise to a wide range of projects, organisations and groups working to develop alternatives and transform the food system (Holt-Giménez and Shuttuck 2011). In North America and Europe, there has been an upsurge in local food initiatives seeking to connect farmers and consumers as co-producers of localised food systems (Renting *et al.* 2012). These initiatives include direct farm marketing schemes, farmers' markets, food hubs, community-supported agriculture and local food cooperatives. They generally seek autonomy from the corporate food regime and aim to create more just and sustainable relations around food.

While sustainable local food systems may offer an alternative to the corporate food system, many challenges prevent these grassroots innovations from reaching their full potential. Some have argued that local food proponents are too focused on individualism and entrepreneurship (Guthman 2008), that local food activism caters mostly to the white middle class (Cadieux and Slocum 2015), and that a focus on local pragmatism can undermine the broader processes of transformation (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011). Indeed, decades of neoliberalism have shaped the way people think about food activism and how to achieve food system change. Further,

government regulation and policy, food prices and consumer expectations have all been influenced by corporate industrial food in ways that undermine the development and scaling up and out of alternative food systems (Laforge *et al.* 2016). Thus, while local food systems are emerging from the bottom up, managed by individuals and groups developing pragmatic alternatives, it is essential to address strategically how food producers and citizens can enact a wider range of tactics, strategies and politics to take back control over food and agriculture policy and practice. In this context, any efforts to transform the food system must involve a conscious and strategic struggle to build food sovereignty at multiple scales.

Food sovereignty provides a framework that is uniting citizens around the world in a global struggle for a more just and sustainable food system (Desmarais and Wittman 2014, Wittman *et al.* 2010). It represents an alternative, politicised and radical approach to food system transformation, emphasising the need to put control over food systems and food policy in the hands of farmers and consumers rather than with elite institutions and corporations (Nyéléni Declaration 2007). For those involved in the pragmatic work of developing local food systems in the Global North, food sovereignty implies a reorientation towards working collectively to challenge the politics, institutions and structures of the dominant food system, to focus on power relations in the food system and to work across scales of organisation (Iles and Montenegro de Witt 2015). Fundamental to this process is the development of collective mobilising structures (Tarrow 1998), such as networks and organisations that provide mechanisms to develop collective identity, critical analysis and platforms for sustained collective action.

Tarrow (1998) suggests that there is no single model of social movement organisation, but the type of mobilising structure chosen by any social movement has an impact on their agency and success. More formalised and hierarchical non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are often well resourced and may be more conducive to sustained activities. They are also better suited to interfacing with authorities and mainstream allies (Levkoe 2015). However, formal NGOs have also been criticised for losing much of their capacity for disruption and for their propensity to become co-opted into the agenda of mainstream or reformist projects (Choudry and Kapoor 2013). In this regard, more autonomous, horizontally organised groups and networks are better suited as mobilising structures for politicised and contentious activity. Yet, decentralised and autonomous groups can lack coordination and connectivity. Thus, Tarrow (1998, p.137) proposes: “a delicate balance between formal organisation and autonomy – one that can only be bridged by strong, informal, nonhierarchical connective structures”.

In this chapter, we focus on the importance of understanding the politics, strategies, collective structures and organisational governance that arise as farmers and allies come together to organise for food system change. We present a participatory action research (PAR) project from the Canadian prairies, in which citizens are self-organising to challenge the policies and regulations that limit the development of sustainable

local food systems. Our narrative begins with a controversial raid by government food safety inspectors on a local farm, and we track the various grassroots responses and organisational forms that emerged in the wake of this catalysing event. We critically examine how established norms, practices and pressures towards mainstream forms of NGOs have the potential to depoliticise, channel dissent and undermine more confrontational approaches. We chronicle our struggle to cope with the difficult tension between addressing the immediate need for pragmatic reform and the longer-term aspirations towards transformative change. Our participatory action research (PAR) approach has provided an important opportunity to engage in reflective self-critical dialogue to contend with these dilemmas in collective processes of learning and action. Indeed, we discuss the potential of PAR as an approach that can help social movement actors contend collectively with the contradictions that arise when interacting with mainstream policies, institutions and cultures, while organising for social change. The remainder of this chapter provides an account of our PAR project, focusing first on describing the background of the case study, then on the different mobilising structures that have been pursued in our case, and finally by reflecting on some of the main debates and choices made by participants in these efforts.

Box 11.1. About the authors

Jeanette, Colin and Kenton have all been actively involved as participants and animators in the work described in this article and have written this account through their work as members of the action research committee of Sharing the Table Manitoba. Jeanette is a farmer and community organiser and has acted as the coordinator of Sharing the Table Manitoba. Colin is a participatory action researcher and participated as an organiser in the Real Manitoba Food Fight. He was involved in other related community food organisations in Manitoba over the previous eight years. Kenton is a food grower, a teacher at the Canadian Mennonite University and a member of the Sharing the Table Manitoba steering committee. He has been involved in a range of related community food initiatives in Manitoba over the past decade, including the Manitoba Community Supported Agriculture network and the Manitoba Food Charter. This narrative and analysis is based on a participatory action research project and draws on the experiences of the authors as well as dialogue with the wider group of participants involved in Sharing the Table Manitoba.

11.2 The participatory action research case study

This chapter is based on a PAR process carried out by participants in a network called Sharing the Table Manitoba. PAR is a collaborative process that combines critical analysis and action towards addressing practical and political challenges (Reason and Bradbury 2008). For us, this has comprised iterative cycles of observation, reflection, planning and action, with each cycle leading to increased capacity for action, learning

and change (Anderson and McLachlan 2015, Kemmis *et al.* 2014). Our goal throughout this process was to apply our collective analysis to better understand how we could most effectively organise our efforts to gain political agency and to adapt our strategies based on this analysis. In this way, we wanted to learn more about the world by working together to try to change it. The PAR team has been facilitated by Sivilay and Anderson, but has involved a wider evolving collective of farmers, researchers and consumers involved in Sharing the Table who committed to adopting a PAR approach to develop and document our work and whose voices are represented in the case study below. We facilitated the PAR process as part of a commitment to collectively observing and analysing the evolving political situation in the province, carrying out actions both as individuals and a group, and reflecting on these actions to inform further planning and action. We documented this process through note-taking, recordings of our group debates and from qualitative interviews, which form the basis of the narrative presented as a case study.

In August 2013, the Manitoba provincial government raided and confiscated cured meats produced by the local, mixed farm of Clint and Pam Cavers. Ironically, just months earlier, the same provincial government had awarded a prize to the Cavers for the same cured meats in recognition of them being the most exciting new farm product in Manitoba (Anderson 2013). The raid resulted in the destruction of their products, a \$1600 fine, damage to their reputation and loss of years of testing and product development. While the province claimed to have 'non-physical evidence' that the Cavers sold their meat products illegally, these allegations were denied by the Cavers and the government eventually dropped the charges without producing any evidence (Laforge *et al.* 2016).

The raid was widely considered to be unwarranted and unfair, but also to reflect more pervasive problems with a provincial regulatory and policy framework and culture that favoured large scale food systems and that undermines the autonomy of food producers and inhibits the development of localised food systems (Laforge *et al.* 2016). The event sparked a surge of political organising amongst farmers, citizens and other allies in Manitoba to advocate for changes to these policies and institutions and to ensure that small farmers have more control over policy and practice related to local food systems.

While there are many food activists in Manitoba who embrace a critical stance and push for a radical agenda in their work, there has generally been an absence of an organisation to amplify their voices in debates around local food. The most prominent province-wide NGO working to promote local food systems is Food Matters Manitoba, which emerged out of the process of creating the Manitoba Food Charter. In 2005, an ad hoc volunteer group made up of individuals and representatives from grassroots groups led an extensive process of community deliberation through 70 public meetings convening people from across Manitoba to write the Manitoba Food Charter (Manitoba Food Charter 2005). The Food Charter represented a broad call for

citizens and government to work towards community food security and food justice, and for greater involvement of the public in policymaking (Lobe 2005).

The participatory process that led to the Food Charter was an important phase in grassroots organising, building solidarity and articulating a holistic vision of food systems change for Manitoba. It also led to the formation of Food Matters Manitoba as an NGO that would carry forward the vision and momentum of the Food Charter. Over the past decade, close ties with the public health department of the provincial government and a strong track record in securing funding from multiple levels of government have allowed Food Matters Manitoba to bring a diverse range of actors from civil society together with the private and public sector to work towards community food security and to deliver a variety of community food programmes.



Video about the Real Manitoba Food fight, a campaign to contest the industrial orientation of food safety regulations in Manitoba and the lack of support for community food systems.

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1F6sCPMlm8>

However, Food Matters Manitoba has also avoided advancing a more critical perspective that directly confronts government; for example, they intentionally avoid using the explicitly radical food sovereignty discourse to frame their work. Further, while Food Matters has had a strong presence in northern and urban areas of the province, they have had less success in connecting with small farmers and rural areas. In this context, when the Cavers farm raid occurred, many felt that there was no organisational body to represent the needs of small farmers engaged in local food networks and there was a need to develop collective capacity to engage in political strategies to affect change.

11.3 Three mobilising structures developed in the wake of the Cavers farm raid

The incident on the Cavers farm led to the emergence of three interrelated mobilising structures that developed chronologically and were advanced as vehicles through which farmers, consumers and allies could work politically to develop local food systems in Manitoba.



The Real Manitoba Food Fight logo.

The Real Manitoba Food Fight (established in August 2013)

The raid on the Cavers farm occurred coincidentally at the same time as a class from the University of Manitoba was scheduled to visit. Members of the class recorded the confrontation and used the footage as the basis of a short video aiming to raise awareness, beginning the first of the collective structures: a campaign called The Real Manitoba Food Fight (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1F6sCPMIm8>). Originally coordinated by a student group, the campaign was augmented by an ad hoc collective of farmers, chefs, students and researchers through a series of meetings, op-eds published in local papers and social media communications. The campaign aimed to develop a critical and politicised voice around local food systems in Manitoba, focusing on discussing the raid, raising awareness of the unclear and inconsistent regulatory environment to which small farmers and processors are subjected, and establishing a place where citizens could participate in dialogue around these issues. While the website and social media platforms for the Real Manitoba Food Fight remain online, the campaign has been largely inactive. The campaign was effective as a single-issue mobilising structure in a particular political moment; however, it was not viewed as a suitable structure for long-term mobilisation. As the initial enthusiasm and political tensions that arose in response to the Cavers incident subsided, participants in these efforts grappled with the challenge of how to extend their energies to enable more proactive and sustained political lobbying.

Sharing the Table Manitoba (established in September 2013)

The Real Manitoba Food Fight thus led to the formation of a network called Sharing the Table Manitoba, which involved a similar contingent of people, but was intended to be a more durable entity that could bring different actors together. The network was originally named Farmers and Eaters Sharing the Table or FEAST, but the name was changed to be more inclusive of a wider diversity of actors, including hunters, fisherfolk, chefs, retailers and other allies in the grassroots struggle to build local food systems.

Sharing the Table Manitoba was developed as an informal network rather than as a formally constituted NGO, and was driven forward initially by a transitional steering group. Its original participants are mainly individuals from long-established organisations working on food issues in the province include members of the National Farmers Union, the Farmers Market Association of Manitoba, Food Matters Manitoba, Small Farms Manitoba, Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance, the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, Canadian Mennonite University, various chefs, small farmers and their consumer allies. The breadth of these perspectives allowed the network to discuss the issues strategically and form multiple perspectives in ways that enable the individuals and groups to pursue joint strategies and support the decentralised work represented by each participant.

Sharing the Table Manitoba has thus operated as a horizontally structured meeting place, modelled after the metaphor of a community meal, where people can come together regularly and convivially to share ideas, strengthen relationships and contribute to a grassroots food movement in the province. The name also implies a certain level of informality, which has been a defining feature of the movement, where the intent has been to remain as a coordinated yet decentralised network rather than a structured organisation. The effectiveness of this informal format and mode of organising was debated by the council of Sharing the Table Manitoba, especially in light of calls for a formal NGO to represent the interests of small farmers in dealings with government.

Direct Farm Manitoba (established in March 2016)

In January 2015, partly in response to the pressure exerted through the Real Manitoba Food Fight, the provincial government mandated the Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group to address the concerns of small-scale farmers and direct farm marketing in Manitoba. This group coordinated a process of consultation to generate a report of more than 20 recommendations to government on how to increase support for small farms in Manitoba (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group 2015). Several members of this working group were also participants in Sharing the Table Manitoba, engaging the wider network in conversations on relevant issues, sharing information and gathering feedback. The report was considered by many to include a range of promising recommendations. Some of these have been acted upon, including adding new extension staff focusing on supporting local food systems, examining methods through which small farms can operate better within the

supply management system and, most directly relevant to this chapter, stating that government should, “facilitate a process to allow small scale producers to organise themselves” (Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group 2015, p.48).

Following this recommendation to government, the provincial authorities – along with farmers who participated in the production of the report – hosted a meeting in November 2015 to develop interest in starting such an organisation. The meeting included more than 50 farmers and resulted in the formation of a volunteer steering committee who agreed to move forward with the creation of a formal, sector-based organisation. The group decided to approach an already existing but largely inactive organisation (the Farmers Market Association of Manitoba) as a potential home for a new sector-based organisation. In March 2015, this was constituted as the Direct Farm Manitoba. Some of the key individuals at the helm of this new working group are also participants in Sharing the Table Manitoba. Indeed, individuals have moved fluidly between these different mobilising structures, reflecting shifting priorities and opportunities over time.

11.4 Unpacking the politics of organising

Seeking legitimacy

If mobilising structures are to be effective as vehicles of social change, they must gain legitimacy and recognition in order to encourage participation. Thus, participants in Sharing the Table Manitoba frequently discussed how and with whom to gain legitimacy as an important element of engaging effectively with farmers, policymakers, the public and other actors implicated in efforts to create change in practice and policy. Legitimacy can be seen as a form of social capital; a mobilising structure obtains legitimacy if considered an appropriate body, network or space in which to pursue collective goals. Where legitimacy is lacking in mobilising structures, initiatives and efforts can be hampered and participants demoralised over time if it becomes apparent they are not being taken seriously (Iles and Montenegro de Witt 2015).

It was clear however that the question of with whom to gain legitimacy was important in terms of choosing how the group presented itself externally, what kinds of actions were taken and what organisational form was developed. Some felt strongly that the network should focus on working closely with, and gaining legitimacy from, government, which aligned well with the recommendations of the government-commissioned Small Scale Food Manitoba Working Group report. Others felt legitimacy should be sought among grassroots actors involved in local food systems to create an organisational space and structure that was more independent from government. The latter were more interested in a critical and possibly confrontational approach to bring citizens together to debate key issues, raise public consciousness about food sovereignty and challenge the dominance of

large-scale industrial food systems. The hope was to provide an otherwise absent critical and politicised voice that would hold government to account and push for the inclusion of grassroots actors in policymaking.



It's essential not only to form a lobby group to government, to [also] be reactionary. I mean, we have to if government is going to... maintain an attitude of control, then there is going to be constant need for that kind of public reaction.
(David Neufeld)

These debates played out in the discussions around organisational governance. Some felt that a formal member-based organisation was the best and only path to being recognised by institutional actors and to gaining access to the decision-making spaces of the provincial government.

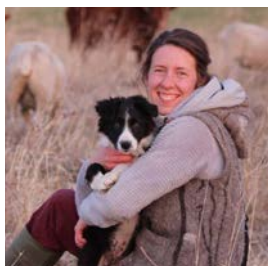


... You have to have had your validity step. The step where you show who your members are.
(Kate Storey)

For participants accustomed to working on advocacy with government, a member-based organisation was the most obvious route to having influence over policy. However, others sought to pursue a more open-ended, flexible, network-based approach not driven by the desire for legitimacy from government and one that would avoid cordoning off participation to members only.



...There are more ways to create legitimacy than being recognised by the government. We speak up and make our voice louder we create that kind of legitimacy as well. (Terry Mireau)



...Legitimacy comes from the people involved. There is a lot of power in us meeting and having on-going meetings and inviting other people to meet because these discussions are always important. Even to support each other – people who are eating the food, growing the food, people who are interested in food sovereignty issues – it is valuable for us to get together. (Lydia Carpenter)

Thus, participants felt that the wider networking, public awareness and discussion that were facilitated by Sharing the Table Manitoba and the Real Manitoba Food Fight could be the basis of a social form of legitimacy that may be considered more relevant to many than formal recognition by government.



I agree that we probably do need a valid structure for some activities, as Kate has said. But then to agree with Lydia that that structure, the official structure, does not really confirm our legitimacy or validity in terms of popular opinion or appearing as though we represent the groups that we do or getting our side of the story known in the media. The PR does not really require a valid structure at this point. We probably need both, but in the meantime, before we have a valid structure, we should still be pushing forward on putting out press releases and meeting and talking to other groups and things like that. (Curtis Brown)

Compartmentalisation

In response to the government-mandated Small Scale Food Working Group report, both government and farmers called for the creation of a new industry or sector group for small-scale farmers. However, participants in Sharing the Table Manitoba were concerned that the sector group model conflicted with the more holistic and alternative aims and values of their movement based on collaboration amongst a wider set of actors in the food system.

[There is a recommendation that puts] small-scale food marketing people into one of the boxes that the government has already created for everybody else. They put pigs in a box, beef in a box, eggs in a box, they create a commodity organisation and they like to look at everything in isolation. (Kate Storey)

The exclusion of consumers was also considered to be problematic by some. Indeed, many in Sharing the Table Manitoba took the position that local food system development should be farmer-led, but inclusive of the participation of consumer citizens and other allies. Thus, the reductive sector-based approach risked undermining the strength of a method that would include the active participation of urban people who co-produce local food systems.

But with direct farm marketers we all know our customers, and we know all our processors, we know all the people who handle our food and so it's natural and right that it be a more diverse group. (David Neufeld)

The sector approach is based on an implicit framing of farmers as removed from consumers, and these groups as having competing interests despite the intention of

direct connections and solidarity that is promoted as a basis of local food systems. A compartmentalised approach also hijacks the intention to pursue joint interests between farmers and consumers, and opportunities to form cooperative and mutually beneficial modes of exchange and social relationships. These concerns were aired in one of the Sharing the Table Manitoba meetings.



[We need to hold on to] that piece that invites a broader understanding of the food system that includes eaters [consumers] and does not segment... Yes, there are difficult policy conversations, but part of our argument, I think – part of the food sovereignty argument, anyway – is that eaters and growers are inherently connected. Growers are eaters. We do not want to participate in that segmenting out. (Kenton Lobe)

Excluding consumers means that their input and participation in matters of agriculture, processing and food distribution are considered to be irrelevant and it effectively leaves them with no voice in these debates.

It is also clear that the dominant emphasis of this work has been on western white settler food systems, which has inadvertently excluded indigenous food producers. None of the three mobilising structures – the Real Manitoba Food Fight, Sharing the Table Manitoba and Direct Farm Manitoba – made efforts to widen their network to include aboriginal groups, who clearly have common issues, although come from a different historical, cultural and political position. There is a strong network of Indigenous organisations working on food issues in the province and, indeed, just as much need to build solidarity and mutual support between indigenous and settler communities as between rural and urban people. David Neufeld pointed this out and, although addressing this gap has been a recurring conversation in Sharing the Table Manitoba, it has yet to be acted on in any meaningful way.

I hear Aboriginal providers and eaters are as keen to be part of a radically diverse organisation as most smaller scale farmers are. (David Neufeld)

The compartmentalisation between constituents in grassroots food movements fragments an already small base of active citizens advocating for change, hollowing out the capacity and potential of more diverse and broadly constituted grassroots coordination. During the Real Manitoba Food Fight, collaboration between farmers and urban consumer allies was fundamental to holding the government to account. The contributions of urban allies in the campaign pressured the government to drop the charges against the Cavers family and raised public awareness about the wider issues. The widespread public discontent expressed through letters, a petition and

writing in the popular media pressured the government to commission the Small Scale Food Working Group and examine support for small-scale farmers and local food in the province. Many in the group recognised the importance of working with supportive urban allies who were better positioned to criticise the government publicly, whereas many farmers expressed fears of being targeted by inspectors if they 'stuck their heads up'.

...A good portion of the folks who ought to be at the table simply will not stick their heads up because their livelihoods are at risk. Those that eat their food are the ones who are able to advocate. (David Neufeld)

Sharing the Table Manitoba participants expressed concerns about the prescription to form an industry group by the provincial government. This focus on 'industry' frames local food in narrow economic terms and was viewed as a reductionist and depoliticising channelling of an otherwise highly social, cultural and political movement. To focus on developing the industry without attending to the wider set of relations within which local food is embedded was seen to erode the scope of possible change that any local food industry group could achieve. Drawing from his experience with the organic movement, Terry discussed parallels with the development of the organic industry.

I saw what was happening... when [Canada Organic Regime] was coming in, when the Canadian government was basically saying 'we want to legitimate the organic industry', which we fought hard against, the word 'industry' and, in my opinion, gave in to the word 'sector'... but what I saw from that moment on, was that the organic movement in the country has been dead. As a movement it is dead, as an industry it has taken off... I am saying this as a precautionary tale to seeking legitimacy, or seeking recognition for who you are as a group or organisation... I really feel strongly about the language of movement and about the idea of becoming legitimised. Legitimacy comes with people. (Terry Mierau)

The emphasis on the economic development of organic food by the Canadian government served to support the organic farming industry which was based on more modest reforms to the existing corporate controlled industrial system. This separated it from the organic farming movement, which was based on shifting control of food systems away from corporations and decommodifying food, amongst other transformative aims. Indeed, organic food is now considered to have gone down the road of 'conventionalisation', resembling a light version of industrialised agriculture with large-scale monoculture controlled by powerful multinational food corporations (Guthman 2004). Thus, seeking legitimacy in the eyes of dominant actors (government in this case) and within a sectoral, compartmentalised and economic framework was viewed as a way that NGOs often become co-opted when they attempt to align with government expectations.

11.5 Conclusion

The urgency and clarity of the problems that emerged in the wake of the raid on the Cavers farm prompted farmers and allies to recognise and discuss common experiences and concerns about food safety regulations and other barriers to building sustainable local food systems. This was thus an important political moment that crystallised a sense of a collective political identity, prompting critical questions and strategic thinking about how to create a more enabling environment for local food systems. It inspired thinking about the need for transformative change and for greater citizen control of food systems through longer-term processes of political mobilisation.

Over the past three years, members of our research group have been embedded in a wider collective of farmers and citizens working through three interrelated mobilising structures that emerged chronologically: a) The Real Manitoba Food Fight; b) Sharing the Table Manitoba; and c) Direct Farm Manitoba. It is clear that the more confrontational tactics carried out through the Real Manitoba Food Fight and Sharing the Table Manitoba were instrumental in forcing government to address the grievances of small-scale direct market farmers. These opportunities were considered by many to be under-realised, which largely reflected the absence of an organisation that government would consider as a legitimate voice for small-scale direct market farmers. Direct Farm Manitoba was established to fill this gap and was structured as a producer-only industry group designed specifically to work at the interface with government.

This progression from a confrontational campaign towards a sector-based formal NGO may reflect a relative depoliticisation of the grassroots response. Indeed, as grassroots movements gain legitimacy and resources, there is a risk that their efforts can become co-opted. By gaining minor concessions from governments and traction within an institutionalised arena, confrontational and broad-ranging politics can be transformed into more routine and conventional political strategies (Choudry and Shragge 2011). Further, leaders can become preoccupied with running organisations, pursuing isolated projects and single issues and competing to reform government policy. Indeed, NGOs similar to the Direct Farm Manitoba have been criticised for being a part of the mainstream institutional apparatus that is often used by governments to channel dissent into sanctioned, bureaucratic, legal and permissible forms of expression that may ultimately have little influence over policy (Choudry and Shragge 2011).

Participants in this project were aware of this dynamic and viewed the three organisational forms, not as mutually exclusive but as complementary tools that can be animated in response to the opportunities available in any given political moment. There are clearly limitations to each particular organisational approach and choosing one over another can limit the potential to create change. The approach has thus been to experiment with maintaining a diverse organisational ecosystem based on cooperation and overlap between the more conciliatory and

confrontational components. In this instance, key individuals participate in each component, cross-fertilising ideas and aligning strategies. An ongoing process of critical reflection and learning will be essential to adapt to changing circumstances and to ensure the balance and emphasis on the different approaches maximises the impact of this work.

While sustained overt political mobilisation may be desirable and necessary to advance food system change, there are many unanswered questions about how to realise these more radical aspirations in the absence of an urgent and catalytic need, such as the Cavers farm raid. Currently, Sharing the Table Manitoba is functioning as a space in which to facilitate virtual and in-person discussions around the politics of food in Manitoba and to bring together individuals and groups to discuss political opportunities and potential joint efforts. However, it has been relatively inactive in terms of overt political organising, where most of the energy has shifted towards the Direct Farm Manitoba. In this way, Sharing the Table Manitoba may at times act as a latent, yet reactive, resource that can be animated in response to specific grievances or political opportunities, rather than engaging in consistent and proactive political activity. Indeed, as we finish writing this chapter, another situation is developing in which a local farmer is being targeted by regulators, prompting new efforts within Sharing the Table Manitoba to organise support for this farmer and use the opportunity to further pressure government to make changes in policy. Interestingly, the Sharing the Table Manitoba steering group has discussed reanimating the Real Manitoba Food Fight (its name, logo, website and social media), indicating that its nature as an edgy campaign provides the best tool for this more confrontational work. Again, this demonstrates the value of having multiple organisational tools and the importance of remaining agile and flexible when re-orientating efforts in response to changing circumstances and opportunities.

Issues around who is included, who is excluded and who has power within these mobilising structures are looming and troubling questions in our work, and they require greater attention in food system activism (Slocum 2007). When we talk about and work towards food system change or transformation, it is too easy to gloss over the differences in the claims of a grassroots or general citizen who is said to be mobilised and empowered through activism and organising. It is vital that we begin to ask difficult questions about who is included and who is excluded, who benefits and who does not, who is invited to participate and for whom is the transformation and change directed. In Canada, there is no escaping the legacy and ongoing structures of colonialism (Kepkiewicz *et al.* 2017, Chapter 19), and it is vital to come to grips with the ways grassroots activism and participatory research can inadvertently reproduce colonial relationships. Indeed, this hard reflective work will require proponents of alternative food systems to incorporate de-colonial practices to challenge our own understanding, relations and practices of transformation.

There has always been an optimistic tone amongst our collective that we are engaging in imperfect but forward-looking strategies to advance a long-term project that builds capacity for food system change. But how do we know when our collective choices about self-organisation limit our potential and inadvertently lead us down a path that undermines our more radical demands and aspirations, such as those experienced in the organic movement? How do we see exclusion in our practices? How do we begin to engage with de-colonial thinking and practice? How do we balance the immediate concerns and concessions required to make incremental pragmatic changes with the desire for more radical systemic change? How do we deal with uncertainty regarding the choices about how to organise for transformation today, which have uncertain outcomes for the future? The collective of farmers, consumers, researchers and activists involved in Sharing the Table Manitoba have engaged in a process of self-analysis through cycles of PAR that have, through dialogue and reflection, allowed us to name the contradictions and form strategies about how to contend with them. It is vitally important to engage in collective critical reflection, not only on the ways that we are discussing the problems and solutions (e.g. food sovereignty versus food security), but also about how we choose to organise ourselves and why. The process of PAR and the cycles of action and reflection have provided us with an opportunity for what Holst (2002, p.87–88) calls “a pedagogy of mobilisation”, or the “learning inherent in the building and maintaining of a social movement and its organisations. Through participation in a social movement, people learn numerous skills and ways of thinking analytically and strategically as they struggle to understand their movement in motion.”

PAR opens space for reflection and dialogue amongst social movement participants and allows them to engage in a continuous deepening of what Paulo Freire (1970) calls conscientisation or developing critical consciousness. This process involves becoming aware of the inevitable objectivisation of social movements by powerful actors who attempt to enrol and re-shape dissent into mainstream development agendas. Through critical self-analysis, PAR can generate knowledge as a resource to support the continual battle for autonomy and the self-determination of subjects. In this way, the use of PAR can open up opportunities for protagonists in social movement organisations to critically examine their own practice and the mobilising structures they maintain in order to identify internal and external contradictions and to strategically resist being co-opted and to pursue transformative change.

The collective self-analysis discussed in this chapter is exploratory and provisional. We have been experimenting with alternatives, innovating and making mistakes, grappling with these questions and struggling to find the resources and time to pursue the organisation and activism that we believe is necessary to push for change. We have used this writing project as an opportunity to critically discuss the dilemmas that have arisen. We are working through the challenges, trade-offs and compromises made when pursuing legitimacy with government while also recognising the limitations of these institutionalised strategies. We are using and promoting self-critical reflection and dialogue as a means to contend with these issues, which have provided some

opportunity to strategically adapt our efforts. We feel that this process of reflection, however, should not be an inward one carried out amongst our collective alone. Wider dialogue and reflection amongst allies in similar struggles are essential to share with and learn from others, develop a critical analysis and build solidarity. It is in this spirit – a desire to both share and learn in a multi-voiced dialogue – that we wrote this chapter and participated in this work. To this end, we hope these ideas provoke your thinking and we welcome your feedback and engagement as critical friends seeking a more just and sustainable world.

11.6 Acknowledgements

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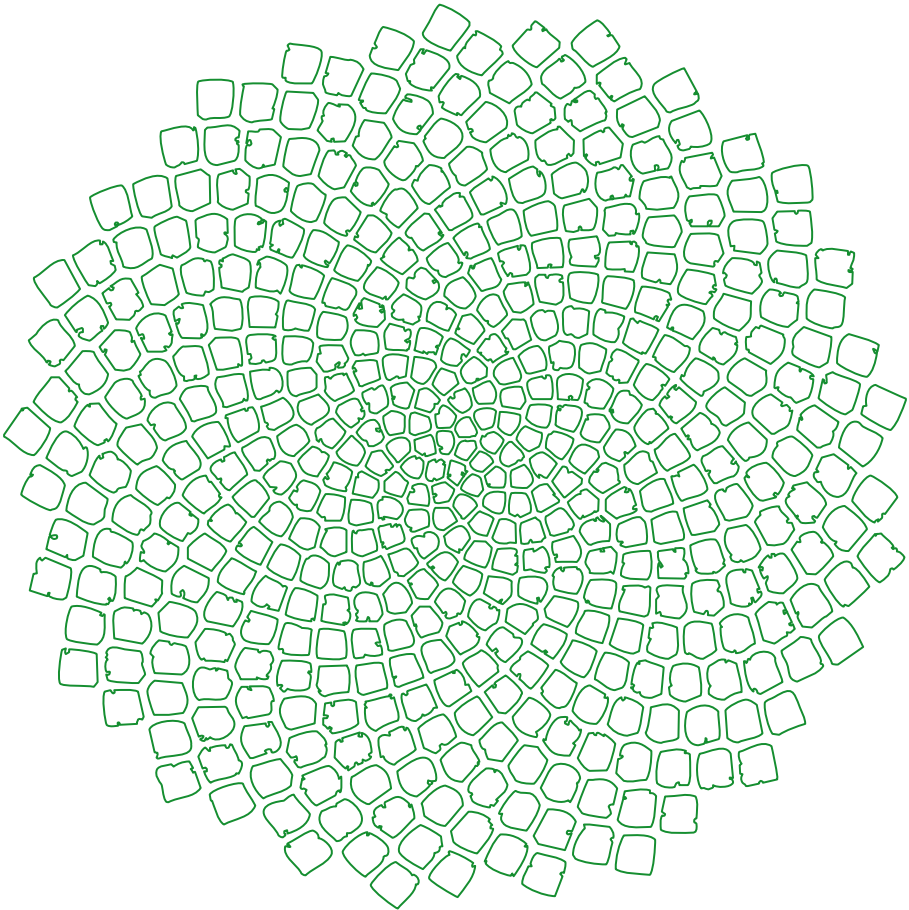
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12



Canadian women farmers: developing a gender- inclusive vision for agricultural policy

Carla Roppel and Annette Aurélie Desmarais

Geographical location: Canada

Chapter highlights: Government agricultural policy development is dominated by men and typically favours male participation, thus incorporating male perspectives of the needs and interests of farmers, communities and institutions.

Because women farmers often have different roles in their families, on their farms and in their communities, their input is essential to the development of holistic, sustainable agricultural policy.

The best way to collect women's visions for gender-inclusive agricultural policy is to use participatory feminist methods.

More than 100 women farmers in five provinces participated in a series of workshops designed to solicit their vision of an alternative, gender-inclusive Canadian agricultural policy environment.

Keywords: agricultural policy development, women farmers, gender equity in agriculture, feminist participatory action research, alternative agricultural policy, gender-based agricultural policy, participatory feminist methodology.

12.1 Introduction

Imagine it is 1988, and you are participating in a Canadian rural women's study tour to Nicaragua. You've been travelling in the back of a pick-up for several days

and you are sunburned, tired and culture-shocked. Today you're a stone's throw from the Honduran border on a co-op farm that the Contras often attack. You're sitting at a small old-fashioned desk in a one-room school. There is a thin, strong Nicaraguan woman striding across the front of the room, smoking furiously. She is a peasant leader, here to talk about the women's section of the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG) that she leads. When one of the tour participants asks how we (i.e. privileged Canadians) can help Nicaraguan farmers, she replies, "The best thing you can do is to go back to Canada and work at changing the oppressive structures and policies your own government has in place that lead to inequality and injustice in Canada and elsewhere. Go home and work for social justice and we'll do what we need to do here. Then come back and visit us, and we can talk about what worked well, what didn't work and what changes we need to make for it to work better."

This call for solidarity gave rise to the National Farmers Union (NFU)–UNAG Women's Linkage Project (see Box 12.1) which became a platform from which a generation of farm women leaders analysed and responded to agricultural policies that had increasingly marginalised farmers, especially women. The call for solidarity also profoundly influenced the authors of this article, both of whom were involved at different times as coordinators of the NFU–UNAG Women's Linkage Project.

Box 12.1. The background to NFU–UNAG Women's Linkage Project

The NFU–UNAG Women's Linkage Project involved exchanges between women members of the NFU in Saskatchewan and UNAG in the Matagalpa region of Nicaragua. This institutional linkage began in 1990 and continued until about 1996, with the organisations alternately sending delegations to share their experiences and analyses with each other and building strong ties of solidarity. At the time of the linkage project, literacy levels among Nicaraguan farmers were typically low. Most training and information, therefore, was provided orally – through radio, popular theatre and sharing stories. The power of story-telling as a mechanism to share information and repeatedly extract and extend valuable learning became clear very quickly. A story told, heard and shared is embedded in memory as an experience as well as information. Those experiences – context, facts, emotions – can be recalled almost intuitively in situations that, at least on the surface, seem to have little in common with the original story. As stories were unpacked and analysed, farm women in both countries came to understand, in very concrete ways, the complex interconnectedness and influence of food, trade and agricultural policies – whether local, provincial, federal or international – on their lives and livelihoods, as well as the sustainability of their communities. The linkage helped build leadership skills and strengthen organisations as well as raising women's voices. For example, based on the example of UNAG's use of radio programming developed by and for women to provide information about various subjects, the NFU women produced six half-hour broadcast-quality radio programmes about different areas of concern, including women's ownership of farmland. The programmes were aired on community and student radio stations in the two major cities in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada. Copies of the audio tapes were shared with like-minded organisations across Canada to be aired or used as best suited them.

In many countries, or perhaps even globally, farm organisations and farm policy arenas are predominantly patriarchal domains that legitimise male voices and viewpoints. It is no surprise then, that government consultations about agricultural and trade policies have agendas and meeting processes developed mostly by and for male audiences. In short, it is largely men who are engaged in the policy arenas and women farmers are thus effectively excluded. In this context, when rural women are given rare opportunities to participate in discussions on food and farm policy, they must repeatedly prove the legitimacy and value of their analyses and recommendations. To secure rural women's meaningful participation and representation in sustainable food systems policy development requires much more than simply inviting them to multi-stakeholder consultation processes. One path forward is to use participatory action research grounded in feminist methodologies.¹

The women of the NFU in Canada have long recognised the power of using participatory methodologies to organise and participate in meetings and workshops to successfully identify the issues that concern women living and working on farms and to motivate them to action. The NFU is a direct-membership voluntary organisation made up of farm families who share the goal of cooperatively building socially just and environmentally sustainable food systems that recognise the critical importance of the family farm as the primary food-producing unit (www.nfu.ca). The NFU is unique in Canada as it is the only farm organisation that has introduced progressive affirmative action for women within its organisational structure. Since it was founded in 1969, the organisation recognised that women's participation and representation are critical for socially just farm policy *and* organisational success. Consequently, women's leadership positions are embedded in the NFU's constitution and bylaws, thus ensuring their integration at the national board and provincial levels in analysis, policy development and mobilisation. In creating this structure, the NFU understood that women and men have different roles, responsibilities, needs and interests in relation to the farm, and so a more effective agriculture and food policy environment could only be created through the input and analysis of both farm men and women.² Integrating women was seen as critical to ensuring the best quality of life for the greatest number of farm families in Canada.

The ability of NFU women to successfully carve out their own spaces to debate and organise within the Canadian farm movement is certainly an important accomplishment. Equally significant are the ways that women have organised themselves within these spaces. There is a long and fascinating history of women's involvement in the NFU but

1 For further information about feminist participatory action research, see Maguire (1987, 1996, 2006); Reid and Frisby (2008); Reid *et al.* (2006); and Langan and Morton (2009).

2 The NFU's positive experience with this organisational affirmative action also informed structural changes within La Via Campesina in 2000 when the transnational movement expanded its International coordinating committee to include one man and one woman from each of its regions. The movement also committed itself to seeking gender parity on delegations and other organisational activities and mobilisation. See Chapter 9 by Josh Brem-Wilson in this volume for more on La Via Campesina and <https://viacampesina.org/en/who-are-we/what-is-la-via-campesina/>.

this chapter analyses just one specific participatory research project: Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy. We begin by describing the project and then explain the research process and key research results.

12.2 Farm women turn the Agricultural Policy Framework on its head

Like many other countries, in the early 2000s the Government of Canada sought to expand and strengthen its integration into the global agricultural economy. It engaged in an extensive consultation process involving numerous key stakeholders throughout the country to discuss the Canadian Agricultural Policy Framework (APF)³, a policy designed to further liberalise many aspects of the agricultural economy in Canada and guide agricultural policy for decades to come. Given that official agricultural policy development in Canada had made little effort to specifically include women's voices and needs, it comes as no surprise that at the beginning of the 21st century there was very little research analysing the effects of existing agriculture, food and trade policies on the lives of Canadian farming families and rural women (Angeles 2002). There was also little research about women's views on what policies *should* be in place. NFU women noticed that very few of their peers were participating in the APF consultations, so their experiences, needs and interests were effectively excluded. Consequently, with the assistance of three researchers (which included the authors of this chapter), the NFU secured funding from Status of Women Canada to conduct a gender analysis of the APF.⁴ Given that men and women tend to have different interests in and perspectives on farm and rural community life, the research aimed to document what rural women and girls consider to be critical elements of Canadian agricultural and rural development policy, and develop recommendations to rectify the historical exclusion of women and their legitimate concerns in setting agricultural policy.

Specifically, the Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy (Roppel *et al.* 2006a) research addressed the following three sets of questions:

- What changes in their daily lives have farm women experienced as a result of current Canadian agricultural policies? What are the policy implications arising from rural women's experiences and what policy recommendations are required to address farm women's concerns in these areas?

3 The APF was introduced in 2001 and embraced the principles of aggressively growing Canada's agricultural export markets as laid out in Canada's previous agricultural policy: Growing Together: A Vision for Canada's Agri-Food Industry. The APF outlined five pillars as key to achieving such growth: business risk management, environment, renewal, food safety and quality, and science and innovation. For more information about Canadian agricultural policy, see pp. 93–94 in Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy (Roppel *et al.* 2006a).

4 Status of Women Canada is a federal government agency established in 1971 specifically to support women's equality. Its funds supported all kinds of women's and feminist organisations, research and organisational activities. Source: Status of Women Canada website – Who we are (<http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/abu-ans/who-qui/index-en.html>). In October 2006 however, the word equality was removed from the agency's mandate and funding for advocacy, lobbying or general research contracted by Status of Women Canada was reduced substantially, thus negatively affecting women's organisations across the country.

- Does Canada's APF reflect the unique needs of men and women equally? If not, what is missing? What would a gender-sensitive agricultural policy look like?
- What would be required to ensure that future Canadian agricultural policies are gender-inclusive?

In a typical research or consultation approach, a 'knower' – whether a researcher or government representative – would have acted as a teacher, providing women with information about the APF. Women's thoughts about and/or responses to the policy would have been collected with carefully crafted questions. Half-day or evening sessions would have been organised in several locations across the country, with women implicitly included in a general invitation to attend. Childcare would not have been offered or associated costs reimbursed. Experts would have provided the information, asked the questions, collected and synthesised the responses and prepared a report for the sponsoring entity. From the outset, women's perspectives would have been *narrowed* – some might say 'focused' – by the process itself, especially by the information emphasised in the APF session presentation. Although their *responses* to the specific questions would have been collected, the *analysis* of the policies (agriculture, trade and economic) and their effects on women's lives and rural communities would have remained unexplored.

This research, however, sought to document farm women's visions for Canadian agricultural policy and collect their feedback to questions that no government has ever dared to ask farmers, such as: how are current policies affecting you? And, what kinds of policies do you need? To explore these questions, the team used feminist participatory action research, which inverts the typical power dynamic between knower/expert and learner/recipient. It is important to note that the research participants were the protagonists directly involved in developing research questions and methods, and in carrying out the research itself. That is, the three key researchers were not the experts looking in on or overseeing the research, but acted as resources to the research process. They worked side by side with 12 NFU women to define project goals and objectives, and to plan and deliver workshops to more than 100 farm women (both NFU and non-NFU members) in five Canadian provinces between October 2004 and April 2005. Besides their specific skills and experiences, the three researchers had varying backgrounds with the NFU; all had carried out research, managed projects and volunteered with or been employed by the NFU. Their familiarity with the history, work and people of the NFU contributed to the development of trust and safety so that participants willingly shared deeply personal stories and information, and participated in exercises that could be challenging, both individually and for the group. The information⁵ and analysis gathered would never have come up in any government or other public consultation.

⁵ A complete listing of all concerns, factors contributing to the changing realities in their lives, and elements of an inclusive Canadian policy envisioned by research participants is provided in *Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy*, pages 100–124 (Roppel *et al.* 2006a).

It is also interesting to note that a number of the research team members had participated in the NFU–UNAG Women's Linkage Project as elected officials, members of the planning committee, delegates to Nicaragua, or hosts to Nicaraguan delegations. They had also participated in several other related projects, such as producing radio programmes and educational toolkits. Despite a common understanding that this feminist participatory action research project was a collective endeavour rather than a series of individual observations and learnings, there were many challenges along the way. Some were personal; some were related to process, roles or participation; and others related to the belief that local leaders knew best what their constituency wanted or needed. Because many of the team had worked together in the past, they knew and trusted each other, and were able to strongly challenge each other, resolve differences and continue to work respectfully as a collective. Finally, the research aimed to obtain the collected (i.e. collective) experience of women farmers, their wisdom and their vision for a more gender-inclusive and sustainable agricultural policy environment. For this reason, we (as key researchers of the original study and authors of this chapter) will not discuss our personal experiences and the knowledge of change we acquired. Rather, we wish to focus on NFU women's collective participation, the results of the research and the learnings and experiences of NFU women, whether participating as members of the research committee, elected officials or general members.

Feminist participatory action research processes begin with women's lived experiences – the daily realities faced and lived in their homes, families, farms and communities. Thus, farm women saw themselves as legitimate 'knowers' about their lives and communities, and the potential effects of proposed agricultural and economic policies. Figures 12.1 to 12.4 are examples of the life maps drawn by the women to describe the individual daily realities of life on their farms, captioned with excerpts from the stories they shared. Groups then focused on developing a collective analysis of the impact of current policies and determining their collective vision for a sustainable food system.

To keep farm women's collective analysis at the centre of the research and thus protect its integrity, researchers deemed it essential that the APF should not be discussed until *after* the women had identified their issues and policy needs. At that point, invited government representatives were asked to look at the concerns raised by the women, listen to the elements of women's visions for agricultural policy and respond to whether and how the APF addressed any of the issues raised and remedies proposed. Having government representatives enter the workshop later in the process helped to invert power dynamics. Losing their position as 'the knowers', presenters became recipients of and responders to the women's analyses of and visions for Canadian agricultural policy. This was not a happy experience for most of the presenters; one verbally denounced and ridiculed elements of the women's alternative agricultural vision. Women then reflected about what was good, bad and missing from the APF and how their farms, families and communities were affected. The consensus was that the pillars (i.e. strategic directions) themselves "weren't so bad", but there were problems with what was being addressed and/or excluded *within* the pillars.

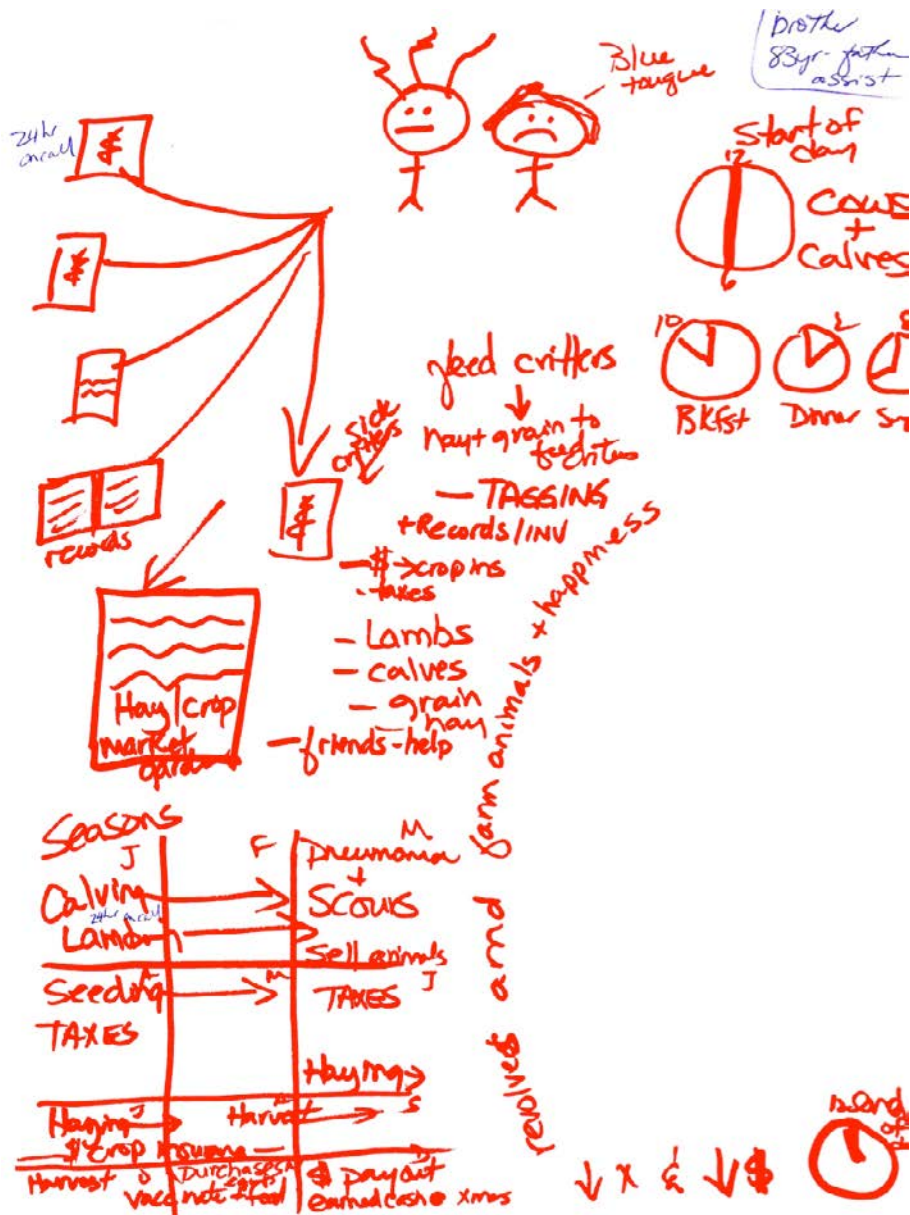


Figure 12.1. "The whole farm thing, I think it centres around time for us. You start your days at six o'clock and end your days at midnight. You do breakfast, [lunch and supper] at 10, 2 and 8 is the meal time... And then the calendar seasons. There's calving season, scour season, tax season, crop insurance season and then at the end you get a little crop insurance and that buys Christmas presents and you start all over again."



Figure 12.2. "Lots of paper, forms. It is not so much about how good of a farmer [you are] anymore. The questions now relate to filling out forms. ... We have a new tractor, a different combine. Everything is computerised. Technology is a big thing. Big everything. The equipment is huge. We have two sons (11 and 9). With the big equipment there are a lot of questions about when you let them start handling the equipment. When is it too late - will they lose interest? ... [W]ith spring coming we will have long days - farewell to my husband. Here is a puppy, we don't have one yet but I'm looking forward to it. Last year we had to put our dog down..."

12.3 The power of the feminist participatory action research

Whether researching women farmers' labour practices, developing resources for community engagement and organising around international trade agreements or agricultural policy, or producing radio programmes, NFU women leaders have successfully used a feminist approach. The approach validates women's daily life experiences and acknowledges that, in collectively analysing these daily realities, women become the experts involved in producing knowledge. Spaces that encourage farm women to learn about themselves and analyse their experiences ultimately lead others to recognise and value their work, their collective wisdom and thus their legitimacy as advocates for their own interests. Farm women's work is farm work, whether caring for children, keeping books, operating machinery, running for parts, taking meals out to the field or participating in farm organisations as leaders and policy consultations as experts.

Besides the principle objective of empowering women, feminist participatory action research methodologies provide women with tools, strategies and information that are transferable and useful in other collective action and advocacy efforts to advance their condition and position in society. This research project modelled a participatory consultation process that was quite different from that typically used in government consultations, one that was designed specifically to encourage and support women to speak from their hearts as well as their minds. In this environment, there was little risk that farm women's profound expressions of concern about current agricultural policy and their vision for an alternative one would be discounted or excluded as hysterical or irrational. Without explicitly providing safe spaces for such responses, women's voices are effectively silenced.

Women participants said that the research experience was "highly valuable", "eye-opening", "encouraging", "empowering", "intense" and "motivating", while at the same time being "frustrating", "hard on the head" and "exhausting". They were impressed with "how smart the other women were", noting that the workshop process "really confirms they [women] have a lot to say". The two last statements are revealing. On the one hand, individual women tend to view others rather than themselves as 'knowers' in the area of agricultural policy and able to speak up about the issues. On the other hand, by collecting their individual experiences, engaging in collective analysis, and developing a comprehensive vision women were empowered as social actors and advocates of their own interests.

When members of the research team presented the results to the annual NFU National Convention in 2007, members responded with a standing ovation.⁶ Several men rushed to the microphone to express their deep appreciation, respect and gratitude for the work the NFU women had done. One said that his wife had participated

⁶ All annual NFU National Conventions are recorded. The audio file of the presentation was reviewed at the time this article was drafted. For information about obtaining copies of the audio file, please contact the NFU (www.nfu.ca).

in a workshop and had returned home excited and with a powerful sense of what is possible. Others recognised that the research went far beyond what is typically thought of as 'women's issues', tackling concerns that were important to all farmers and their communities. They acknowledged the clarity of the work, noting the efficacy of the participatory feminist methodology used to systematically collect and analyse the complex social, economic and political realities faced by farm families on a daily basis. Some said that the NFU needed more research like this. Subsequently, men and women members used a research summary document to lobby all levels of government and inform discussions with other farm and civil society organisations. NFU officials and members of the research team received enquiries from farm and peasant organisations in other countries about using the workshop process.



Figure 12.3. "This is a picture of my husband and I when we first got married. We were so optimistic ... we thought this is the life. This is what we want to do and we'll do it too. This cute little farm and we are going to have this wonderful little life and we were happy. ... But we knew that that little farm was not going to support two families. ... So my husband opted to go to university and there he goes for a long time. He went for four years to university and is teaching at [another college] now. ... I'm holding that little farm in my hands now ... and I'm saying I love this little farm. ... I have a vision of how beautiful it is but we had to rent it this year because my brother-in-law has to make a living."

Assessing whether the NFU recognised and used the Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy research to its full potential depends entirely on the criteria used to make the assessment. Certainly, the research questions (see above) were answered. The research was disseminated widely to federal and provincial government representatives as well as to national and international civil society organisations and farm organisations. Media pick-up of the research varied across the country, with surprisingly strong uptake in politically conservative areas where NFU positions are not usually well supported. The research team also produced a summary document

(Roppel *et al.* 2006b) containing the key research findings and this was sent to every NFU member family and supporter as an insert to the membership magazine, the *Union Farmer Quarterly*. The research therefore gave significant national profile to the voices and policy vision of women farmers. In addition, the research was the first within the NFU to frame a historical alternative vision as an expression of food sovereignty. More than a decade after the research was completed, the women's vision for sustainable food system policy formed the basis of the NFU's organisational pamphlet on food sovereignty (National Farmers Union 2014). By these measures alone, the research project can be considered successful.

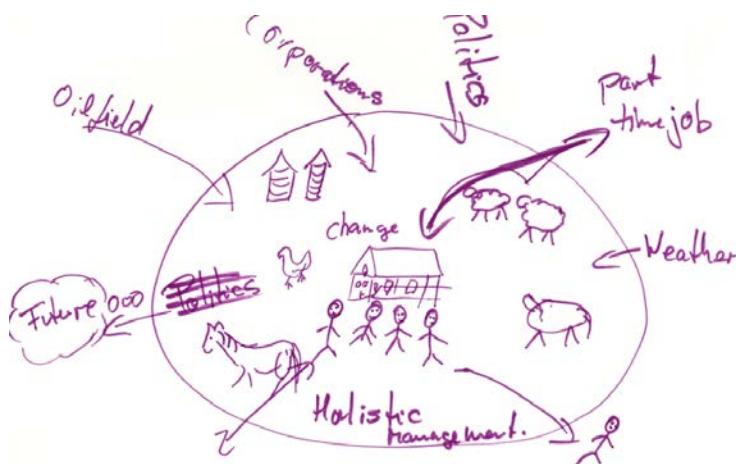


Figure 12.4. "I have the farmhouse in the centre because this is where everything goes from.... A few years ago we took a holistic management course so we tried to think of all the aspects of not just the farm but all the things we do on the farm, how they influence the outside and also then I have all these things outside which influence our farm. In our area there is a lot of oil field activity so it's pipelines, wells and the smell and whatever. So it's the oil field that's influence what we do on our farm. ... If we don't have healthy soils we don't have healthy animals and people will be sick as well."

In participatory research, however, there are other measures of success. People are disempowered in systems that do not allow them to see who they are and what they really think about the important issues in their lives. When you do not understand yourself or your context within the larger environment, lobbying for your own interests is difficult, if not impossible. Without spaces such as these workshops, views that contradict the dominant position have no public forum and, if articulated, are often ridiculed and denigrated. Knowing that other women share similar understandings and analyses is affirming, and a tonic for the social and geographic isolation of living in rural areas and having to drive long distances for banking services, to buy groceries, see a movie or visit the doctor. Participants proudly identified with what they learned about themselves – that they can act on their own behalf, engage in activism and become empowered. People think about the important 'activist moments' as big, well-

publicised events, such as tractor rallies or public demonstrations close to the centres of power. This perspective does not fit women's lives, as their activist moments are smaller, more frequent actions that occur with little horn-blowing. This research was one such act of resistance.

Through their participation in the workshops, the women learned that, although their stories might have been unique, they shared many common threads. They learned that they do have views of and knowledge about agricultural policy, shared in whole or in part by others, and that they are not alone in their views. Women also learned that they can develop a collective vision of what Canadian agriculture and food policy should look like – one that was considerably different from, but equally legitimate as, that outlined in the APF. The women's socially just, inclusive agriculture and food policy rested on four pillars: financial stability; domestic food policy; safe, healthy food and environment; and strengthening the social and community infrastructure. Importantly, women recognised that change could occur only through persistent collective engagement and action, and so they committed themselves to further involvement. Essentially, the research project gave NFU women greater visibility and a stronger voice within the NFU and they gained a deep respect from the general membership. Perhaps more importantly, the project was instrumental in initiating a wider discussion about food sovereignty within the NFU and strengthening the community of women within the NFU.

The experiences of some of the research team in Nicaragua and with the international women's linkage, together with women's analyses of and ideas for agricultural policy, confirmed the effectiveness of feminist participatory action research as a powerful and empowering tool for social change. The process also reconfirmed our experience with the NFU–UNAG Women's Linkage Project: starting with women's stories based on their lived realities is a critical springboard to their engagement in political processes. Farm Women and Canadian Agricultural Policy was just one conversation in a vibrant organisational thread that continues among NFU women, men and youth today.

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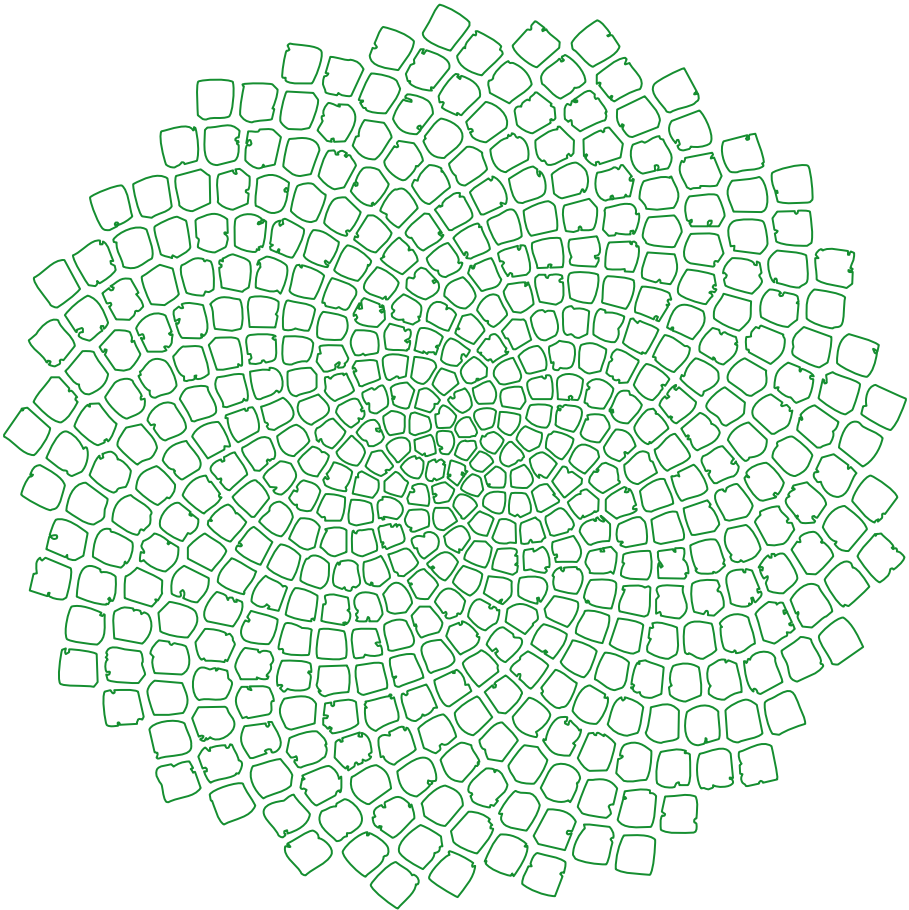
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13



Engaging with Cuba's permaculture movement through transformative learning

Mary A. Beckie and Ron Berezan

Geographical location: Cuba

Chapter highlights: Cuba's permaculture movement provides a unique context for transformative learning about the development of sustainable agriculture alternatives.

This chapter describes an experiential study abroad programme, co-developed through a unique Canadian–Cuban partnership, that aims to foster cross-cultural learning and engagement for Canadian and Cuban participants.

The impacts of involvement in this programme for Cuban coordinators and permaculture practitioners are examined according to four themes that emerged during interviews: cross-cultural learning, developing relationships of solidarity, building local capacity, and creating a strong partnership.

This case study shows that continuous and iterative learning and change is crucial to the development of resilient food systems.

Keywords: sustainable agriculture, permaculture, urban agriculture, experiential study abroad, transformative learning, Cuba.

13.1 Introduction

Cuba is widely recognised as a leader in the development of sustainable agriculture alternatives. In order to give Canadian university students an opportunity to learn first-hand about the transitions taking place in Cuban agriculture, in the spring of 2010 we partnered with a Cuban non-governmental organisation (NGO), the

Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ), to develop an experiential study abroad course on permaculture and urban agriculture in Cuba. This seven-week course fosters cross-cultural engagement and immersion into Cuba's permaculture movement, with Canadians and Cubans working and learning together, side by side. In contrast to conventional classroom-based pedagogy, this experiential approach provides opportunities to learn from permaculture practitioners working in their own cultural and everyday context. This approach challenges the hierarchical relationship that often results when academic professionals acting as 'the teacher' impart theoretical insight to adult learners. By having practitioners and learners work together to co-create knowledge and tangible outcomes in a real-world context, a different set of opportunities for learning and action emerge from those afforded through mainstream educational approaches.

One of the observed outcomes of experiential study abroad programmes, where participants are in different places undergoing different experiences, is the opportunity for transformative learning. This is a process of awareness and widespread change in adult learners that impacts subsequent experiences (Mezirow 1997). The pedagogy of permaculture is compatible with a transformative learning framework, since it emphasises a holistic learning approach that incorporates both instrumental (technical, i.e. what and how) and communicative (understanding experiences, i.e. why) learning, or what is referred to as 'engaging the head, heart and hands'. Hence, those participating in this course are challenged to acquire, not only the essential knowledge and skills of design, food production, soil and water management, etc., but also to reflect deeply on how they are part of this system of elements, whether within the community where the project takes place, within their home communities, or in the broader global food system.

While most research on the impact of study abroad programmes focuses on describing and quantifying students' transformative learning experience (France and Rogers 2012), in this chapter we reflect on the structure of the programme that has evolved over the past five years, the unique international partnership that makes it possible, and the way the programme has been experienced by the FANJ and Cuban permaculture practitioners who co-produce the programme. This analysis is based on yearly course evaluations by Canadian and Cuban partners, our own observations over the past five years, and interviews conducted in 2013 with Cuban farmers and FANJ representatives.

13.2 Background

Twenty-five years ago, Cuba embarked on a transition to a more self-sufficient, ecological-based approach to food production. This transition was triggered, in large part, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, its major trading partner, during the late 1980s. Cuba was highly dependent on this relationship for fuel and a wide range of manufactured agricultural and food products, and for export markets for its agricultural commodities. Following the fall of the Soviet bloc and the imposition of a

stricter trade embargo by the United States through the Helms Burton Act, Cuba fell into a severe economic and food crisis. Cuba's strategy was to shift from the prevalent model of industrial agriculture to more traditional, diversified and low external input approaches. Some Cuban scientists had been investigating agroecological methods as early as the 1970s, but government endorsement and support since the 1990s has greatly expanded research, information dissemination and training opportunities across the country (Febles-González *et al.* 2011, Funes *et al.* 2002). *Campesino-a-campesino* (farmer-to-farmer) networks and NGOs have also provided an important social framework, allowing rapid spread and uptake of sustainable agriculture practices (Rosset *et al.* 2011).



At Revolution Square in Havana.

Urban agriculture has been an important component of Cuba's agricultural transformation. Recent studies indicate there are over 350,000 urban farmers and 50,000 hectares dedicated to urban agriculture, representing 14.6% of agricultural production or 1.5 million tons of vegetables per year (Altieri and Funes-Monzote 2012, Febles-González *et al.* 2011, Koont 2011). Initially employed mainly as a survival mechanism by individual households, by the late 1990s, urban agriculture became formally identified as the *Movimiento de Agricultura Urbana* (Urban Agricultural Movement), involving federal and local government agencies, NGOs and urban farmers (Koont 2009). Contributing to this effort, FANJ provides support and training in permaculture design (www.fanj.org).

Permaculture was established during the 1970s in Australia by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, and is now an international populist movement that subscribes to a worldview based on three core values: care of the earth, care of the people, and sharing the surplus (Mollison 1988, www.permaculture.org). The methodological framework integrates ecological principles and systems-based design (Ferguson and Lovell 2014). Antonio Núñez Jiménez, an accomplished and influential Cuban geographer, anthropologist and first Director of the Republic of Cuba's Institute for Agrarian Reform, became interested in permaculture's merging of environmental protection and sociocultural development, themes that became the focus of the foundation he established in 1994.

Permaculture also fits well with Cuba's revolutionary ethos of social justice and community solidarity, and was viewed as a way to address the widespread environmental degradation resulting from decades of intensive agricultural practices. FANJ, with a head office in Havana and regional representation in Sancti Spiritus (central Cuba) and eastern and western Cuba, is now recognised both nationally and internationally as the central agency promoting permaculture in Cuba. FANJ has hosted numerous regional, national and international permaculture workshops and conferences, including the 2013 International Permaculture Convergence. The work of FANJ was featured extensively in the documentary film, *The Power of Community – How Cuba Survived Peak Oil*. The organisation operates under the Cuban Ministry of Culture and, in its work on permaculture, collaborates with the Department of Urban Agriculture, the National Association of Small Farmers, and other NGOs and community groups.

13.3 The programme

Our study abroad programme uses a blended learning model, with two introductory online sessions undertaken prior to leaving for Cuba. On arrival, students enter ten days of face-to-face orientation, including group dynamics and cultural sensitivity workshops. These are followed by tours of urban agriculture and permaculture sites in Havana, Matanzas and Cardenas. The students spend the remainder of the seven weeks in the city of Sancti Spiritus, where they learn permaculture design principles, attend workshops on a variety of related topics (e.g. soil building, intercropping, weed and pest control, composting and green building), collectively develop a permaculture design on a site, and then work in collaboration with Cuban farmers and other community members (e.g. local artists, primary and secondary school pupils and university students) in implementing the design. Completion of the programme results in a permaculture design certificate issued by FANJ. Students also wishing to gain academic credit for the course register in a three-credit course on Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Permaculture offered through the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

Students also take part in a weekly review and discussion of assigned readings (primarily academic journal articles on Cuba's agricultural transition) that are given

to them before they leave for Cuba. Additional time is allocated for group discussion and individual reflection on and documentation of their lived experiences. Students also participate in weekly Spanish language lessons, experience everyday life while living with Cuban families and, on weekends, explore national parks and sites of historic and cultural value. Providing this variety of experiences is viewed as essential to meeting the broad set of learning objectives for the programme, which are to: a) develop awareness of the historic, political and social factors shaping Cuba's agricultural transition; b) compare and contrast this with the Canadian context; c) understand and utilise permaculture design principles; d) critically examine the relationship of permaculture and urban agriculture with the broader concepts of sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty and food security; e) experience Cuban culture and language; and f) engage in cross-cultural exchange, critical reflection and analysis, group problem solving and decision-making. The permaculture curriculum and pedagogy emphasize systems thinking, and developing relationships and interconnectivity over atomistic approaches, which provide a language and a framework for students to undertake a deeper analysis of their own experience while in Cuba. This helps to prepare the students to integrate their new learning and insight into their own lives when they return home.



Cuban and Canadian students and organizers at the project site.

Experiential, situated learning through engagement with others and located in different situations, as well as reflection on these experiences, is referred to as constructivist learning. In contrast to a positivist approach, or what Freire refers to as the banking model (Freire 1970), where knowledge is acquired through information transfer,

constructivism is an active process of constructing knowledge through personal and collective experience, with the aim of raising critical consciousness. Although positivist learning has been the prevalent model in educational institutions for more than 100 years, there is a growing body of evidence from learning and behavioural science supporting the value of constructivist approaches for generating longer-term transformative change (see Fried and Associates 2012 for an overview).



Orelvis sketches a garden plan in the soil.

Study abroad programmes are designed to provide real world experiences that can challenge assumptions and beliefs, and result in new ways of perceiving and defining the world. These programmes vary, both in length – from a few weeks to a few months – and in terms of the degree of engagement and responsibility of the students in their learning outcomes. Some programmes are essentially structured tours led by an academic coordinator. Our programme is a combination of structured and unstructured learning activities, but throughout the programme participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to be actively engaged in group learning and decision-making. Another characteristic that distinguishes this programme is the active involvement of Cuban urban farmers and permaculture practitioners, who partner in the generation and sharing of knowledge (as both teachers and learners) and in the development of a new permaculture site. The collective transformation of unused and often degraded urban land invariably leads to a sense of solidarity,

empowerment and accomplishment on the part of all participants – Canadians and Cubans. Moreover, the Canadians develop a great deal of respect and admiration for the resourcefulness, skill and generosity of their Cuban counterparts.

13.4 The partnership

The programme is coordinated through a collaborative process involving a unique Canadian–Cuban partnership. Each partner has a different expertise and executes different but mutually supportive roles. FANJ is a national NGO that educates people about permaculture, natural resource management and Cuban environmental history and culture. It has trained hundreds of Cubans in permaculture design, is involved in permaculture training internationally, and previously hosted Canadian students in Cuba through an educational partnership with Équiterre Canada. The Urban Farmer, run by Berezan, is an independent business based in British Columbia that offers permaculture training, design and consulting and, for the past eight years, has offered permaculture and agroecology tours in Cuba. Previously, Berezan coordinated international youth educational programmes through two Canadian NGOs: Canada World Youth, and Change for Children. Beckie, an associate professor in the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, utilises a collaborative, community engagement approach in researching and teaching about the development of sustainable agri-food systems in Western Canada, Northwest USA, Europe, Southeast Asia and Cuba. She provides academic oversight for the programme.



Sign at the “El Pimenton” project site.

The Canadian coordinators are responsible for recruiting, interviewing and selecting suitable participants, conducting interactive online sessions (run out of the University of Alberta) and the initial orientation and tours of sites in the first three cities visited. FANJ handles visa applications, organises the logistics of accommodation and food for participants, recruits local permaculture practitioners to assist with workshops and take part in the permaculture installation, accesses materials and resources for the installation, and organises additional learning opportunities such as language lessons and weekend expeditions. Lectures and workshops are conducted initially by the Canadian coordinators, but in Sancti Spiritus it is predominantly FANJ representatives and Cuban practitioners who fulfil this role. The functioning of this partnership is successful because each partner has experience with international and collaborative educational initiatives. Together we define the goals and objectives of the programme, which are reviewed and revised yearly based on end-of-programme evaluations by participants and the partners.

Despite all the planning that goes into the programme, there is an element of flexibility, since each new group of participants brings a range of knowledge, abilities, expectations and needs. There is also a different location for the permaculture installation each year, and there are often limitations in access to materials and resources in Cuba. The partners and permaculture practitioners also have changing needs and expectations. These variables factor into an equation that has to be balanced. The goal is to develop a format that is mutually beneficial to the partners and the participants. However, we acknowledge a fundamental inequality in our relationship: as Canadians, we have the financial resources and unrestricted freedom to travel internationally, while the Cubans we work with do not.

13.5 Impacts on the Cubans

In analysing the outcomes of this programme, we focus on the impacts experienced by FANJ and other members of the Cuban host community. This section is based on interviews conducted with FANJ representatives and permaculture practitioners involved in the programme. The section is structured according to the four themes that emerged during these interviews: cross-cultural learning, developing relationships of solidarity, building local capacity, and creating a strong partnership.

Cross-cultural learning

One of the most positive impacts of the programme experienced by FANJ representatives and permaculture practitioners is the opportunity it gives them to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Canadians who are interested in coming to Cuba, not just for tourism but to 'understand their reality' by living and working with them. Cary Cruz, the director of FANJ programmes for local sustainable development commented: "The Cubans involved know about the influences of the typical tourism in the country, and for them to see that there are people who, while

they live far away in very consumerist societies, don't manifest that way of being in their lives and in their fraternity with us."



Sharing design ideas.

Josefina Romero Emperador, local FANJ coordinator, added that it is enlightening, "from a social and political point of view", that Canadians "come as workers to support the Cuban process that we are still struggling to complete: to have a sustainable agriculture within the urban environment".

Another dimension of cross-cultural learning experienced by the Cubans has come about through their observations of the physical capabilities and stamina of our predominantly female cohorts. While initially FANJ was so sceptical about the outcomes that they enrolled local men to assist with demanding tasks (e.g. digging and lifting), the Canadian women have been able to break through traditional gender stereotypes common in Cuban society by providing proof of their capacity.

Ricardo Torres Treyes, a permaculture practitioner, explains: "Well, sometimes we have a certain idea, like 'Oh, only women are going to be coming, how are we going to be able to work with this?' They showed us the strength they had, their ability to rise up to challenges. We learned that these are very strong women who will find a way to do many of the things that we assumed they would not want to do."

Developing relationships of solidarity

In a country that has suffered from decades of an externally imposed isolation, the act of 'accompaniment' by the Canadians is particularly meaningful: "Because when people work together, they become unified, they help each other and they establish relationships. And this bears very beautiful fruits," said Ricardo Torres Treyes.



Solidarity grows in the garden.

Revolutionary values have led Cubans to believe that it is their duty to share their knowledge, skills and services, not only with their own community but also with the wider world. When Canadians travel to their country to learn from them, this resonates with their social value: "And I like this, it gives me satisfaction, this is a voluntary work, but I get satisfaction from sharing it with other people – the theory and the practice at the same time," said Edith Ramirez, permaculture practitioner.

The Cubans point to the relationships they have established as the most important benefit of the programme and of their involvement in permaculture in general: "Aside from the food and the income, I feel very happy with all of the new friends I have made. I now have friends in Canada and they are very good people, and I have lots of permaculture friends in Cuba as well," commented Ricardo Torres Treyes.

The lasting impact of these relationships, and their importance to the permaculture philosophy, is summarised poetically by Ricardo Torres Treyes: "They say that culture is the footprints of people upon the land. I think that now there is a little bit of the footprint of Canadian culture upon this land." Yet, one must always be cautious as

to the nature of the 'cultural footprint' being left behind, hence the need for cultural awareness and reflexivity.

Building local capacity

Our Cuban partners frequently refer to the fact that the programme challenges them to develop greater organisational capacity by bringing more permaculture practitioners into positions of leadership and teaching. Edith Ramirez commented: "This stimulates us; it is a movement on both sides, very positive and strengthening on both sides." Edison Ramirez Castellano added: "And just like you have come from a long way away to be with us, to support us, we help others too. Our collaboration for this programme helps us to work together more. We have grown much."

Having a group of foreign volunteers collaborating with them also helps to raise the profile of the work of FANJ within Sancti Spiritus: "The programme was a great opportunity to promote the ideas of permaculture to the community, to the students in the school. The group itself provoked a lot of interest and resulted in attracting many people to the site. I think this was something very, very, very positive," said Edith Ramirez.

The presence of the programme also brings some economic benefits, both to FANJ and to the producers on whose land the participants have worked: "There is the financial support that we receive from the programme. This is also important. It is not the only thing because there are many other benefits but this too is important," said Cary Cruz.



Former garbage dump transformed into beautiful gardens by Ricardo and students.

The creation of these productive systems allows for the possibility of ongoing benefits to the resident family and to the wider community: “We can say from personal experience that using permaculture methods has been very economically beneficial to us. The other thing that happens with the permaculture approach is that, if you get a marginal piece of land, and for the first couple of years it is not very productive due to low fertility, but over time that land will become increasingly fertile and will provide better yields and benefits. Because it is our responsibility to rejuvenate this land, we are holding wealth in the soil,” commented Ricardo Torres Treyes.

Creating a strong partnership

The importance of developing trusting relationships with open and clear communication among the partners cannot be understated for a programme of this complex nature. Josefina Romero Emperador commented: “We need a high level of organisation and a direct relationship.”

Fundamental to the cultivation of these relationships is the annual visit by the Canadian partners to sit with FANJ coordinators, review participant programme evaluations and collectively make decisions for the year ahead. Regular evaluation has been essential to the programme's evolution and to maintaining an effective, positive and healthy working relationship, as Josefina continued: “It is a very beautiful thing that, after the second internship, I sent you a page of recommendations. This was after the group of all women, which was the hardest intern group we have had, workwise and logistically. And you evaluated all of those recommendations and made some of your own as well and we made changes for this past year. So both sides contributed to making some very positive changes.”

The strong sense of collaborative partnership and the positive evolution of the programme have also been fostered by the fact that the regular evaluative process includes not only the programme organisers but also the front-line FANJ workers and volunteers and the Canadian students themselves in direct and meaningful ways.

13.6 Conclusion

For the past five years we have had the privilege of collaborating with FANJ to coordinate an experiential study abroad course on permaculture and urban agriculture in Cuba. This partnership has provided Canadian students with an opportunity to become immersed in Cuba's permaculture movement by learning and working directly with Cuban permaculture practitioners. Learning is also enhanced by the students' experiences with and reflections on everyday Cuban life, culture, language, history and ecology. The programme is designed to foster critical examination of the food system and international solidarity through a real world experience that engages the head, heart and hands in building sustainable alternatives. The pedagogy and practice of permaculture creates a fertile venue for transformative learning in that it nurtures both instrumental and communicative knowledge, and emphasises the

importance of seeing and enhancing relationships in systems and communities. These constructivist learning opportunities provide a platform for developing praxis: the iterative relationship between action and reflection that is crucial to food system learning and change.

The partnership that coordinates this unique programme is structured and operates in a way that is sensitive to the context, objectives and needs of the Canadian and Cuban partners, as well as those of the Cuban practitioners with whom we work and who are essential to the unique experiential quality of the programme. Although participation in the programme places demands of time and labour on these volunteers and FANJ coordinators, their involvement is motivated in large part by their belief in both the revolutionary and permaculture values of sharing knowledge, skills and services. In exchange, the programme finances access to material resources, enables the rapid establishment of new food production sites, and stimulates organisational development and individual leadership among the local permaculture community in Sancti Spiritus. Over the five years that this programme has been running, relationships of trust and solidarity have developed as Canadians have shown their willingness to experience the 'Cuban reality' in which the Cubans welcome them into their homes and lives. Together they have co-created vibrant, productive learning exchanges and growing spaces.

Cuba offers a unique context for learning about the development of alternative food systems. Triggered by crisis and necessity, the country began a strategic process to make the transition to a more ecological, low external input approach to agriculture. Twenty-five years later, great strides have been made, mostly with relatively limited material resources, confirming Cuba's reputation for innovation and resilience: *se inventa* (we make do). Seeing and unleashing creative potential and making it possible to develop transformative agri-food systems, even in times of scarcity, is an important lesson for all of us who come from relative affluence and privilege but have now entered a period of economic and ecological uncertainty. Resilient food systems are characterised by continuous learning, where trial and error and joint problem solving build capacity to cope with hardship and unexpected changes. Through this experiential learning programme, we have joined with Cuban colleagues to create a long-term collaborative project for transformative learning and change.

13.7 Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the contribution of FANJ, our Cuban partner in this programme, and all the permaculture practitioners we have worked with over the years. Your dedication, commitment and friendship are truly inspiring. We also acknowledge support for this programme and our research from the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta.

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Further Reading

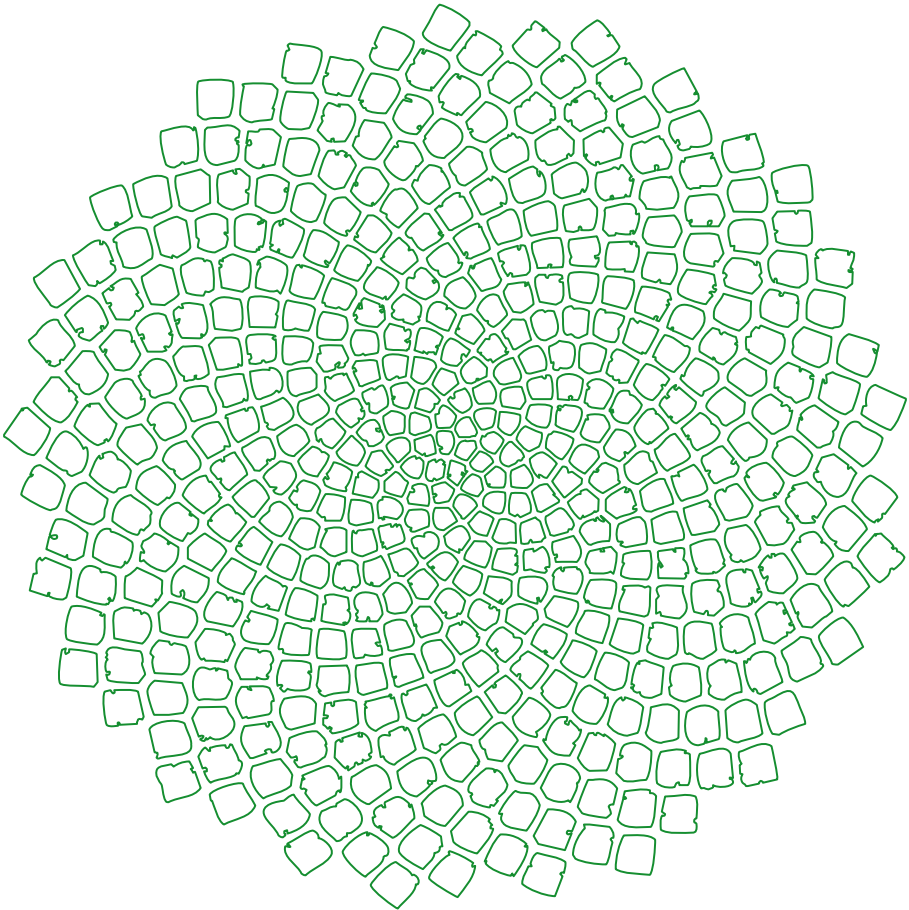
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14



Reclaiming the yam: a critical journey into the origin and transformation of our food

Mama D

Geographical location: London, England

Chapter highlights: Food from the Caribbean as seen through the lens of experiencing colonialism.

A quasi-historical perspective working with British African-Caribbean families, sharing food stories - which arise through the course of food preparation and dialogue, as well as by working through exploratory sensory experiences - reveal and highlight legacies of disempowerment.

The possibility of having greater agency whilst engaging with the food systems of the UK, through greater sharing and repositioning of food narratives both within the British African Caribbean community and other similarly economically marginalised communities of the UK as well as among seasoned food activists.

The margins of the different food systems of the UK are understood to be the unacknowledged actors who nevertheless define and influence mainstream food consumption, trade and production patterns.

The chapter introduces the calabashes of resistance and resilience by locating food within a continuous historical trajectory of the appropriation of power and associated transformations.

Keywords: commons, commodification, Caribbean, cultural, colonialism, resistance, resilience, transformation

14.1 Introduction: planning the journey

This is a journey of return¹. An emancipatory journey, an attempt to reverse the 'chattelisation' of human life and erasing the 'line'² across which food became imprisoned within the shackles of early corporate capitalism: the harvest of empire.

*I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
From the root of the old one
A new one has sprung.*

Epilogue, I is a long memoried woman: Grace Nichols

As a woman of British citizenship who has passed through the portals of the Caribbean, I find I have something in common with the diversity of food in the markets of the metropolis.

I represent the produce of different lands and cultures, combined, often violently, for the sake of profit and 'mek do':³ an unstable mix. Others, born from communities of oppression have and are also breaking new ground by linking epistemologies of race and cultural injustice to food system transformation. In this chapter, I hope to take a small step in a similar direction: to bring ideas of sustainable diversity to food system change narratives.

By undertaking a 'critical food journey' we can better understand the falsities within and ahistoricities of current food narratives and everyday parlance. How, for example, a supermarket claims to stock 'world foods' in a small section or aisle, when in reality the whole supermarket gains from the products of global trade, much of which is hidden within the stories of Caribbean food journeys.

The vessel

This chapter is akin to a journeying into the experiences Caribbean heritage families by sharing meals and through Food Journey workshops. We explore together a deeply immersive experience of re-crossing the Atlantic through food.

On the Community Centred Knowledge website, you will find a wealth of stories, images, audio and video demonstrating the process of the research work and its outcomes and implications for food sovereignty in the UK. Material for this chapter was also gleaned from the different spaces in which food conversations are held: at family mealtimes as well as 'over the counter' conversations within the dwindling number of Caribbean food outlets in Britain in which the transactional memories of

1 <http://tgcghana.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/door-of-no-return.html>

2 'As early as the mid-16th century, the French and Spanish, unable to settle their disputes over the Americas, had agreed that there would be a line in the Atlantic beyond which accepted European treaties and, in effect, accepted European codes of conduct, would not apply. The English, in the treaties of 1604 (Treaty of London) and 1630 (Treaty of Madrid) implicitly accepted the same agreements.

3 Houston speaks of the 'make-do' culture of the Caribbean, in which coping with necessity has become a cultural signature, here rendered in patois. Houston, LM (2005) Food Culture in the Caribbean. p. xxvi.

the past meet the present. My involvement in UK organisations that feed into food systems sovereignty and transformation discussions has also has given rise to much reflection, on account of the persistent contradictions encountered.

Baggage on board

'Sankofa' (a Ghanaian Adinkra symbol) means it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind, i.e. go back and fetch it.

The Caribbean food story is a Sankofa journey, rediscovering food relationships, which can be uncovered as a source of cultural power and agency, and thus applied as a transformative mechanism to challenge power dynamics in what is a broken or disconnected understanding of local and global food systems.

The context of this writing reflects upon the popular discourse linking nutrition to health within the African Caribbean community and the practice of asserting food justice as a remedy for better health in the UK population. Often, groups in the UK, while embracing the language and activism of locally grown food, appear to operate in ignorance of the vast number of everyday foods that derive from the story of exploitation in which their forebears engaged overseas.



Sankofa Bird Courtesy of CCK, 2017

Here is an opportunity for genuine food system justice, were it not for the ignorance, guilt, shame and trauma that are the legacies of the tragedies of the middle passage. These often act as barriers to genuine conversations that might lead to a collective dismantling of the frameworks of power that cause the various food systems to malfunction.

There is a challenge associated with meeting in real and imagined spaces. African heritage people are rarely seen within the movements championing the different UK

resistances, nor is this a topic brought up in the agendas for action. Intersectional⁴ spaces are not recognised by the system, creating further blind spots and blockages to collective work that could challenge the specifics of what is meant by 'food system transformation'.

There also seems to be an endemic resistance to recognising the role of specific African-centred histories as having agency to contest the unequal relations in the food systems and food activism of today. Yet it is such relations which occlude effective articulation by African heritage actors as stakeholders in an ever unequal battle for rights and justice and a say in how food systems should transform in ways to make them more accountable, responsive and relevant. There is a double oppression by the matrix of power and privilege articulated by the western world and the subjugation of an alternative telling of history, and its resultant discourse, as part of the reality of coloniality.⁵

Why yam? Yam is one of the many *Dioscorea*⁶ species found in the global south and cultivated throughout West and Central Africa and the Caribbean. It stands here as a symbol of the journey of food that accompanied enslaved Africans to the Americas. Yet it hasn't made it as a crossover food into the mainstream dishes of the UK. It also represents a food that tells of the story of the people and places violently transformed into an 'open access resource' and who, as such, were plundered as commodities for their labour and assets and who were taken to the Caribbean as factors of production. This was a historical crisis, which is still experienced today as trauma. It affects all our current food choices. Yam still has significant cultural resonance in West Africa and the Caribbean and it is also symbolic of the potential to extricate a people from this trauma by taking up a place as active food system transformers and holding power over the cultivation, distribution and consumption of foods that underpin our resistance to food system colonisation.

Boarding the craft

It will be useful to discuss what 'culturally resonant' food means as this term arose in the research. The Declaration of Nyéléni (2007) includes the following statement concerning food sovereignty (with my emphasis):

4 Intersectionality is a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, which deals with the way official structures or frameworks are unable to respond to the overlapping oppressions in society. In particular, the way in which US legal systems were unable to respond to the twinned oppression of women who were also African American. It creates a space that is invisible to the system and is thus not responded to, or catered for, by the system's resources.

5 Coloniality: coined by Anibal Quijano and extended by Walter Dignolo, it refers to "...long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations." Taken from: Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) On The Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3) 240-270 available at: <http://www.decolonialtranslation.com/english/maldonado-on-the-coloniality-of-being.pdf>.

6 *Dioscorea* is a genus of over 600 species of flowering plants in the family Dioscoreaceae, native to tropical and warm temperate regions of the world. The yam (not sweet potato *Ipomoea* spp.) is cultivated as a starchy staple across Africa and the Caribbean and South and Central America.

*"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and **culturally appropriate food** produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."*

"It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations."

Cultural appropriateness of food, in modernity,⁷ is complex and expressed through the socio-economic, geopolitical dynamics of citizens, mediated over time, by the market. Food that culturally resonates in African Caribbean circles is that which is identified as possessing the politics of resistance to domination and those items that can be deemed to be food sovereign in the sense of conferring a sense of agency and autonomy through a long-standing association with their cultivation and consumption.

For the purpose of understanding Caribbean food choices, I am defining foods of resistance and foods of resilience as distinct discourses which have different potentials to influence food system transformation. This is particularly the case when it is articulated from a bias in the definition of sovereignty as defined above, which is 'producer'-centric. It assumes that transformative power is vested chiefly in the politics of production, narrowly defined by a 'market-centric' approach.

For Caribbean people away from 'home', this is markedly not the case. Culturally resonant foods are seen to be associated with those perceived to be liberatory - resistance foods - which confer an autonomy of presence, giving credence to the sustainable farming systems that originally produced them and the cultures of resistance that maintained them. That the majority of my research participants selected these foods can stand as testament to an articulation of agency as a system transformer. One who seeks to redefine transformation decolonially, from the intersections, reflecting and engaging with history and the present.

The resilience foods, on the other hand, are global in nature in the sense that they were, and are now, produced far from their 'centres of diversity'.⁸ They became 'enforced' as popular ingredients in what has been configured as Caribbean cuisine throughout the middle passage, and were foods that enabled the furtherance of enslavement in the Caribbean and Americas.

Resistance foods are generally not produced in the UK, partly because of the current limitations of the British climate, but also because they have never really crossed over into the cuisine of British mainstream culture, then as now. Many resilience foods are not produced in the Caribbean or Africa either. An exploration of the contrasts between sites of cultivation and sites of use can throw up issues of

⁷ Defined by coloniality, modernity is the way in which knowledge and its practice is defined geopolitically through its expression of power.

⁸ The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) has produced useful infographics that examine the global nature of the food we all consume. See: <http://blog.ciat.cgiar.org/foreign-crops-from-maize-to-mangoes-dominate-national-food-consumption-and-farming-practices-worldwide/>.

controversial food sovereignties and challenges to ideas of what is local and what is truly 'cultural'.

A certain sovereignty might be expressed through the production of those species adapted to the UK climate. *Amaranthus* spp. *Callaloo* and chayote (outdoors), sweet potato (under cover), for example, could be championed by African heritage communities in situations where they have access to the land spaces to grow them commercially and market niches in which to sell them.

African-Caribbean people in the UK, however, suffer a disproportionately unequal access to the 'factors of production', i.e. land and, now, through inner city gentrification, a diminishing access to markets, communities of solidarity and spaces in which to maintain cultural community building. This situation affects the majority of African heritage people and, it is important to note, it also has a major impact on all positioned as an underclass. This is because of the particular disenfranchising ways in which imported crops (sugar is one of note) became part of the industrialised food system complex that it is today in most of Western Europe. Much of the discourse around this coincides and intersects with British colonial narrative. To emancipate these narratives both the perspective of lions (victims) as well as hunters (historians⁹) the latter as possessing 'Wetiko'¹⁰ sensibilities, must be reclaimed and understood for their impact.

14.2 The journey

Some of the comments from participants arising in the course of the research relate, very specifically, to expressions of Caribbean–UK food sovereignty:

- *“As a young child my parents (usually my mother) would often prepare one dish for the children, based upon ready-made, easy to prepare English foods like fish and chips, and another for the adults of the household, often made of Caribbean hard foods.”* Research participant
- Many participants noted that their parents had been inclined to use fresh instead of powdered spices to season the food.
- Others spoke of the diminishing quality of the foods available and that they would return to specific outlets just to have the quality they felt was the best.

At the Food Journey Workshops, across generations, there was a sense of an erosion of power, in terms of being able to define our own food landscape. Yet there was also awareness that there was a need for a greater expression of agency:

9 Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter (Igbo, Nigeria). Found across Africa, this proverb describes the way in which there is an unequal telling of what has taken place in history if there is not adequate opportunity for the 'victim' to tell their tale as well as the oppressor. For further explanation see: <http://www.afriproverb.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/32-2006proverbs/224-april-2006-proverb-quntil-the-lion-has-his-or-her-own-storyteller-the-hunter-will-always-have-the-best-part-of-the-storyq-ewe-mina-benin-ghana-and-togo-.html>.

10 A way of perceiving the actions of imperialist acquisition as mindless cannibalism: <http://www.skeptic.ca/Wetiko.htm> and this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBV9-YdxXOM>.

"Knowledge (about food) should be shared between generations. We use concepts which do not belong to us which hinder communication."

"Food is a weapon used against us."

"We were force-fed during slavery."

"We used to eat the food of a specific clan, now we do not eat with that discipline."

"Food is on a race to our kitchens to see which gets their first!"

"It is either less fair trade or unfair trade for us."

There was strong cynicism around the emblems of sustainable eating such as 'Fair Trade' and 'organic food' and suchlike. This relayed a lack of trust in those who are positioned as potential allies of production-related food system transformation. This is indicative of a scarcity of a Caribbean food narrative in food-growing circles in the UK, despite people's respect for growing food for oneself as an act of autonomy and resistance. Other ways to express this autonomy is through buying foods specifically sourced from 'homelands' in the tropics or to seek to supplement less nutritious diets with a range of herbs, superfoods or alternative health practices which relate to 'home culture', and which were felt to be able to confer 'good health'.

A question then to ask is what are the main narratives of food system 'Black Britain' and how can they be understood as a mechanism to bridge relationships of mistrust and marginalisation and so work towards more transformative relationships around food?

14.3 Reflecting on the journey

As Wilk (2006) suggests, particular foods and cuisines have been a defining part of Caribbean people's identity. It is an act of resistance to define oneself by something as sensually relevant to everyone as food, especially when so little else has been claimed as owned by us. Enslavement critically damaged many important, self-affirming cultural forms and norms.

Food was, and is, a key agent in enabling a variety of cultural ways that framed people's ability to survive the 'middle passage' and at present. So, what can the prevalent discourses of food sovereignty mean to transplanted peoples, whose original indigenous agronomic practices were redirected and whose bodies instead became disempowered tools of production and profit? What happened when these people were then forced into abandoning even this land connection and became predominantly consumers within an industrial food system?

Critically, the ability of African Caribbean people to possess a sense of agency relates to resisting the worst impositions of the global food systems. What is it about the Caribbean experience that is yet to be reclaimed as a contribution to a notion of deep transformation? In partial response to this, it is noted that in the past Africans were responsible for the dispersal and cultivation of many African 'home foods' and the

culture of plantains, yams and an assortment of 'ground provisions' and many other vegetable staples common to the Caribbean region (Carney and Rosomoff 2009). These same 'ground provisions' made up the bulk of what the research participants selected as being 'culturally resonant' to them, from wherever they were from in the Caribbean.

However, African Caribbean people were actively and repeatedly blocked from practising indigenous agroecologies. First there was the forced removal. There is no space here to develop this discussion, except to say that colonial license to 'penetrate' the 'dark' continent resulted in both the upheaval of the balance between human and nature there (Richards 1985) there and damage to the relationship between the transplanted African and her natural environment. The conditions of enslavement forced African men, women and children into becoming factors of production, with curtailed autonomous connections to nature.

Even food production for the enslaved person was severely constrained by the system of chattel slavery. The recently transported African had few opportunities at her disposal to reacquaint herself with the new country and forge a connection that would lead to the kind of multi-layered relationship that she had been torn from. Plantation agriculture continued in the Caribbean until the 20th century in some cases. Land ownership of large estates and lands of reasonable quality still remain in the hands of those descended from the earlier landowners. Creolisation with its kitchen adaptations to imported foods from other parts of the globe and specifically from North America, for the enslaved, changed the balance from resistance to resilience foods. This rang a death knell for local, productive systems of resistance foods.

Caribbean inheritors of such systems who were called to the UK in the post-war period were known for cultivating their tiny, 'kitchen' gardens and for taking up allotment provisions. They were the descendants of those recently liberated from apprenticeship slavery and were eager to acquire and continue agency over their own food supply.

Nevertheless, there were severe limitations to this practice expanding in terms of access to productive resources and it did not form a contiguous part of the liberatory praxis of the 1960s and 70s. Access to land and countryside were further delimited by taboos of fear and victimisation. City life meant easily accessible imported foods: the foods of resilience and creolisation. These were also foods that Europeans and Asian people had acquired a taste for and who were also acquiring import rights to and thus had business interests in. The expansion of supermarkets, widening range of food imports and high street fast foods all formed a backdrop to a widespread erosion of resistance foods consumption in subsequent generations. This 'replacement resilience' food uptake is founded upon histories of creolisation in which house servants and affluent creoles were encouraged to imitate the social hierarchies of taste shown by plantation owners (Wilk 2009).

With 'gentrification' of many areas of London, especially those in which African Caribbean populations have lived and worked, older members of the community are

now finding it challenging to source close by, affordable and familiar foodstuffs from outlets that also understand their needs.¹¹ The socioeconomic positions of Caribbean people in the UK also account for the rareness of their voice in food sovereignty discussions and other contexts in which issues of food system transformation can be contemplated. Black, Caribbean people in the UK are part of the voiceless oppressed, landless with insignificant access to land-based assets or funding streams.

For some research participants, the greatest concern was the cost and time available even to shop more deliberately. Many ingredients were obtained from local supermarkets. There is reason for this. Occupying lower income brackets and typically classified as poor, African Caribbean people rely on processed, trade foods. This presents a major challenge to contemplating community self-sufficiency.

A research participant obtained his food through a food cooperative that he was establishing, reflecting the resistance shown by some to the, often exploitative, marketing of the foods of resistance and resilience. Direct purchase of imported 'resistance' foods can enable African Caribbean people to contribute to supporting trade with regions of the world still sustainably producing them.

However, consumption of such 'home foods' is decreasing and people have become reliant upon processed food imports and fast food alternatives, we even lack garden spaces to grow. Altogether, it seems, we have lost 'the plot'.

14.4 Losing the way?

*My eyes grow dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.*

The Tropics of New York: Claude McKay, 1889–1948

Sankofa journeys are emotional, with trails of trauma. Yet, through tears, one can savour the aromas liberated from *Dutch pots* bearing the insignia of a history carved out from the scarred aluminium-rich soils of West Africa or the Caribbean Islands. One tastes the sweetness of annatto-coated squashes, okra and bean rich stews; all of these a blood-red testament of the lands from whence both people and their foods were appropriated. The tears too are blood-red.

The tears collect in twin calabashes: a metaphor of the dual legacy of Caribbean foodstuffs.

The calabash of resistance holds those items that enabled the ocean crossing. African roots, grains, leaves, legumes and fruit travelled in the fetid holds of slave ships and were nurtured by women's food ways into remembered dishes, made in familiar

¹¹<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/TheFutureAgeingOfTheEthnicMinorityPopulation-ForWebJuly2010.pdf>

styles, to feed and nourish. These dishes formed the basis of survival and insurrection and are, even today, in foods like yam, associated with the prowess and victory of latter day athletes and champions.¹²



Ground Provisions in the marketplace

The second calabash is filled with resilience foods exchanged by the people that converged in the islands. From the salt pork of the buccaneers to the Amerindians' cassava flatbreads, East Indian curry spices and roti, Polynesian breadfruit and Chinese noodles. The colonists also brought, via the kitchen and industrialising merchants, a range of food preparation styles and dishes from Cornish pasties, black cake, Yorkshire hams and Spanish escovitch¹³ fish. Today there is a similar preoccupation with globalising fast foods.¹⁴



Processed foods in a grocery store

¹²<http://tamersoliman.net/the-usain-bolt-yam/>

¹³ A style of preparing fried fish, which uses vinegar, pimento, scotch bonnet peppers and thyme as a marinade.

¹⁴ See Wilson, 2013 p107-117.

As a result each year, the Caribbean imports over US\$ 5 billion worth of food.¹⁵ Much of what is imported is processed; traded by descendants of those of mercantile or landholding class, who remained in the Caribbean or migrated to Europe and there built fortunes through successful food businesses. A brisk and growing trade is based upon trading economies rooted in slavery and creolisation.

Food production in the Caribbean was chronically neglected as the plantation economy burgeoned. The absence of investment in local industry is akin to the cheap opportunism of importation and the accelerated western industrialisation (often based on Caribbean products; Wilk 2009). All this created conditions favourable to the birth of the transnational company. The trading off of opportunities and threats¹⁶ specifically operating in the Caribbean region was supported by cheap or freely available raw materials and labour. It fed 'mother-country' industrialisation, avoiding the risk of local uprisings and political instability.



Harvest from the allotment

Creolisation, which adapted Caribbean people to new eating patterns, included:

- Supplying fieldworkers with imported rations to enable on-going productivity in the plantations or forests.
- The desires of the slaveholding classes to imitate the ways of the metropolis thus importing an increasing variety of processed foodstuffs.

¹⁵ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/11/caribbean-agriculture-looks-to-cope-with-climate-change/>.

¹⁶ <http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Publication%20Files/10-076.pdf>

- The imperative of the kitchen as wives sought to eat as they might in the colonial countries from which they or their forebears came.
- The importation of replacement foodstuffs from North America to serve as substitute staples when insufficient time was afforded the enslaved workers to produce for themselves
- Competition between colonising nations to grow their empires led to trading based more on national pride than need, and avoidance of taxes and buccaneers¹⁷

All of these factors produced a people who became too dependent upon an outward facing food legacy.

14.5 Back on the open road

“Our liberation starts because we can plant what we eat. This is food sovereignty. We need to produce to bring autonomy and the sovereignty of our peoples. If we continue to consume [only], it doesn’t matter how much we shout and protest. We need to become producers. It’s about touching the pocketbook, the surest way to overcome our enemies. It’s also about recovering and reaffirming our connections to the soil, to our communities, to our land.”

Miriam Miranda. The Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH)

What is the potential role that can be realised for people of African Caribbean heritage in UK food system transformation? Uppermost will be cultivating spaces for dialogue, exchanging experiences and understanding what is important to each voice and potentially transformative role. There may be a need for sacrifices on the part of those who have been holding power around what change has been, to enable new exchanges to become possible, new narratives to emerge, and new bridges to be built. For example, movements radicalising the distribution of food at household level might form partnerships with Caribbean people seeking to forge alliances with small-scale food producers in the Caribbean. Opportunities will need to be created to encourage a mutual understanding of building resistance, in food activism circles, to the forces of neo-liberal capital wherever it has a destructive effect.

‘Brokenness’ in the food systems within the UK may have to be reformulated as an impaired understanding of how such systems have been historically constructed and continue to impact current eating habits and farming systems. There will need to be some accountability and responsibility for the ruptures in history which occlude the development of fairer trading systems, land access and food habits. We will also need to promote sound social as well as environmental practice for all farms and farm workers, the latter of whom should be included in what it is to be a ‘land-worker’ in Britain today.

¹⁷ Parker, M (2011). The Sugar Barons

We ought to work towards and understanding of the 'Eat yam' imperative because it is emblematic of a sovereign food system choice that is aligned with agency and autonomy over food choices in a community which is already multiply oppressed. It also denotes the resistance of the African diaspora to the dictates of imposed consumerism and unsustainable, unfair global trading relations.

Sovereign choice in this sense is what 'sustainable consumption' means, even though the food choices it implies might seem to be significantly different to those of the wider UK communities. There can be greater convergence where there is greater understanding.

We will always trade; it is human to do so. We can, though, be careful about what is traded, mindful to encourage earth and human-centric production and interdependent, diverse, living systems. Far from eschewing all tropical products traded in the UK, we can decide to include a shared attitude of resistance to the renewed-colonial-corporate imperative. Such a shared attitude will need to recognise a complex history and the potential within that for creating interdependencies. Will we be brave enough to reach across traditional boundaries of culture to effect genuine food system transformation? Can we, as part of this, recognise our joint legacy of responsibility, which is symbolised in reclaiming the Caribbean narrative which in our midst who also needs, for liberation, to reclaim the yam?



Yam at the table and in the market places of London

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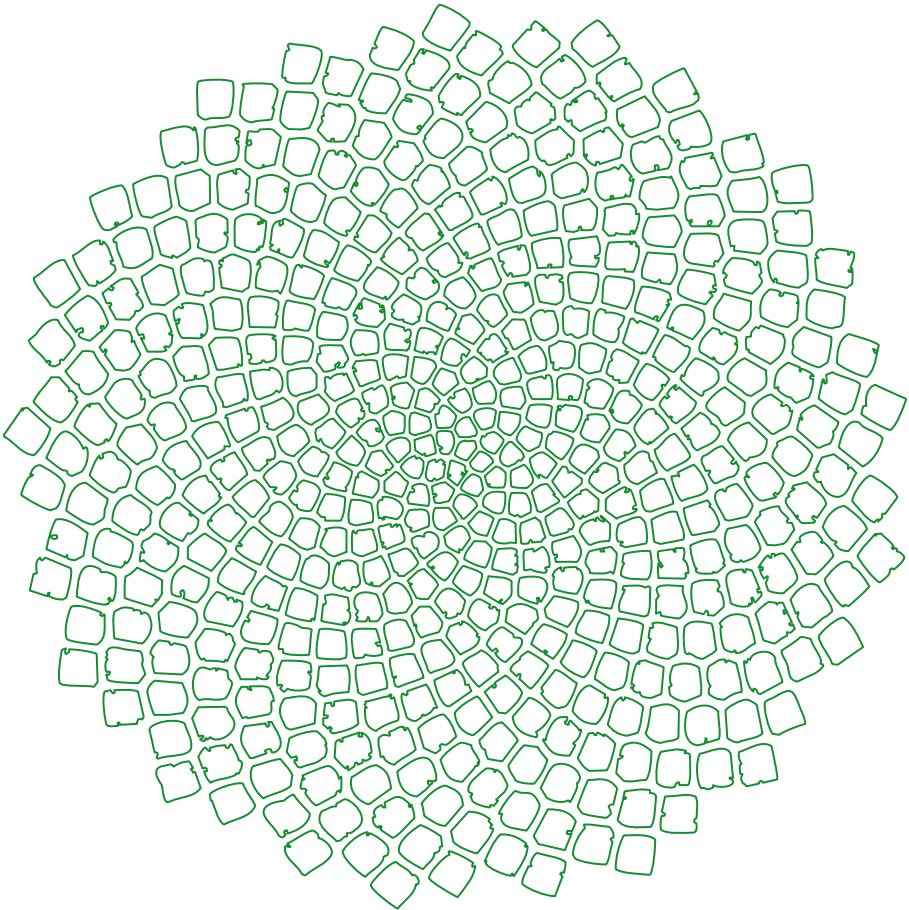
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15



Soil and me

Ma'at á Nkemi

Geographical location: Kent and London, England

Chapter highlights: This chapter is a research project undertaken by young people into the importance of soil. It shows how children change their attitudes towards food and life on Earth when they begin to understand soil.

It explores how having access to the soil is an important way to learn about where food comes from and why the soil needs to be enriched and valued.

Writing and performing rap music is used as a medium to communicate to fellow students what the author has gained from her inquiry into soil and to share her knowledge.

Keywords: soil, nutrients, degradation, young people, children, future generations, garden, rap, creative communication, access to food.

This chapter is in honour of my friend
Kwesi Abraham
who sadly passed into another realm in June, this year, aged only 14
I will miss him and his relentless search for knowledge.
Let's read what he had to say about soil in my chapter.

15.1 Me first!

I am thirteen years old and a girl who lives in the county of Kent, which is known as the 'garden of England' because it has traditionally produced many of the fruit and vegetables we eat.

Much of the source of my education is within nature, the nature reserves near to me, my exploration of self and others and through exploring the Earth and the universe in my back garden, allotment and in books.

I also like listening to different types of music and writing my own 'conscious lyrics' for rap and spoken word performances. The process of writing helps me think about life

on this planet, both for me and for other children and people around me.

I am writing this chapter because it was suggested that it would be useful to have a child's perspective in this book and I am game at giving things a go, so here I am!



Me and a slow worm at our allotment

We live in a small, dormitory town in Kent and I help my mother out at our allotment periodically and sometimes in the garden. She used to have to really coax me to get involved, but these days, I am growing my own potatoes and sweetcorn and sometimes a flower or two. I love picking the different berries on our allotment and looking out for the slow worms, which are actually legless lizards!

What having so many slow worms in our allotment tells me is that we have a lot of decaying organic matter and that there are lots of hiding spaces, piles of rubble and tin sheets and rotting weeds beneath which to hide. These are homes to slow worms, though they are also the places that we want to clear, remove and reduce!

I am in touch with the soil now quite often. At first, it was just this thing that I would walk on, handle with gloves to plant vegetable seeds in and so forth. To me, it was just there and as far as I was concerned it would stay there forever.

When we first got our allotment and went to work in it, the ground seemed to be made of iron when it was cleared of some of the weeds. It was the middle of summer and mum was determined to get a crop despite the abundance of weeds. These were weeds such as couch grass, bindweed and bristly ox-tongue, all of which had such deep roots.

We were constantly finding buried potatoes which must have had very long tubers because some still pop up to this day — so much for planting potatoes only one year in four (for the avoidance of soil-borne pests).

We soon decided though that it was better to cover the weeds, let them die and then turn over the soil and plant immediately. That year we harvested sweetcorn, beans, lettuce, radishes and cucumbers. It was a hot year and we planted loads of sunflowers. Fenugreek, clover and phacelia were planted later in the year as green manures and to compete with the weeds.

I understood then that to get a good crop you had to be good to the soil.



Getting bed edges from pallets



Sunflowers at the allotment

Even so, the journey that I have gone on whilst writing this essay has changed my views on soil even more dramatically. Partly from what I learnt whilst researching, but also because I have been able to really focus upon the relationship I had with the soil. It has changed from being something mundane, something I did not really value before, to a source of inspiration and a place to become really grounded.

After I had agreed to contribute to this book I knew that I would have to make a commitment to finding out more about the facts of soil and experience it even more deeply. One of the first things I did was to research all I could find about the soil. I read books about it; then I watched videos on it such as *Symphony of the Soil* (Koons Garcia 2012) and *Dirt, the Movie* (2009). These films helped to create a basic understanding for me. After that I consulted mum and others at my alternative school.



White Radishes (Mooli) growing

I also chatted to one of my spoken word mentors, Ian Soloman-Kawall, who is involved in teaching children and young people gardening through hip-hop, at May Project Gardens. I spoke to others, elders, who had grown up with different relationships with the soil and I also asked some other children at school, such as the ones who are quoted below.

Some of these children also came up to the allotment so that we could learn about the allotment soils and what grows on them. We had an interesting discussion with the most elderly teacher at the Saturday school, Elder Des, who was joined by another two teachers, to talk about the soil and what it means to them. We filmed a short conversation in which they shared the unique value of soil in their lives both in the Caribbean and in the UK.

15.2 What is soil? Here's what I have learned

Soil provides all the nutrients required for successful growth:

The power of the soil is infinite

It's the cornerstone for life, that's definite

Holds so many nutrients from the parts that decay

It's a living system: producing sand, silt and clay.

Holds so much water: 9,200 tonnes per acre

10% CO₂ storage for us, gotta love soil just can't hate her!

So many microorganisms within

More than a human count

Helps make topsoil

Plants can't do without!

Bacteria and fungi,

Beetles and worms

Spiders, slugs and snails,

You're just going to squirm!

When there's enough phosphorus and
potassium,

Trace elements and nitrogen

Grows food and flowers in the soil

And constantly we harvest them!

Yet

Soil is the foundation of the food chain, and the cornerstone of life on Earth

It's time to appreciate and act as if we recognise and know her worth.



Soil in the local forest

The power of the soil is infinite,
It's the cornerstone for life, that's definite.
Holds so many nutrients from the parts that decay:
A living system producing sand, silt and clay.

Emfasis MC, 2015

These are the three main ingredients of soil which give rise to different soil types:



Different proportions of sand, silt and clay make up the soils of the Earth

There are also the different types of soil found in different geographical environments.

These are international soil classifications with names like:

Histosol: a very organic soil like peat, where 20-30% of it is decayed organic matter.

Podsol: an acidic soil that is ash grey on the surface and usually not very fertile.

Ferralsol: An iron- or aluminium-rich, deeply weathered soil, often found in the humid tropics.



A soil texture diagram redrawn from USDA, undated (https://wiki2.org/en/File:SoilTexture_USDA_png).

I am very lucky because my mother has both an allotment and garden plus she grows plants on all of the windowsills in the house, even on the tables placed near the windows. It means we sometimes see spiders, woodlice and the occasional slug indoors, but it also means that I get to see plants and the earth working together close at hand and I can plant seeds, in pots, on my own bedroom windowsill. So far I have grown marigolds, garlic and a date palm plant in my room as well as lemongrass and aloe vera plants!

Those children whose parents have farms or gardens are quite lucky because they get to experience some of the story of where their food is actually coming from. People who raise their own animals and breed them are also fortunate, because they basically understand where their food comes from if they eat meat or drink milk. However, for urban children who do not live near the land, a BBC survey indicated the following:

“Almost a third of UK primary pupils think cheese is made from plants and a quarter think fish fingers come from chicken or pigs ... Nearly one in 10 secondary pupils thinks tomatoes grow underground”

(BBC, 2013).

Other websites indicate that I came across indicate that in many urban areas around a third of teenagers don't eat breakfast and do not know how to cook any meals at home, although three-quarters state that they would like to prepare more food. I think that if more children knew about the soil and how it works, they would also start to understand and learn more about plants and food and where it comes from, for their own benefit.

Who are the children who live in our society who do not have access to the soil because they do not have farms, gardens, allotments or even windowsills? What difference does this make to their lives? I think this lack of experience is a kind of poverty, not to know the soil.

15.3 Looking after soil

At our alternative school we have a small garden which we visit every third or fourth week, depending on which class we are in. We have made compost and planted onions, garlic, lots of different herbs and beans. The tomato seeds are many and because of the warmth of the compost — and maybe because it is very rich and fertile — lots of tomato plants come up all over the place. Just like the many sycamore tree seedlings. Maybe the trees will have to be trimmed to bring more light into the garden? We put the branches under the soil of some of the beds, so that the soil there will become richer and more organic and spongy as the wood rots.

There were two visits to our allotment by my fellow students from the Saturday School I attend.

On the first trip, they dug the soil to see how it was made. Where we dug, it was a deep brown colour and rich and crumbly. This was a loam soil and good for growing food crops.

Below are some of the opinions of my fellow Saturday School students about the soil during the visit and just afterwards:

8 year old Kemi says:

"Soil means love and growth, soil is for growing plants and getting CO₂ back. When you have soil you have a happy life and live longer."



A pile of just sieved compost at the allotment

12 year old Yahleetah says:

"Soil to me is the source of everything, you can make different things from soil, it's on the ground that we walk on and it has been there for a very long time. I think that it is used for building stuff, for example, 'back in the day' people used to use it to build mud houses. Soil is also used for growing plants, fruits and vegetables. I think that it's there to help the plants grow. I wouldn't like it if soil was to become extinct, because there would be no more food to keep me (and others) alive and also some of our clothes are made from plants that grow in the soil, and also people make roadworks daily and without soil it would be very difficult to make roads and pavements."

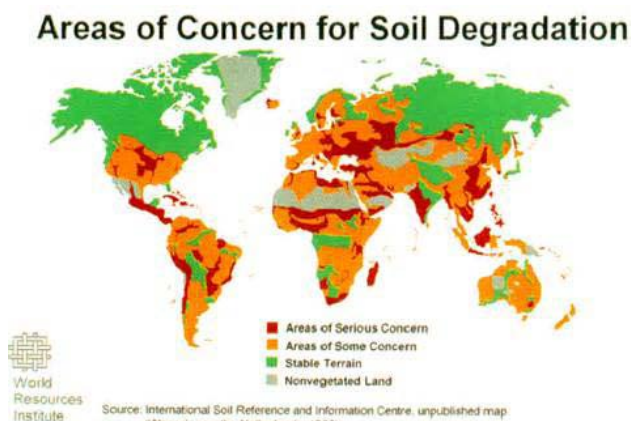
(shortly after this time, Yahleetah lost her mother to a long term illness. She also spoke then, when we met, about the soil her mother was buried in and how she was becoming a part of it).

10 year old Chinaza says:

"I understand soil as a covered piece of land that helps grow other plants. Soil is used to help plants grow. This will involve photosynthesis. I would feel sad as well as confused if we ran out of soil. If soil isn't there, we wouldn't have any food to eat, we wouldn't be used to eating anything if there was no soil, therefore we wouldn't be educated about the things on Earth."

14 year old Kwesi says:

"My understanding of soil is that it is a kind of organism that conducts nutrients, absorbs and stores water to in turn be absorbed by plants and trees and other things. Soil is used to grow crops for selling for food or for pleasure because people love growing and tending their plants, The word Earth is I think fashioned from the word soil, so if there was no soil, Earth I don't think would be called Earth. The 'not Earth' would feel like a barren place to me with many forms of life gone and the world would be exceedingly dull." (R.I.P, Kwesi.)



What is happening to the soil is very serious. Soil degradation map.

On the second trip to the allotment we also took some soil that had been in a bag composting and we took turns to put it through a sieve. The soil that came out of the sieve was still moist and a deep brown colour. It felt very rich and we thought it would be good for growing food with. We placed it on a bed and left it for the next growing season. We covered it with cardboard so that when it rained all the nutrients within it would not be washed away. Soil degradation is when the soil quality has been affected by aspects of agricultural over use or human misuse. Impacts on the soil include: soil compaction, the loss of soil structure, nutrient loss, soil salinity (too much salt in the soil) and many other aspects of the soil not being managed well.

I think that soil degradation is a very bad thing and needs to be stopped! But how can it be stopped if the adults who are responsible for the care of the soil maybe do not value it like we children have said we value it? Can we, the children, teach adults more about the soil? Would the adults listen?

First of all, don't expose your soil, this may seem a small thing but it's not insignificant. When the soil is left exposed then leaching can happen. This washes away the

nutrients of the soil and so plant roots cannot access them. Also when the soil is left exposed harsh winds can blow it away (especially if you have sandy soil).

Imagine this. If we imagine that the soil is the skin of the Earth, we can understand, from our own experience, what happens when skin is left exposed to the elements for too long. It becomes dry and cracked, burnt and flaky. The soil experiences the same, but worse, because it's crumb-like structure makes it even more vulnerable to the effects of erosion and the elements.

The causes of soil destruction include chemical-heavy farming techniques, deforestation, which increases erosion and global warming.

Generating three centimetres of top soil takes 1,000 years, but if current rates of degradation continue, all of the world's top soil could be gone within 60 years!



Seedlings from the School garden

It would mean that the world would only have 60 years of farming left, 60 years of eating healthy, homegrown food. That would be a crisis! If everyone does not start looking after this beautiful, fertile cover that the universe has given us, then we, as children, won't have a decent future when we grow up or any future at all! If we don't do something soon, our fate as human beings on Earth won't be simply bleak, we just wouldn't be here anymore. What kind of legacy are adults leaving for us as children?

Some 40% of soil used for agriculture around the world is classed as either degraded or seriously degraded — the latter means that 70% of the topsoil, the layer allowing plants to grow, is gone. Because various farming methods strip the soil of carbon and make it less robust as well as weaker in nutrients, soil is being lost at between ten and forty times the rate at which it can be naturally replenished. Even the well-maintained farming land in Europe, which may look idyllic, is being lost at unsustainable rates.

Microbes need carbon for food, but carbon is being lost from the soil in a number of ways. The main way to try to keep more organic matter in the soil is to leave stubble in the field after harvest. However, modern farming methods remove it and use it as animal feed or waste it. Carbon is also lost by too much disturbance of the soil by over-ploughing and by the misuse (excess and unbalanced use) of certain fertilizers. The soil is good for storing carbon if it is looked after well. Carbon stored in the soil is not in the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas. A further issue is overgrazing. If there are too many animals, they eat all the plant growth. One of the most important ways of getting carbon into the soil is through the photosynthesis of plants left covering the soil. All of this poor soil management means that the soil becomes weaker and less able to be a hospitable place for the soil microbes. They can be understood to be the soil workers, making the soil able to be useful for plants and animals, including, eventually, humans.

What we actually see, in practice, is that it is the humans who are being poor workers of the soil except if, by tradition, they are used to looking after the soil. I know that my great grandmother and my grandmother and grandfather all knew how to look after the soil, even when they came to England, a long time ago, from the stories I hear. What has happened to our traditional soil care skills?

We also relate to the soil through the culture of our ancestors, close ancestors such as my grandparents and those distant, such as those in Africa and other Indigenous people who practiced ways of soil guardianship that left a legacy of good soil for us to inherit as young people.

In West Africa babies are sometimes given a small amount of soil to help build up their immune system. Here in the UK, we use a lot of sterilising agents to keep anything close to the baby super clean, but this means that the growing child never comes across foreign bodies to prime its immune system, so its body overreacts to anything unusual it encounters, even food! Such children often experience many allergies and intolerances to natural foods. Some of my friends have such allergies, which is sad, especially as it relates to not having a relationship with the soil.

Clay containers and ornaments can be made from the soil. Jewellery also may be made from the soil: clay beads and shapes for necklaces and bracelets or even amulets. The many gems we see in jewellery originate from the Earth, not necessarily from the topsoil, but deeper layers exposed to pressure and heat, which changes Earth-held materials in colour, hardness and shape.

We are buried in the soil and once we are there, we break down to become a part of it.

What soil teaches us is that we as humans are a part of the Earth and not separate from it. If we do not learn this, and if we do not live as if this is an important fact for us, we stand to lose our place as part of Earth's interconnected system, as part of the web of life.

15.4 What is rap?

Rap is Rhythm and Poetry.

It is based on the basic heartbeat and other natural sounds such as women pounding roots in a large mortar to make fufu (pounded yam or cassava and plantain, usually) in West Africa, the lands from which my own ancestors are from.

Here is another definition:

"More than a century before rap exploded onto the American music scene, West African musicians were telling stories rhythmically, with just the beat of a drum for accompaniment. Meanwhile, folk artists from the Caribbean Islands were also telling stories in rhyme. Indeed, these singing poets from Africa and the Caribbean lay the foundation for modern-day American rap music." (Plastic Little Raps, 2017)



Women pounding fufu in Ghana. Credit: Schweitzer, 2013

15.4 Why do I rap and why am I rapping about the soil?

Why do I rap?

I rap because I want to share my ideas and views as messages which reach a diverse group of young people. I rap about things that I care about such as the Earth, people and the soil! I also rap because I want to reach out to other young people especially because we are the group most targeted (effectively) by all the toxic companies, the ones that seek profit over the welfare of the Earth and its peoples, and I just want every young person to be more aware, and maybe even take action, based upon their awareness.

I'm rapping about the soil because it matters to me what happens to it in this world.

Before I wrote this chapter and started learning more about the soil, I thought that the world's soil would never run out. Now, I realise that I'm mistaken. The world's topsoil is already running out and if landusers continue to use the excessive fertilisers and other toxic chemicals that they do, and in so doing continue to degrade the soil, what's going to happen in the long run? I think it could end up a great calamity for the Earth.

Simply put, in the end we will have no more usable soil. When we have no more soil that we can use then there will be no more food from the land: no more natural food and no more animals, any sort of animal, including us.

So we need to treat this wonderful soil as if it were worth more than gold, because soil is worth far more than gold. This is true even though there are people who feel differently and who act towards the land and soil disrespectfully. This is why I want to, and feel I must, write this rap on soil.

Different kinds of people listen to rap music (not all rap music is the same) but this goes out to a mixed audience. I really want people to actually listen to the words of this rap and think about it properly. I don't want it to be a rhythmic poem that says nothing much about the soil but has a catchy beat.

Also because this is a rap made by myself as a young person, it may encourage other young people to listen and pay attention to it, because it's a rap made by someone of their age group, with words relevant to them.

I also like to express things using vivid images and to use metaphors and other mind images. In this way the listener can think about the message and make their own connections. Rapping means that my message has a rhythm to express as well as words. The rhythm is another form of communication and also helps the memory of the words stay with the listener for longer.

What matters is that I get my message across and that it has a chance of helping to save our world from the soil crisis that we are already in by encouraging a greater awareness and responsible action.

Here are the raps that I have worked on: I am also including an audio of the final rap that you can enjoy.

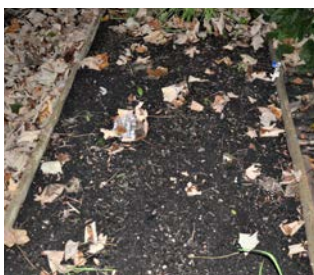
15.5 Soil Rap

"My understanding of soil is that it is a kind of organism that conducts nutrients, absorbs and stores water to in turn be absorbed by plants and trees and other things. Soil is used to grow crops for selling for food or for pleasure because people love growing and tending their plants, The word earth is I think fashioned from the word soil, so if there was no soil, Earth I don't think would be called Earth."

Kwesi Abraham, 2001 - 2016



The following pictures are of me enjoying being at home with the soil and plants, alive and decaying, in our school garden. Image credit: Mama D.



SOIL RAP

PART I: THE BIG VIEW (STILL (always) IN PROGRESS)

Soil is a living system:

Soil:

*She looks after us
Yet she is the victim
of the badness.*

*We treat her too rough, so
She is constantly being lost.
We call it soil erosion, yet
When I'm talking about this, people think I'm
nuts.*

*They say why are you talking about the soil?
Why are you making such a fuss?
And I say, it's 'cause I care about Mother Nature
and that if we are not careful we might lose her.*

*We don't let her be herself,
We try to dominate and control her.
We think that material wealth is more important than our health
Yet*

*Soil is in my Soul
She is worth far more than gold
Soil has been here for many years
She renews
So she is still not old.
She lives and dies
Yet she has always thrived
And she is a vital part of human life.*

SOIL RAP PART II:

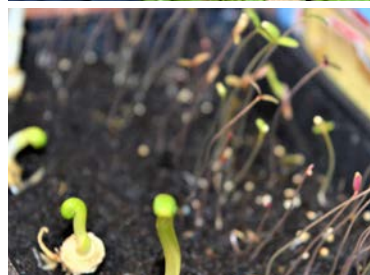
THE MEDIUM TERM (ALWAYS IN PROGRESS)

So the soil is the foundation
In which Earth is born/

That's one a way to look at it, yet there are
many more/

We take Mother Nature for granted -
Call her and treat her like dirt/

The thing that has no nutrients in it
But soil has/ so, of course, she is hurt.



All she is doing is what many of us should be
doing and that is -
Fulfilling her purpose/
Yet we fill her up with chemicals,
Why are we doing this?
It doesn't make any sense/
Because though the farmer may make a small
profit
Then that money has to be spent/
On buying pesticides and fertilisers
Which destroy the soil even more
And then you get many pests
As if you have the same plant all around/
If the pest gets one plant -



Then it can knock all of the others down/
So you buy more pesticides
Go on then/ poison the soil again/
You might as well because you've scarred
her depths so much,
That, sooner or later you are gonna have to
say farewell.



SOIL RAP PART THREE: THE SMALL (EVER IN PROGRESS)

See,
I'm growing up; I am a child, here on this
Earth/my birth to now
Makes me just thirteen/
But there have been/ so many things that I
have seen
Not all of them I have written down
But they always stay with me
In my heart/
Of which soil is, of course, the queen.



Listen,
The soil was created for different things/
Not just for the benefit of human beings/
We feel as though the Earth is only for us
But others they don't even make a fuss/

We hardly recognise/what is right in front of our eyes/
We talk of her as if she's something to despise/ugh, but that's all lies.

Deep, dark mother called soil
Always open, always silent, always still
Nile overflow, Ganges overspill
Creating as you go, fertilising as you will/
Trodden upon/pierced by forks/cut by spades
Prodded, poked and pierced/burnt by harsh sun
rays
Massaged by the tiniest of hands and feet and/
Ingested and worked through by the smallest
guts/
Transformed by fungi in many ways/
Sand to silt/ silt to clay/always in flux.
Soil in my hands/dirt at my knees
You have embraced life and held still bodies
Dirt is a lie/ Soil is the Truth
The greatest story ever you tell at the root/the greatest story ever you tell at the root/
The greatest story ever you tell at the, tell at the root.



15.6 References and further reading

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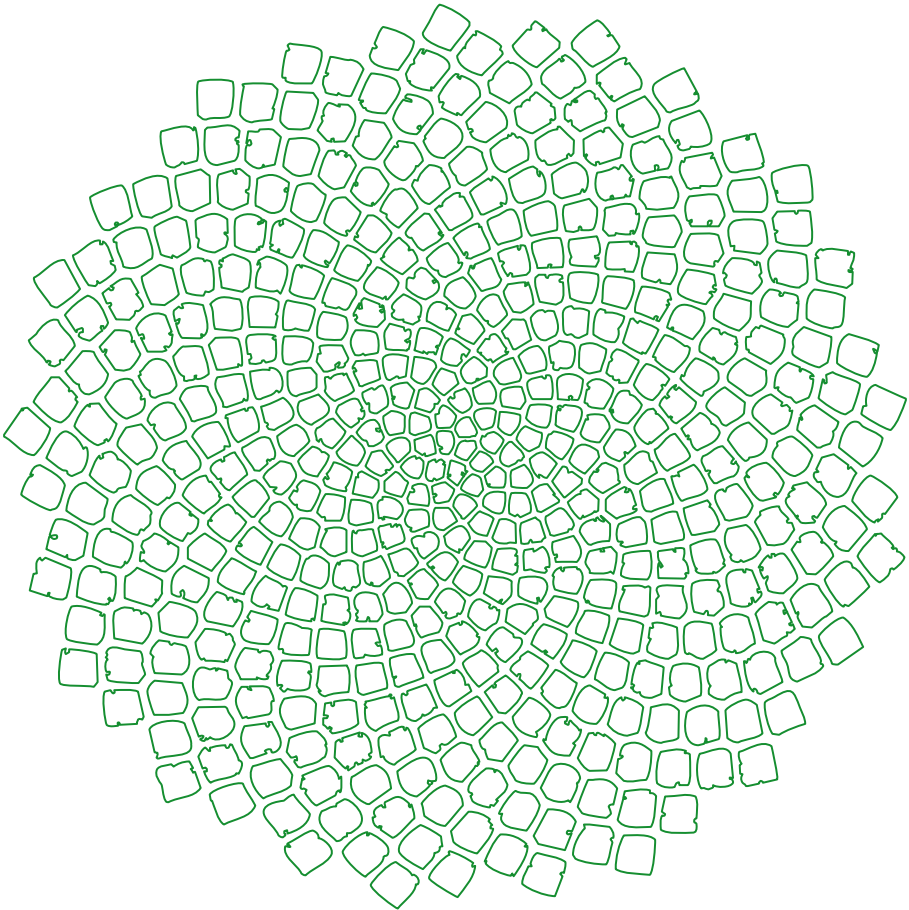
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16



Community first!

Engaging user participation in *A Community Guide to Environmental Health*

Jeff Conant

Geographical location: Berkeley, California, USA

Chapter highlights: This chapter describes the participatory approach used to develop a popular and widely used grassroots community education manual, *A Community Guide to Environmental Health*.

It finds that participation of people who will use the manual is key to developing a useful resource.

It includes reflection on how the editors' political perspectives and aims of the publication must be carefully balanced between them and with input suggested by users, as well finding a way to carefully present the knowledge from marginalised people, alongside that from 'experts'.

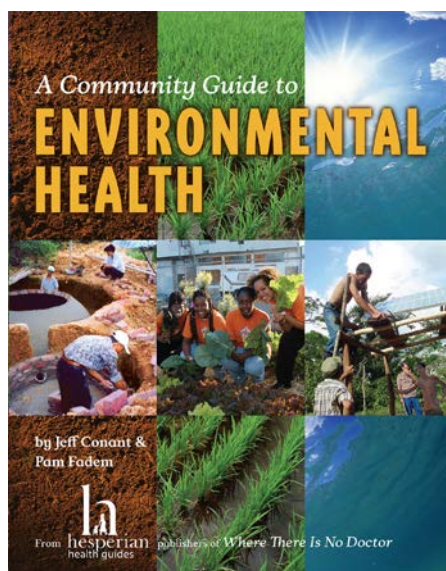
The authors argue that honesty, transparency and clarity of roles are crucial to achieving a positive collaborative process and co-written outcome.

Keywords: environmental health, participatory education, grassroots development, community-based learning, participatory publishing, community empowerment.

16.1 Introduction

"There are no universal methods of education. Methods have to be dynamic and innovative depending on locational factors and participant capabilities."
(Sarvodaya Youth Organization, India)

"From water quality to social inequality, from toilets to toxics, from raising crops to rising temperatures, how we use natural resources affects our health and well-being." So reads the back cover of A Community Guide to Environmental Health (Conant and Fadem 2008), a comprehensive guide to grassroots action published initially in English and in some 18 languages since then. The book was designed as a set of popular education tools to inform and empower community groups around the world. The focus is on improving environmental health in the broadest sense of the term, whether this means designing programs for community hygiene and sanitation, implementing sustainable agriculture and food security systems or defending land and territory from extractive industries. [The full book can be purchased or downloaded from https://store.hesperian.org/prod/Community_Guide_to_Environmental_Health.html.]



Seven years after its publication, chapters from the book are being used in a wide array of settings: to develop waste management programs in northern Nigeria and ecological sanitation programs in Haiti; to teach water purification at eco-lodges in Peru and among Indigenous peasant farmers in Mexico; to diagnose and prevent pesticide exposure among farm workers in the western United States and southern India; and as the basis of a university degree program for Maasai people in Kenya. Because of the accessibility of its language, it is even being used to teach English literacy to Chinese graduate students in an agroecology programme in the UK.

In this brief essay I will argue that the key element that has defined the success of the *Community Guide to Environmental Health* is the participatory methodology used in

its development. I will seek to describe this methodology, in rather informal terms. Informal, because the process itself was informal; no strict theoretical underpinning was applied beyond a mandate to seek input as broadly as possible, while making efforts to draw this input not only from elite agencies and professional consultants (though that was true, too) but from real-world pedagogical settings.

Developing a set of metrics to quantify the impacts of a resource like this is complicated by the very nature of it: *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* was designed to be reproduced and distributed for free when possible (both in hard copy and through free digital distribution); it is used in informal group settings as one among many resources by facilitators whose craft is improvisatory and whose approach is determined by local conditions; and the project to develop the book was undertaken primarily by a not-for-profit publisher which, due to financial and capacity constraints, can only occasionally undertake systematic impact studies. Consequently, it is difficult, to say the least, to precisely evaluate the book's contribution to the worlds in which it has landed.

So, without adhering too strictly to any framework for evaluation, I will describe the general method by which the book was developed, in hopes that lessons emerge that will inform future projects in participatory research and transformative pedagogies.

16.2 Why a book?

Between 2000 and 2008 a non-profit publisher, now called Hesperian Health Guides, brought together a shifting team of researchers, writers, editors and artists to produce the comprehensive guide. I was hired as the project coordinator and lead author, and thus was responsible, along with a team of editors and advisors, for developing both the content and the methodology used to gather, synthesise, and develop content. Given the organisation's long expertise in participatory content development, and wide network of contacts with community groups around the world, the project built on the success and popularity of its previous publications.

As we set out to develop the book, it was therefore clear that the only way to develop a resource that would be used by community educators at the grassroots level in countries around the world was to engage those same educators in the process of developing the book. We believed that the best way to engage educators was not simply to attempt to extract their knowledge, but to engage them in a participatory process that would provide them with a training platform and teaching materials, while simultaneously enriching the materials and refining the platform. This approach had been used successfully (albeit with challenges) to develop several previous publications (Burns *et al.* 1997, Klein *et al.* 2013).

The organisation's first book, *Where There is No Doctor* (Werner *et al.* 1977) was written and illustrated based on the author's direct experience with rural communities in Mexico, and then expanded to address other regions. Beginning in the mid-

nineties with the production of the book *Where Women Have No Doctor* (Burns *et al.* 1997), the organisation adopted a model of content development that took advantage of global digital communications: rather than a single individual working with community groups first-hand to write the books, now the process was managed largely from a distance. The advantage of this approach was that input could be gathered from virtually every region of the world at once, and networks of local health and development professionals, community organisers, and other engaged people could be mobilised to share their experiences toward a common goal.



Community Partnership for Health and Development, Ghana, copying illustrations for Community Guide chapter review on water, 2004.]

For the *Community Guide to Environmental Health*, over a hundred educators and community groups were enlisted in drafting, reviewing, and field-testing written materials, technical instructions, educational activities, stories, and illustrations. The work ended up taking eight years to complete, and was carried out under a basic ethic of participatory research that can be summed up in the words of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda: “Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers” (cited in Hall 2005).

We worked with countless ‘experts’ from institutions that ranged from Sussex University, Johns Hopkins and the University of California to the UN Development Programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Centre for International Forestry Research; but a key to our approach was that the knowledge generated at these elite

institutions had to be vetted and even challenged by “the subalterns and the social majorities” (Esteva and Prakash 1998) – by which we meant the everyday people, mostly in the global south and mostly from oppressed or marginalised classes, for and by whom the final product was intended to be used.

During the development of the book, many people asked, “In the age of multimedia, why a book?” The question is best answered by Feliciano dos Santos from a small NGO called Estamos in northern Mozambique, one of the community reviewers who later translated the book into Portuguese, and who has made efforts to have it taken up as a resource by the Ministry of Land and Environment in his country:

“More than any other resource in this world, books are most important and necessary. Computers always need a connection. They always need energy, always need a battery. But books you can pick up and carry anywhere.”

That said, in the years following initial publication, chapters of the book have been made available for different technology platforms with an emphasis on platforms that can be accessed in rural areas of some of the world's most isolated regions.

16.3 Methodology

We undertook participatory research, using both structured and unstructured processes in a wide range of settings. Each of the book's 24 chapters was drafted by project staff and then used in educational settings by community groups on at least three continents. The facilitators of these sessions were encouraged to adapt the materials as needed, and to review the materials by taking into consideration both their own reactions and the reactions of the community groups with whom they worked. Feedback from these field-tests and community reviews was incorporated, material rewritten, and new versions sent to a further set of reviewers.

The goals of reviewing were kept simple. In each packet sent to an educator for review, we wrote:

*“We are asking you to help us make the information as useful as possible.
We want to hear your opinions on:*

- *If the messages are understandable*
- *If the information applies to your community or the communities you work with, and*
- *If the solutions and activities described are appropriate and practical.”*

The two primary forms of generating participation and feedback were:

- Field-testing, in which a facilitator would engage participants in an informal popular education setting, and then evaluate the outcomes of the session in ways that would lead to improvements in the material

- Community review, in which a facilitator would read aloud sections of the material and lead a discussion designed to both engage and educate the participants, while also eliciting critical feedback on the material itself

The project team spent a great deal of time by phone and email engaging community organisers and facilitators to ensure we were able to provide what they needed, while also ensuring they were the agents and could design their sessions as they saw fit, with a minimum of intervention.

One example of a workshop methodology, undertaken by the Gwalimutala Women's Development Group in Kafumu Village, Uganda, was described as follows:

"As a point of departure, the workshop started in the field. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, spraying [pesticides] which was a very important farm activity for our discussion is carried out in the morning. This timing allowed us to meet the farmers in the fields. Secondly, it also helped to place the discussions into perspective ... Participants were briefed on the purpose of the exercise in a tomato field. Using a participatory approach, participants were run through a session on what pesticides are, types of pesticides they know, and some of the health hazards."



Gwalimutala Women's Group, Uganda, reviewing Community Guide chapter on pesticides, 2002.]

A second example of a workshop methodology, from the Centre for Resource Education, in Vasanthapuram Village, India was described like this:

"Figures in the chapter were enlarged into posters, displayed and used as a basis for discussion. In addition, there was good exchange of information

on crops and cropping patterns, with the presence of a plant entomologist (whose services helped in maintaining the interest of the farmers)."



Centre for Resource Education and Sarvodaya Youth Organization, India, review of Community Guide chapter on pesticides, 2002.]

Both examples show local community-based organisations adapting the written and illustrated material we provided to their own locally appropriate teaching methodologies. Feedback from these organisations was thus embedded in a clear social, cultural and political context, never removed from the real perspectives of the end-users.

In some cases, community groups criticised our notion of how a field-test or community review should be done, or explained the economic and physical barriers to engaging in the field tests. An example is feedback received from the NGO ADAF/GALLE in Mali:

"In Mali, raining season is very important, critical for farmers. To allow some people to leave their field for one day meeting requires compensation; they will pay someone to work in their field during their leave."

In such cases, we provided funds (up to US\$500) to allow both facilitators and community groups to gather for the events, including covering costs of food, lodging and transport when possible, as well as costs related to specific circumstances, such as that described by the Malian group above. In all cases, project staff worked with potential reviewers to determine costs and develop budgets.

16.4 Choosing partners

Ultimately, the content of the book would be determined by the perspectives of those invited to participate in its development, so the criteria for choosing partners was a central aspect of the project design. Put in basic terms, a very wide net was cast through outreach efforts at the beginning of the project and at the outset of developing each chapter. The groups and individuals that responded formed the central pool of participants. The nature of this outreach could be said to be 'rhizomatic' in that one contact leads to two more who recommend five more, and so forth, to grow the network that ultimately consisted of over one hundred groups.



Centre for Resource Education and Sarvodaya Youth Organization, India, reviewing pages from *Community Guide* chapter on pesticides, 2002.]

This process brought in a good number of groups both known and unknown to project and organisation staff; at the same time, strong emphasis in choosing partners was given to groups who, in the words of one Hesperian Health Guides editor, *"are doing not just 'good work' but advanced work, i.e. those not just responding to a problem but responding with a bit of a vision for change"* (personal communication). Further, this editor points out that a critical understanding of the positions of these groups was key to choosing how to integrate responses into the final text: *"As we read and evaluate field-testing responses, we take those positions into account. And it influences how we read and understand and incorporate, or not, the comments received"* (personal communication).

This editor offers an analysis of how this played out internally:

"I know that one editor at [Hesperian Health Guides] often chose groups that were less than the most progressive around, and their feedback was invariably useful for understanding whether procedures or graphics were understandable, but they always criticised the parts of the text that discussed community actions as too political. Others, for example, often Latin American groups, would be politically more progressive than their African or Asian counterparts and asked for more political critique" (personal communication).

In other words, different community groups' responses were given different kinds of weight in the way their feedback was interpreted based in part on their level of social critique. Given that an editorial goal of the project, decided *a priori*, was to politicise environmental health and embed health interventions in a context of social justice, liberatory, rights-based values, and progressive education, project staff intentionally sought out groups whose work reflected these positions, and knowingly read and interpreted field-test responses with an eye to the full spectrum of political engagement, or lack thereof, of the groups involved.



Two men with poster on wall. Caption: Community Guide review chapter on water, El Salvador, 2004.]

In regards to the facilitation of community reviews and field-tests, facilitators and reviewers were almost universally selected by the groups themselves, with no intervention from project staff. Each proposal for a field-test or community review included the name and description of the person or people who would facilitate the process on the ground; in selecting field-test and review sites, it was taken as a given that the community-based organisations applying to participate knew best who should guide the process. It is notable that this resulted in few cases of poorly-led or failed review efforts, and the vast majority of review sites offered useful and engaging feedback, and reported that the process had also been useful and engaging for the participants themselves.

16.5 Community responses

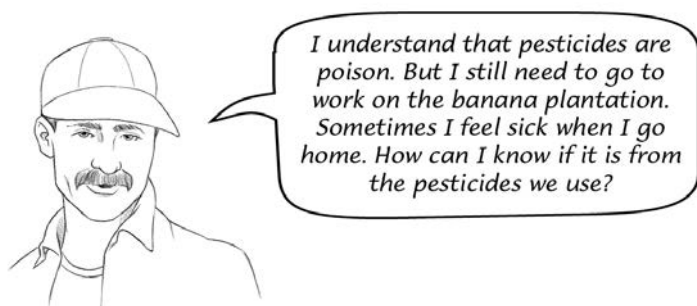
While it is, again, virtually impossible to measure, let alone quantify, the impact of this approach, a brief review of some community responses may provide illumination:

- In chapter 14, *Pesticides are Poison*, on a page with the heading 'Children have a high risk of pesticide poisoning' and an illustration of a woman spraying pesticides with a child in a sling on her back, the hand-written comment: *"We do understand [that children have a high risk of pesticide poisoning] but women farm workers cannot avoid bringing children"* (Sarvodaya Youth Organisation, India).
- On a page with the heading 'Long-term health effects of pesticides', the hand-written comment: *"Doctors never discuss the source of our problems, but they do blame us as a bunch of drunkards and smokers"* (Sarvodaya Youth Organisation, India).

Comments like these allowed the project team to better understand the social context of many of the book's potential users; in the editing process, we could then decide how to address such issue. Editorial decisions to accept reviewer comments were often determined by the number of comments on a single point generated by vastly different audiences. For example, the comment above (*"Doctors never discuss the source of our problems"*) rang true for groups in India, Uganda, and migrant farm workers in California, and was thus taken by the editors to be an almost universal experience among our target audience. Generally, the project team addressed issues of this nature either by including anecdotes designed to describe and analyse such disempowering experiences, or by tailoring the language to acknowledge the dignity and the suffering of oppressed communities.



One example of a response to the concern that farm workers often do not have the power to change their circumstances is this: in the final version, on page three of the chapter *Pesticides are Poison*, we included a picture of a farm worker with a speech-bubble, saying: *"I understand that pesticides are poison. But I still need to go to work on the banana plantation. Sometimes I feel sick when I go home. How can I know if it is from the pesticides we use?"*



Another example: in addressing the concern that *"Doctors never discuss the source of our problems"*, we developed a story of a female farm worker who is systematically denied treatment by medical professionals, entitled 'Doctors do not always have the answer' (Conant and Fadem 2008 p.265). When the story was shared in subsequent review sessions, concerns were raised that the message was fundamentally disempowering. This led eventually to the pedagogical purpose of the story in the published book, as captured in the final sentences:

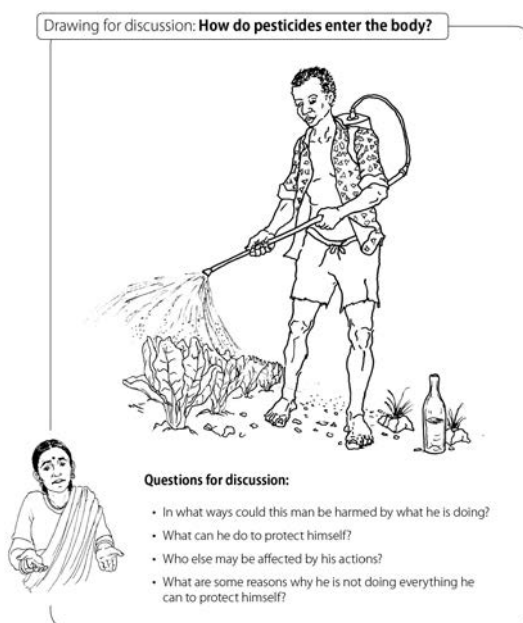
"This is a very difficult problem for Carolina, and for all farm workers. The best way for farm workers like Carolina to take care of their health is to work together to change the conditions that make them sick in the first place."
(Conant and Fadem 2008, p.265)

By allowing for such interventions into the text, the book goes beyond serving as a technical resource, and, ideally, serves to validate and give voice to the condition of struggle in which rural farm workers live, including the social and economic barriers to adopting the technical recommendations of the book itself.

At the same time, as experienced educators and facilitators, our partners quite often shared their knowledge with us in ways that fundamentally enhanced the quality of the materials. Another example regarding the chapter *Pesticides are Poison*:

"I find that people have a hard time understanding that we absorb chemicals through the skin. I therefore spend time teaching about absorption by examples: spilling ink and showing how a paper napkin absorbs it; showing how a coffee filter lets coffee through. This is to get across the concept that our skin has holes/pores to let chemicals in and out."

The question of exposure routes is then addressed in the final book, through two exercises. The first is a *Drawing for discussion* used as a trigger or code: a line drawing of a farm worker with open shirt, short pants and no shoes, spraying pesticides, with discussion questions like: "In what ways could this man be harmed by what he is doing?" The second is a body mapping exercise drawn from the field of occupational health, in which participants draw a body in silhouette and collectively mark areas of their own bodies where they experience the affects of agrochemicals or farm labour generally (Conant and Fadem 2008 p.266).



Following are a handful of responses by field-test subjects and community reviewers of the book's four chapters that refer to food, farming, and agro-ecology:

- An educator in Mozambique shares with the project team the motivating factor that she believes persuades local farmers to try new agro-ecological farming methods: *"Improving the soil will benefit your children and grandchildren in the future while also reducing plant pests now"* (FAO Junior Farmer Field Schools, Mozambique).
- Educators in various countries helpfully point out when technical instructions needed more clarity: *"... Instructions for making compost tea need to be improved in terms of amounts"; "The facilitator found it difficult to understand the steps in this exercise."*

- Among the most common types of feedback was where the users pointed out specific cultural constraints: *"A number of the pictures were not appropriate with our context in rural Indonesia (for example the picture of two people buying burgers on page 5, as it is only those considered to be 'rich' who can buy burgers)"* (World Neighbors, Indonesia).
- In numerous cases, such feedback was often followed by specific recommendations to address these constraints: *"Use noodles not burgers for developing country"* (Asha, Nepal).
- Another form of feedback came often in the form of validation, when reviewers confirmed the approaches we recommended. Here is an example from the section on natural fertilisers from the chapter on sustainable farming: *"My parents used to use 'urea' as a fertiliser to grow chocolate, but many crops failed. They switched to using cow waste and now the crops grow much better"* (Sri, from Lanton Dye Hamlet).

By soliciting responses of this nature, the project team gleaned profound insights into the social and ecological concerns of our reviewers and field-testers, and made a concerted effort to integrate these insights into the editing of the final book. In cases where valuable insights were not able to be captured in the initial English-language edition of the book, the hope was to address them in editions translated by and for groups in the global south. (As we will see below, this hope did not always bear out.)

Results of community reviews were balanced with the perspectives of 'experts', with an implicit consideration that favour should be given to community-based perspectives. An example that comes to mind is the title of the chapter about agro-toxics, *Pesticides are Poison*. One expert reviewer, from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, insisted that this title was misleading and inflammatory (not all pesticides are fatal to humans) as well as grammatically incorrect ("pesticides" being plural, "pesticides are poisons" would be the correct usage). In response, we conducted a brief survey of field educators who worked closely with smallholder farmers and farm workers, who decided unanimously that *Pesticides are Poison* made the point in a way that would best serve the interests of rural preventive health. So, we kept that title, dubious grammar and all, rather than defer to the opinion of the expert.

16.6 Limits to participation

Examples like the above underscore the project's intention to serve an underserved audience, and to advance a politics of empowerment and liberation. But it must be admitted that without some rigorous oversight by a committee of 'end-users', the project team's integration of community review comments cannot be considered a form of total participation, and was never wholly accountable to the 'target audience'. In a project like this, participation has its limits; given the broad acceptance of

'participation' as a concept in the field of development, it may be valuable here to indulge in problematising the term along lines suggested by the Iranian development critic Majid Rahnema who notes that participation has become politically attractive, economically appealing, and indicative of a progressive agenda, even when the particular form of participation under discussion may be merely rhetorical, or may be regressive, coercive, or worse (Rahnema 2010).

Following this line of thinking, it should be explicitly noted that building a project like *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* on a participatory framework serves a variety of political motives, not least of which is making the project attractive to funders. Yet, in developmentalist terms, the project can easily be seen as top-down: the editorial criteria were determined by organisational fiat; both the first and last drafts of each chapter were produced wholly by project staff; the political perspectives presented in the book are those espoused by the editors; and so forth.

That is to say, while participation in the project was significant, and was a determining factor in the content of the final book, this participation was marshalled to a given, pre-determined, end. Hesperian Health Guides as an organisation, and project staff as individuals, undoubtedly partook of a liberatory vision, where the empowerment of the social majorities was a hoped-for outcome of the project; but it would be disingenuous to suggest that participation in the project was fully democratic or 'from below', given that community representatives did not lead the process in any comprehensive way, but partook in a predetermined process to contribute to a project guided and led by a small group of editors in California. At best, it follows Orlando Fals Borda's injunction to "respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities" (Hall 2005).

The shortcomings of such participation can be read in the final text in a variety of ways. Referring back to the example given above: in the chapter on food security, under the heading 'Junk food is not healthy', is a picture of two young African American men walking out of a fast-food restaurant, holding hamburgers and fries. Despite feedback from several reviewers that this illustration was culturally inappropriate, and even raised concerns about class access to luxury foods (the opposite of its intended purpose), this illustration exists in at least seven different translations of the book, including editions in Hindi, Bengali and Nepali. One inference that could be made based on this small example is that the input of at least a handful of reviewers was not taken into account, leading to a kind of 'California hegemony' that persists even in these translations. However, the choice by the original editors to retain the illustration was made based on a decision to ensure that African Americans in the United States found themselves reflected in the book's illustrations – and that the book spoke, in this instance, to a particular socioeconomic situation in the urban United States. Presumably, the illustration remained in translated versions due to decisions made, or not made, by the book's translators in South Asia. So, the failure to replace this illustration with more culturally-relevant ones in specific editions of the book can be attributed to a

combination of 'you can't please everyone' — an inherent structural constraint in the process — and resource constraints in the process of producing translations.



Other pitfalls of an overly simplistic ethic of 'participation' are elaborated by theorist Majid Rahnema when he questions the Freirian notion (via Marx) of false consciousness: that the historical-cultural reality of oppressed groups lead them to internalise the values of the dominant society, and thus act against their own liberation (Rahnema 2010). In Paulo Freire's view, this tendency among the oppressed explains the need for progressive groups of non-alienated intellectuals to transcend their class interests and engage in conscientisation exercises (Rahnema 2010).

Arguably, the project team developing *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* consisted of people working from just such an assumption (this writer included): that any community review comments that diverged from the politics of liberation and resistance promoted by us must have been the product of a naïve or false consciousness — and could thus be dismissed.

Such a dynamic may have played out, for example, in the choice to advance the concept of 'food sovereignty'. The concept, first popularised by the peasant farmer movement *La Via Campesina* in the late 1990s, was still not in wide use by the mid-2000s. The use of the term was not promoted by any of the community groups that field-tested the chapter on food security, nor did it pass the 'jargon test', sovereignty itself being a fraught and difficult concept, never mind 'food sovereignty'. But the editorial team decided it was important to use the term (see *Food Sovereignty is a Human Right*, Conant and Fadem 2008, p.235), in essence because it fit our politics.

This is addressed by the same Hesperian Health Guides editor cited earlier:

"When we're writing this kind of material, issues are raised in a number of ways by groups, some of which seem to be more developed or far-sighted than others. So it is with the example of food sovereignty. It wasn't an invention of [Hesperian Health Guides], but we did like the way that some folks aligned with La Via Campesina used it; we saw some others using it (California native tribes, for instance); and we thought, well, maybe it'll become a catchphrase, or a movement concern" (personal communication).

What this shows, again, is the guiding hand of a progressive, movement-oriented politics that seeks out and actively incorporates rights and justice-based frameworks and reads them into the material as a whole in order to undergird the book's content without, hopefully, betraying those community participants and end-users who are unaware of or in disagreement with these frameworks.

With these concerns in mind, it is still valid to return to where Majid Rahnema lands in his essay on participation: "If the participatory ideal could, in simple terms, be redefined by such qualities as attention, sensitivity, goodness or compassion, and supported by such regenerative acts as learning, relating and listening, are not these qualities and gifts precisely impossible to co-opt?" (Sachs 2010, p.142).

16.7 Conclusion

The production of *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* could be said to have been as participatory as practical concerns would allow. Without relying on granular metrics, the 18-plus translations, thousands of downloads, and hundreds of solicitations for free copies from Hesperian's 'Gratis Books' programme attest to the popularity of the resource among grassroots community groups. One would hope that engaging the participation of thousands of individuals with basic levels of literacy in the process of writing a book would have provided jolts of pride and empowerment that will serve beyond the mere production of the book itself, to lend strength to more transformational efforts. Ultimately however, it is difficult to know what impact the participatory aspect of the book's development had on the participants themselves.

Regardless of the process, the book retains an ethic of populism, if not outright rebellion, that its editors hope reflects the views and serves the interests of a significant portion of the book's users. In a short article in *The New York Times* published upon the book's release in 2008, the *Times*' reviewer noted the book's political dimensions, with something akin to concern:

"Some [of the book's perspectives] are likely to raise eyebrows. The guide opposes genetically modified seeds, including those, like 'golden rice,' ostensibly meant to help the poor. It opposes nuclear energy and fossil fuels. And it teaches communities how to organize opposition to harm from oil, mining and chemical companies and how to sue.

'It is controversial,' [one of the authors] said. 'But the book is for grass-

roots communities, a lot of whom suffer much more from mining and oil exploration than any benefits they reap. I suspect they'll appreciate the perspective'" (McNeil 2008).

16.8 Endorsements, adaptations, and related resources

The English edition of *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* can be downloaded from <http://store.hesperian.org/HB/prod/PDF160.html>. A library of images from this and other Hesperian publications can be accessed at low or no cost from <http://images.hesperian.org/libraryhome.tlx>. Editions in translation, including pamphlet versions of individual chapters, can be found at <http://hesperian.org/books-and-resources/language-list>. An overview of Hesperian's Gratis Book Program, which provides physical books at no cost, is at <http://hesperian.org/books-and-resources/gratis-book-program/>. Short video testimonies of field-reviewers and other project partners endorsing the book can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLXz1PbasOE>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbKII6t9u1E> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFJ6Ef--LGO>.

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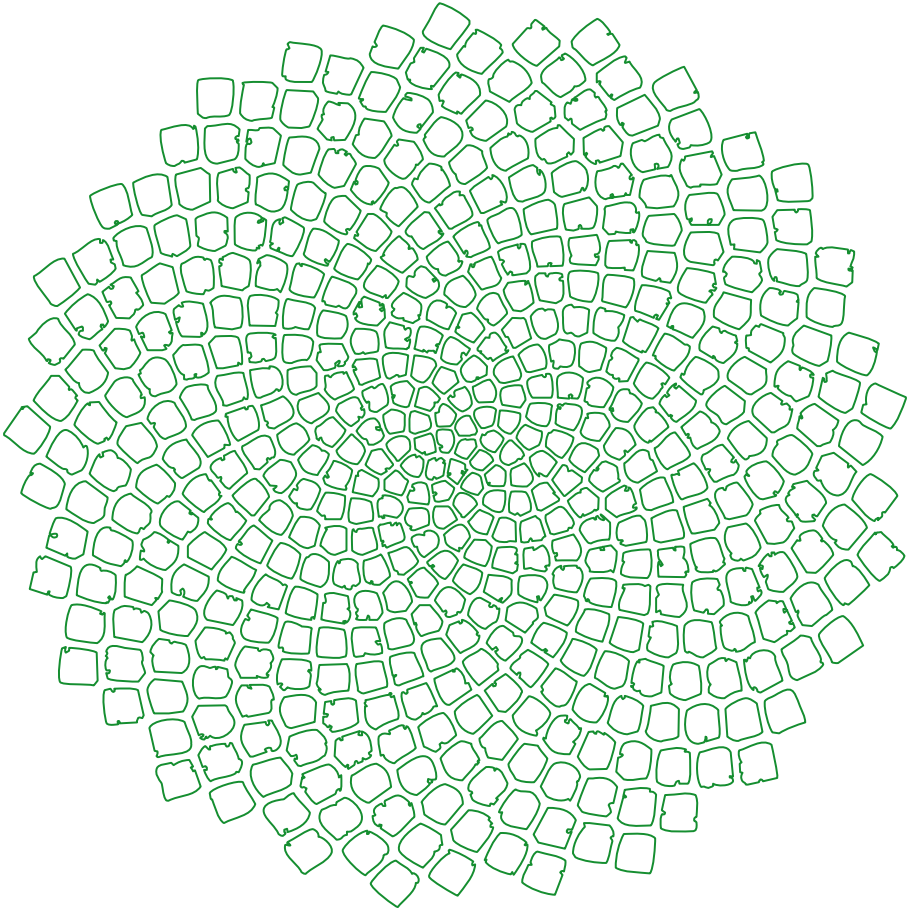
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All photos courtesy of Hesperian Health Guides.

17



Collective learning as a core dynamic of social movements challenging the dominant food system: the case of the Network in Defence of Maize in Mexico

Karol Yañez Soria

Geographical location: Mexico

Chapter highlights: This chapter engages with the work of the Mexican Network in Defence of Maize (NDM) to improve agroecological food production systems and preserve native maize in collaboration with a diversity of organisations and individuals to defend their ways of living.

Collective learning between peasants-Indigenous people and academic-researchers is discussed as a core dynamic for new social movements.

The alliances formed in social movements help to elaborate innovative learning and transformative actions to challenge the dominant system on the ground.

Keywords: collective learning, social movements, activist networks, democratic control, food governance.

17.1 Introduction: A brief glance at the Network in Defence of Maize

The Network in Defence of Maize (NDM) is formed of nearly 1500 peasant and Indigenous communities spread across different states of Mexico. It also includes

a group of NGOs operating at national level to co-facilitate the formulation and implementation of network actions. The NGOs involved are: CECCAM (Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano-Centre for Studies of Rural Change in Mexico), CENAMI (Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas-National Aid Centre for Indigenous Missions), UNOSJO (Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca-Union of Organisations of the Sierra Juarez of Oaxaca), COA (Colectivo por la Autonomía-Collective for Autonomy), ETC Group and GRAIN. They are linked to international entities, and channel financial resources and other types of support to NDM (See Figure 17.1).

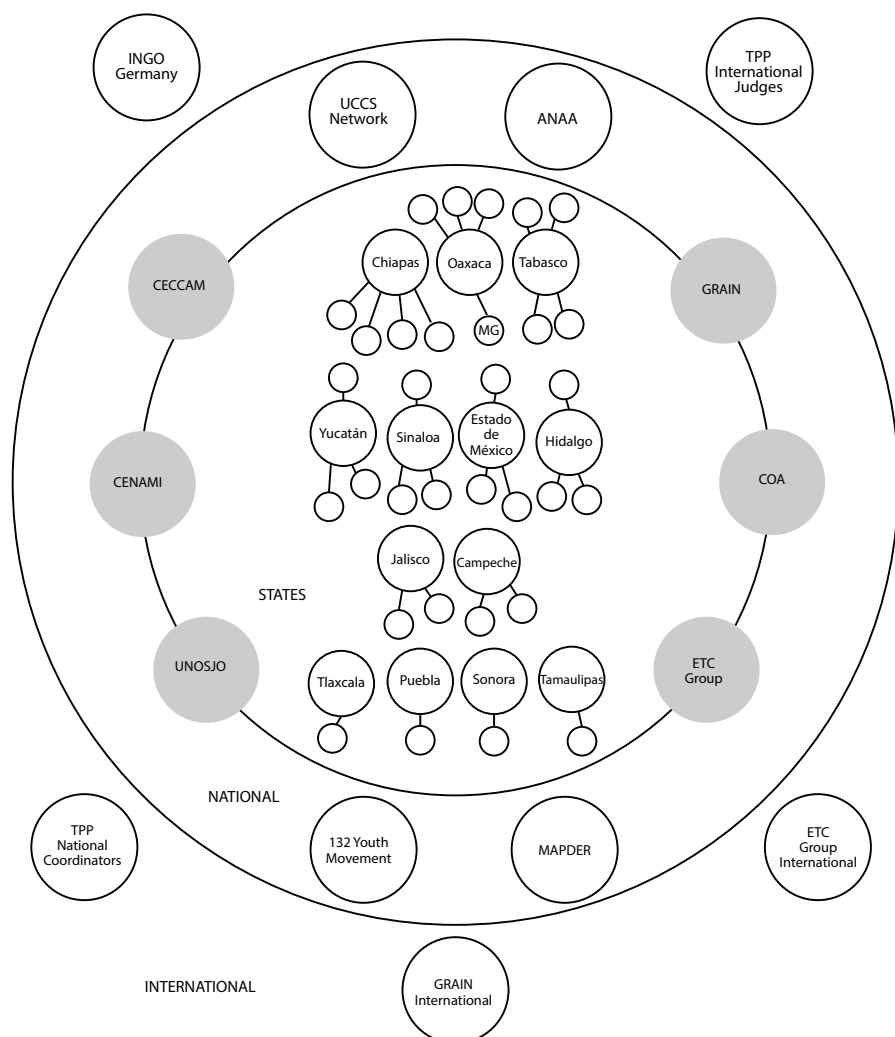


Figure 17.1. NDM members and levels of operation
(Produced by the author based on primary field data, Mexico, 2015)

Since it was formally established in 2002, NDM's main actions have been as follows: developing alternative supply chains, improving the traditional *milpa* mode of food production,¹ diagnosing native maize contamination across Mexico by GMO seeds, and collecting evidence contributing to a collective demand at national level against the legalisation and commercialisation of GMOs in Mexico.

17.2 Collective learning: a core dynamic to the NDM evolution

In-depth interviews with members of NDM took place to review the history of the network and identify relevant facts that enabled its evolution. This was complemented with an analysis of secondary sources including transcribed audio-recordings from NDM national assemblies, bulletins written by NDM members, journals and academic writing on new social movements in Latin America. The analysis evidenced that collective learning became the core process supporting the strengthening of the NDM work over time.

In Mexico during the early 1990s the idea that political changes would create opportunities to put pressure on the state to fulfil rights was still prevalent amongst social movements. This idea was based on the view that the Mexican economy was to recover from the 1980s recession and political parties were to meet civil society demands (interview with de Ita, Head of CECAM, Mexico, 2012, Avila *et al.* 2011). However, the process which took place was quite contrary to the expectations. In 1994 when presidential elections took place in Mexico, outgoing president Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed off a structural change for the country in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Rather than providing people with rights, it locked Mexico into continued adoption of neoliberal policies (Rosset 2008). This led to increasing levels of poverty and decreasing access to resources for agriculture and national markets for small-medium peasants who could not compete with subsidised food coming from the United States. Furthermore, NAFTA brought with it a systematic loss of food sovereignty. Mexico became one of the principal exporters of vegetables and fruits in the world while it imported basic staples (CEDRSSA 2011). NAFTA therefore brought about a complex scenario that needed a stronger and more organised civil society to struggle against these impacts.

Faced with such a scenario, discussions on how to proceed as 'newly organised civil society' took place at different forums. Academic activists and peasant and Indigenous communities came together to develop a deep understanding of the situation in the country (interview with de Ita, Head of CECAM, Mexico, 2012). The main output of these discussions pointed to the need for truly autonomous organisations managing their

1 The *milpa* is a traditional way in which Indigenous communities across Mexico and Central America cultivate maize. It is a multi-crop food production system that includes the combined growth of maize (*zea mays*), beans (*phaseolus*) and courgette (*cucurbita*). Each of these crops helps another restore soil nutrients. Peasants have enhanced the system over time and currently it also includes the growth of tomato (*physalis*), chili (*capsicum*) and amaranth (*amaranthus cruentus*) as well as fruits, aromatic and medicinal plants (CECCAM 2014). This system is recognised by the National Mexican Institute of Nutrition for its high nutritional value, rich in carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals (NMIN 2012).

own resources and supply chains (Avila *et al.*, 2011). Subsequently, alternative supply chains were developed. One of these alternatives was the formation of cooperatives and self-organised enterprises, emerging in both the north and the south of the country. The cooperatives that have resisted NAFTA for longest are located in the south. There is a reason for this: people in the south became much more autonomous, politically, organisationally and financially, due to less access to state resources (interview with de Ita, Head of CECAM, Mexico, 2012). In these cooperatives, collective reflections highlighted the need to develop alternative markets, such as organic coffee for the niche international market (Ibid 2012). Furthermore, Luis Hernandez, founder member of the NDM, academic and journalist, adds that together with peasants from southern Mexico they realised the need to overcome neoliberal barriers by building international solidarity networks (Hernandez and Poniatowska 2000).

“Cooperatives, which started to be formed by civil society during the 1980s, replaced the transportation, processing and marketing arms provided by state agencies for coffee production in Mexico. This saved farmers from disadvantaged positions in the national and global markets, as well as exploitation of coyotes (middlemen). In the cooperatives peasants and academics began to share information on organic certification and agreed on a decreasing dependence on capital-intensive inputs like fertilisers. Co-ops developed linkages with European ‘alternative trade organisations’ and began exporting fairly traded coffee successfully, securing a stable price and pre-harvest financing for their members. Co-ops have survived not only to replace state agencies and become powerful players in the organic coffee industry, but also to extend their impact to economic diversification, environmental initiatives, and to provide and lobby for social services like school and hospitals. They have come to represent islands of self-determination within a political spectrum that has barely been recognised.” (Ibid 2000:7)

Forums where peasants and Indigenous people learn together with activist-researchers became a common practice of the ‘new civil society’ which started to meet frequently under different names such as alliances, assemblies or committees (Esteva 2010). They were defined as “the united men and women, the groups and individuals, who carried out activities aiming at transforming their society” (Villoro 1997 p.36, cited in Esteva 2010), meeting in diverse spaces as networks of relations or communities of practice. *“In these spaces not only did we reach consensus on the type of actions to be incorporated as part of our duties within our organisations, but we also started networking with international organisations. For example, CECCAM started to collaborate with GRAIN following the National Forum on Food Sovereignty held in 1996”* (interview with de Ita, Head of CECAM, Mexico, 2012).

These processes of collective learning also played an essential role in developing the consciousness of participants with regard to the form of the struggle. In an interview with Vera, an NDM member, it was stated: *“The more we met to learn together, the*

more the NDM political position matured; what is more, we were strongly influenced by the Zapatista movement". The Zapatista struggle (in which most of the NDM founder members participated) was based on the construction of 'other worlds', namely, the building of real alternatives on the ground subject to a continuous process of critical dialogue among diverse actors at the core of the struggle (interview with Vera, GRAIN Member, Mexico, 2012).

In the early 2000s the NDM's collective learning process became a more systematised practice, and at this point the group acquired its formal name and started ongoing operations in the face of the contamination of native maize by GMO seeds in Mexico. Mexico is one of the centres of origin of maize, and GMO contamination represented a potential threat to the 59 landraces (traditional species of plants that developed through adaptation to the environment) of maize and around 23,000 varieties domesticated by peasants over thousands of years (CECCAM 2014). Marielle, member of GEA (*Grupo de Estudios Ambientales*), stated in an interview (2012): *"The criollo maize contamination was an intangible issue for everybody; it was a new neoliberal mechanism of which no organisation had a clear idea, neither of its potential impacts nor solutions"*. In response to this issue, founder members of the NDM agreed on the need for systematised work and national assemblies every six months in order to collectively identify root causes and appropriate strategies to defend *criollo* maize in Mexico.

From that moment onwards, the NDM has worked on more visible and formal spaces of collective learning at different scales, from local to national workshops and assemblies. It is worth emphasising that the shift to more systematic work emerges precisely from the collective learning process in which in-depth analysis among activist-researchers and Indigenous-peasant members highlighted that isolated participants or actions were no match for these challenging and complex issues. As a result, members realised the need to work on network dynamics and took this up as one of their duties (interview with Salgado, Head of CENAMI, Mexico, 2012).

17.3 Actions of NDM members as an everyday way of living

In order to further observe NDM operations, and specifically the actions that have helped its members avoid being co-opted by dominant actors, a research methodology based on participant observation was also used. It lasted 7 months full-time as a resident, as well as 3 years of itinerant attendances at the different gatherings of the NDM at local, national and international levels. The term 'resident' is used to differentiate between times when I became part of the NDM and took part in different tasks, and times when I was merely attending/hearing their gatherings. The reason to use participant observation is pointed out by Vera, a founding member of NDM, who argues: *"The only way for a researcher to understand these types of civil networks is by positioning him/herself in the shoes of people living under the conditions to be characterised"* (interview with Vera, Member of ETC Group, 2012, Mexico).

The analysis of this part of the research showed that from the moment the NDM formalised their spaces of collective learning, the group became clearer with respect to its political position. This was based on using their efforts to support the production of native maize and the livelihoods of peasant and Indigenous communities. In fact, following a period of eighteen months of work (mid 2002 to 2004), in which the NDM used scientific methods to evidence the contamination of native maize in Mexico (illegal under international treaties prohibiting GMOs in centres of origin), they declared:

“We cannot continue spending energy trying to identify the GMO contamination of native maize. What we need to do is to improve our methods for planting and cultivating it as well as encouraging seeds interchange and implementation of eco-technologies. The NDM's ultimate aim is the strengthening of the networks and communities across the country to continue protecting the countryside from GMO contamination. The NDM declares that transgenic maize contamination in Mexico was not an accident; it was the result of a lack of commitment of entities such as the government to comply with international and national laws. This issue threatens the food sovereignty of Mexico, which we will focus on defending” (NDM 2012:34).

From that moment onwards the NDM defined itself as an inclusive network built on strong linkages between bottom-up communities of Indigenous-peasants and activist-researchers (usually NGO professionals) to defend the culture and territories of Indigenous and peasant communities in Mexico. Their actions are felt primarily on the ground. Testimonies from the Mission of Guadalupe (MG), an NDM member which works with communities in southern Mexico, illustrate this:

“We have learnt principles of natural construction and permaculture design in the yearly workshops offered in CENAMI facilities. In these spaces we get in contact with experts like recognised people on ecological building and we have learnt to use materials that are within reach and design tools to capture water and to produce compost from organic residues — from both kitchen and our own waste. We have also improved our milpa system, incorporating the production of fruits, vegetables and cattle, including chicken, rabbit or any other animals. The milpa is worked in collective ways among family. We launch into experimentation to improve productivity up to three times and soil health. Moreover, we have increased the quality and quantity of food access (interview with Aguayo, a member from Guadalupe Atoyac community who works with MG, Chiapas, Mexico, 2012).

The milpa is a traditional way in which Indigenous communities across Mexico and Central America cultivate maize. It is a multi-crop food production system that includes the combined growth of maize (*zea mays*), beans (*phaseolus*) and courgette (*cucurbita*). Each of these crops helps another restore soil nutrients. Peasants have enhanced the system over time and currently it also includes the growth of tomato (*physalis*), chili (*capsicum*) and amaranth (*amaranthus cruentus*) as well as

fruits, aromatic and medicinal plants (CECCAM 2014). This system is recognised by the National Mexican Institute of Nutrition for its high nutritional value, rich in carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals (MNIN 2012).

Maize cultivation is at the heart of a food system that produces the staple together with a variety of other crops to keep the soil and people healthy. The multi-crop production system is the backbone of community organising. It is also the main strategy to prevent Indigenous and peasant communities from being displaced from their territories and to guarantee access to a life in dignity (see Figure 17.2). Moreover, maize is a potent symbol of the people and their core identity. If maize is killed, people will die, as they are one, which means this struggle is about protecting their ways of life.

"I cannot explain scientifically what GMO are, but I know that if they reach our communities, we lose the core of our culture and ourselves. This is our way of organising, our livelihood, our food and our sacred symbol in ceremonies. Maize represents us; we are made of maize" (interview with Luna, harvesting maize in Guadalupe Atoyac community, Chiapas, Mexico, 2012).



Figure 17.2. Maize diversity in Mexico

Taken by the author during the National Hearing on Maize and Food Sovereignty, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2014

In conclusion, the essence and spirit of the NDM struggle is rooted in a way of life. This is true not only for peasants and Indigenous people, but also for NGO members and specialists. The daily tasks of the NGO staff are funded and aligned to support the operational strategies and dynamics of the NDM, allowing them also to live in dignity. As the struggle becomes a way of life, as it becomes embedded in peoples' minds as a common identity and translated into their everyday values. It moves beyond a project to become an endless process which exists beyond a specific organisational structure or the achievements of a particular group. Ultimately, it relies on the strength of the movement, which cannot be destroyed unless their members are killed.

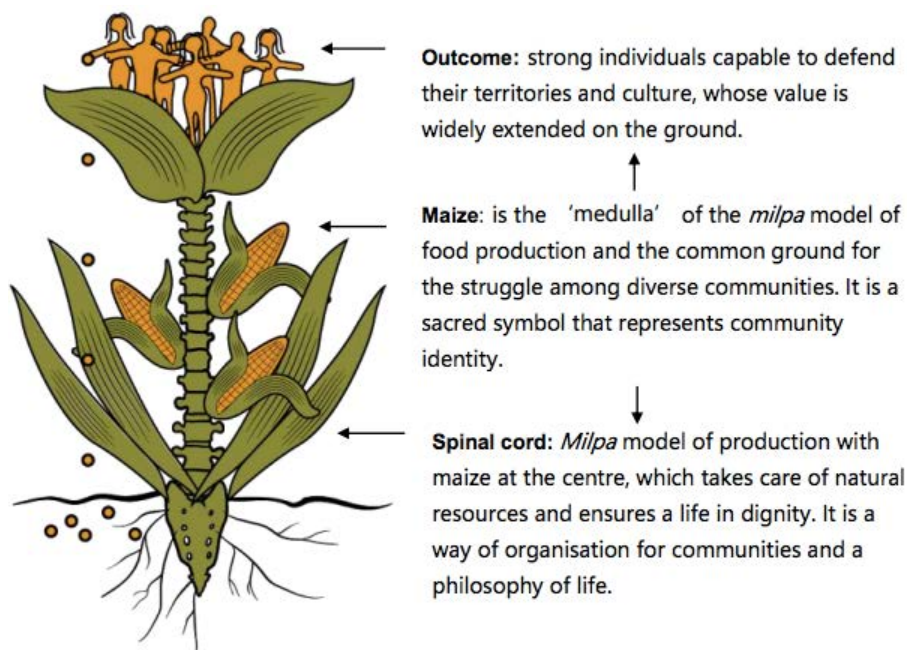


Figure 17.3. Maize cultivation as the source and spirit of the NDM
Produced by the author based on primary field data, Mexico, 2015

Another important action taken by NDM members has been the filing of appeals against the legal entry of GMOs into Mexico. Such appeals have been filed across the country at local and national levels. These actions were agreed within the assemblies and workshops of the NDM. However, as Salgado, Head of CENAMI, claimed in a 2012 interview: "It will never be enough to have moratoria or appeals to change laws in Mexico; in the end, the government might end up making amendments and ultimately approving GMOs' legal entrance." These actions will always be seen as a supportive strategy and not the main aim of the NDM. This viewpoint has become an embedded consciousness among NDM members, developed through the continuous practice of learning together.

17.4 Participants and their roles within the collective learning process

In the national assemblies, the development of narratives around the root causes of issues and power relations become a core part of the collective learning process. These narratives form the basis for the formulation of NDM strategy.

“Indigenous and peasant communities need workshops in which policy analysis is made. But we are not lawyers. We do not have the energy or resources to analyse each law modification implemented by governments or private companies. What is important in these spaces is to unveil their dynamics of operation, which ultimately have shifted towards exploitation of natural resources with nothing in return to either communities or the country. We are peasants and growing food is what we do and we will continue doing so. This is our main defence, but from now on, clearly there is a need to work closely with specialists to get assessment to issue demands whenever appropriate to face this complex scenario. But at the core of our strategy is and will always be the maize cultivation” (Servin, Indigenous Leader participation, NDM Workshop, 2006).

Knowledge of the NDM is generated by iteration among specialists (such as lawyers and biologists) together with expert producers (peasants and Indigenous people). Both types of actors are equally important to generate innovative learning translated into social change. Above all, it is important to mention that specialist participants (invited when required) and NGO members — who do research as part of their duties — provide essential support for the strategies, but these have to come from peasants and Indigenous people themselves. *“The specialist or NGO knowledge would not be of value without resounding the voice of peasants who understand their realities and have a perspective on how to change them; specialists will only support when necessary”* (interview with Salgado, Head of CENAMI, 2012).

Furthermore, it should be remarked that unveiling the root causes of issues is essential in formulating innovative strategies. In doing so, NDM meetings always start by hearing people's realities, and include formal analysis of these realities through the lens of formal 'specialist' knowledge. This process ultimately implies constant iteration between 'theory and practice' to enable the emergence of transformative strategies which improve the dignity of life of people on the ground. At the end of meetings, it is peasant and Indigenous members who come to the final conclusions and ways forward. In the long term this is a sustainable approach, as it is peasant and Indigenous communities who become aware of the knowledge and support needed to face more complex realities and issues.

In addition to the role of specialist participants and expert peasant-Indigenous members in producing knowledge, the role of NGO members is also fundamental. They channel resources to organise and facilitate gatherings such as national assemblies and special workshops. They also serve as catalysts by linking peasant and Indigenous

members with specialists to produce new learning and consciousness of the type of struggle on the ground. Moreover, NGO members make sure that peasants and Indigenous participants have the leading role in the discussions and the construction of civil society strategies. In fact, the working culture of these civil networks revolves around 'inversion of power'. This means the use of formal knowledge to enhance the strategies of expert peasants/Indigenous people. In the end, the power of voice, learning and actions come from local actors who are the core of the network and make up 90% of the membership. It also means that 'formal/professional knowledge' is used to serve people in order to defend their rights.

17.5 Concluding remarks

An initial reflection is with regards to NDM's working practices. While it is clear that spaces of collective learning contribute to the formation of capable and empowered peasant and Indigenous communities that challenge neoliberal mechanisms enforced by networks of power in Mexico, NDM actions are limited to its members. This might not be sufficient to impact the progress on food sovereignty at a larger scale in Mexico. Therefore, a question emerges: How to expand the process of collective learning to an extended civil society? This subject remains an important topic for further research. It is important to recognise the challenge in staying true to the dynamics of the spaces while increasing the number of people involved. Furthermore, the struggle is to become a way of living in dignity.

Reflections of NDM members give some hints on how to proceed. They recognise that working with urban youth movements might be essential as they have the energy and capacity to learn rapidly from civil network dynamics. In addition, there is a need to work systematically and at a larger scale with groups of people and organisations with other skills and dynamics though with similar aims, in order to form a real counter-hegemonic force to the dominant system.

Participatory research is suggested as a key methodological approach. It allows a deeper understanding of human relations and their interactions. Furthermore, in trying to understand the challenges and forms of effective support for social movements, this paper shows that role of academics is fundamental — not only in terms of research, but also in generating alliances to support social movements in the production of knowledge. How to incorporate and strengthen alliances between social movements and academia? And how to make research such as that presented here a more active tool to further leverage social change? Both are questions still to be tackled.

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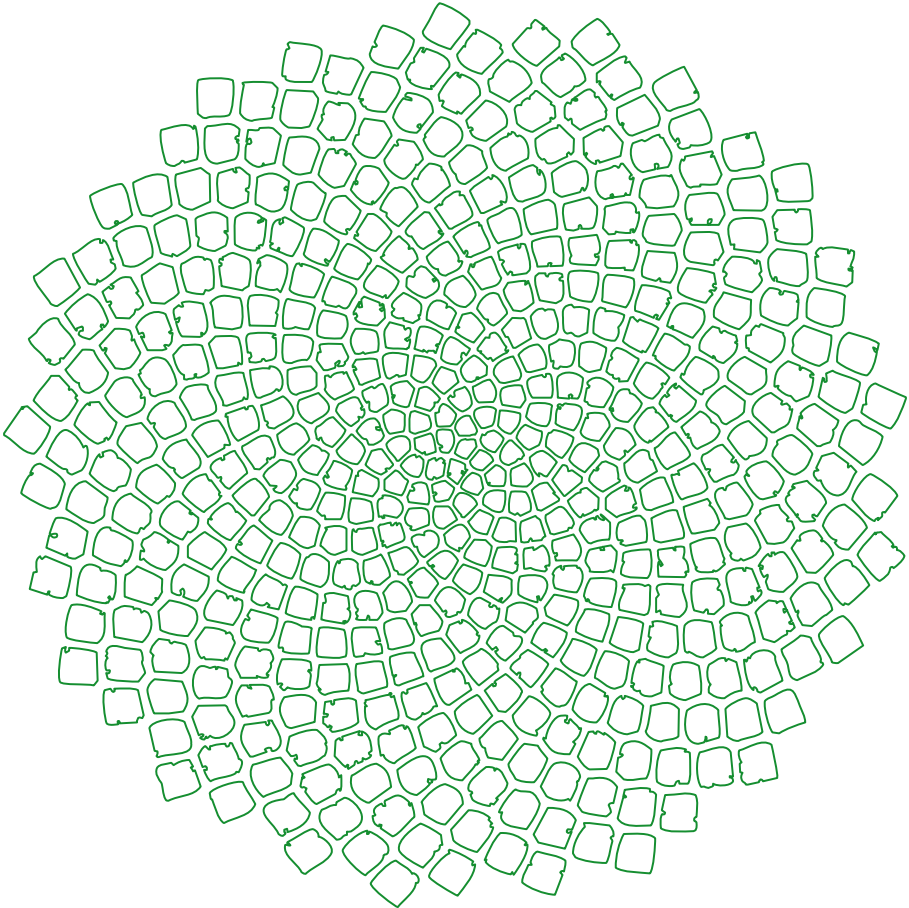
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18



Solidarity science: reflections, negotiations and experiences with doing research on the ground with *Proambiente* and Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers' movement in Acre, Brazil

Jacqueline M. Vadjunec

Geographical location: Brazil

Chapter highlights: This chapter is a reflective, critical account of doing 'solidarity science' with rubber tappers in the Brazilian Amazon, in comparison with being a Beverly Hills geographer.

The author discusses her experiences of the ins and outs of doing participatory research as an academic researcher and argues in support of 'solidarity science' as a preferred method.

She gives insight into the power and identity dynamics between herself and participants in the research, and explores the tension between research that is useful for the local community and knowledge production that will satisfy the scientific community.

Keywords: Acre, Brazil, Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers, payments for environmental services, solidarity science.

18.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on doing what McCusker and colleagues (2013) call 'solidarity science', or science 'with' people and communities rather than 'on' people and communities. First, I will explain my personal reasons for studying Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers' movement. Then I will explore some of the lessons learned from doing work on the ground as a volunteer field agent for *Proambiente*, a Payment for Environmental Services (PES) scheme originally envisioned and articulated by the local agricultural and rubber tappers' unions as a sustainable development alternative. Unlike many PES schemes, *Proambiente* unfolded organically, in part, through the rubber tappers' movement as a means to curtail the rapid urbanisation facing the Amazon region, while at the same time supporting local and traditional rural livelihoods (Bartels *et al.* 2010). From the beginning, *Proambiente* struggled for firm footing, until the Brazilian Federal Government funded it under President Lula's sustainable development initiatives (Hall 2013). This chapter explores the birth, death, and, more recently, rebirth of such a PES scheme, focusing on the pitfalls and opportunities provided by adopting a participatory approach, as well as my own often uneasy experience as a researcher on the ground studying social movements, while at the same time volunteering as a local field agent for *Proambiente* (through both its birth and death) at the request of my institutional partners and local research affiliations.

18.2 Antecedents: Brasilissimo, Chico Mendes, poetry and geography

I am often asked by students and colleagues, why Brazil? Why Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers? These are good questions that merit explanation, especially since my reasons no doubt colour my experiences as well as my interpretations of those experiences. My interest in common property started in the late 1970s, as a small child, when my father, grandfather and uncles, as part of the United Steel Workers Union, along with the city of Youngstown, Ohio, fought to buy and operate Youngstown Sheet and Tube Corporation which had been unexpectedly closed on what came to be known as Black Monday, September 19, 1977. These efforts lasted until the early 1980s, when a publication advocating "a new American socialism" received a great amount of national backlash essentially rendering ineffective the coalition's cause (Linken and Russo 2002). With the eventual collapse of the steel trade, Youngstown, a non-diversified economy, continues to struggle even to this day.

In high school, I was lucky enough to join a programme that encouraged inner-city students to go to college, walking them through the often-confusing process of financial aid and student applications. At Bucknell University, I fell in love with learning, taking advantage of every opportunity that college had to offer, including working late nights as the editor for a literary free press, a double major in English

and Geography, as well as a year spent abroad spending a semester studying British theatre in London, and another studying the ecology and culture of the Brazilian Amazon with the School for International Training (SIT). It was in 1996, during my semester abroad in the Brazilian Amazon, that I first began to truly see the complexity of the human-environment condition. Once there my concern over the environment shifted dramatically and my concern for the wellbeing of the region's residents grew as the need for sustainable development (a hot topic at the time) became more apparent. During this trip, I first became interested in the Brazilian Extractive Reserve system under which, in contrast to the city of Youngstown, extractivists had been successful in gaining communal control over the use of their resource-base in an attempt to make a living. It was during this trip that a poet became a geographer. I fell in love with a people, a story, and my first academic topic: Chico Mendes and the rubber tappers' movement.

18.3 Doing science in the Amazon: reflections on my Beverly Hills geographer-self

From my perspective, Brazil was not an easy place to work, especially for someone with no language training, very few contacts, and few opportunities for growth in either of those areas. Doing research inside an extractive reserve requires a research visa, invitations from the rubber tapper associations, and special access permits from Brazilian governing agencies. However, I was passionate. I would figure out a way to learn Portuguese (my university did not offer classes in the Portuguese language). I would figure out a way to make my own contacts. Most call this pre-dissertation work. In my case it was pre-enlightenment work. As a result, I can't stress enough to my students how crucial this step is in the research process. I spent six weeks in Acre, Brazil doing pre-dissertation work. I went there to make connections and practise my Portuguese. I spent years taking the 'right' classes, and developing the 'right' theoretical framework to study the common property aspects of the extractive reserves and the rubber tappers' movement. My exceptionally naïve self was worried about getting the science 'right'.

Once I got there, however, I realised that few people I spoke with were actually worried about the integrity of my science. Instead, they were more interested in my own integrity. A lunch with a senior expat researcher at the local university in Rio Branco jolted me into a new and much needed understanding. As I explained my research questions and rigorous and (as I imagined) impressive methodologies, he kept asking me, "Yah, but what is your research going to do for the people who live inside the reserve?" My answer, "It will hopefully impact policy on the extractive reserve system." His answer, "Yah, but what is your research going to do for the people who live inside the reserve?" He harshly reprimanded me and told me to develop an answer to this question before visiting Xapuri and talking to representatives at the rubber tappers' union. At the time, I was floored at his negative reaction to what I felt

was important research. However, his not letting me off the hook made me confront my own understandings up to that point regarding my career in 'doing science'. It was during that pre-dissertation trip that Nietschmann's philosophy on the 'Beverly Hills geographer' first started to make sense:

"Who studies and who gets studied reflects power, economics, status, class, color, and identity. Research is done on 'informants' who can't say no. Research is done 'with' those of approximately the same social or economic status as the researcher. Research is not done on people who can call the cops. Try moving into Beverly Hills to do a community study of American Caucasian ethnicity and household production strategies based on interviewing key informants and door-to-door questionnaires, Geography is not done among the rich and famous but on the poor and unknown" (Nietschmann 2001, p.183).

Was I a Beverly Hills geographer? Of course not! How could I be? I had never even been to Beverly Hills, or even California for that matter. Besides, I had always seen myself as a working class girl from Youngstown, Ohio ...

18.4 On not wanting to be a Beverly Hills geographer in the Brazilian Amazon

Once I decided that I was definitely not going to be a Beverly Hills geographer, my research transformed. I started asking people more about what questions they felt needed to be asked, and how and why to go about things, and less about my own academic framings of these understandings. Aside from incorporating people into the actual process of my research, I started to focus on the community-desired 'products' of my research. If science is more about theory building, how can one ensure its utility in small and large (and short and long term) ways for local people? This approach of doing 'open-minded science' opened many doors for me, including an affiliation with a local NGO, the Group for Research and Extension in Agroforestry Systems in Acre (PESACRE). PESACRE was originally co-founded with researchers and activists from both Brazil and the United States using their own participatory action research (PAR) models (Schmink 1999).

In 2003, as I arrived in the field for my dissertation work, *Proambiente* had just received financial backing by then President Lula who had strong ties to both the Acre State 'Forest government' and local rubber tapper politics (Vadjunec 2011). *Proambiente* used a participatory approach for monitoring, education, and outreach that involved community-selected representatives in each community, at each municipality, and at the state (government and NGO) level. As I arrived for my two and a half year stint of dissertation fieldwork, PESACRE had just been selected by the unions, cooperatives, and state government to help design and promote the research and outreach necessary to complete the first phase of *Proambiente*. As a result, at the

request of PESACRE, besides completing my proposed dissertation research (which had absolutely nothing to do with Payments for Environmental Services programmes), I also became a technical and extension field agent for *Proambiente*, working in rubber tapper communities selected by the unions to participate in the first phase of the program (see Figure 18.1).



Figure 18.1. The author in the field (top left) at a community meeting in the CMER.

18.5 The ins and outs of doing participatory research

Integrating my own funded dissertation research into a participatory PES scheme was both challenging and rewarding at the same time. Most directly, it gave me instant 'street cred' with the rubber tappers' social movement. By working in communities that were part of *Proambiente*, and by developing my survey with local partners, it also produced much needed and usable results for local communities throughout the process. For instance, databases and maps were co-developed and shared with partners *before* I left the field, in contrast to the standard 3-5 years after the fieldwork is completed when the research finally gets published. Additionally, I co-taught and co-organised workshops for rubber tappers, local leaders, and relevant NGOs on making participatory maps using inexpensive GPS units and donated software. Data co-production and co-sharing is a very gratifying, but also scary endeavour for a young researcher who needs to publish or perish.

Besides the obvious benefits, there were also several challenges. First, I already had selected my study areas before I got to the field. Now I was being asked to take on completely new ones (luckily my dissertation committee was amenable to such changes). Second, I already had developed my household survey; changing it required substantial time and effort on my part. Furthermore, my desire to be scientifically and theoretically rigorous along with co-creating a practical and usable survey stretched me in ways I had never experienced. Overall, many of the changes held up 'my' work considerably, but it also took my research in directions that I would have never thought possible. I think this is what Vayda means when he says that researchers need to be more open to 'surprise' (1983).

Lastly, when it came to actually publishing my dissertation research, I learned that doing science of value to rubber tappers is not always of value to the scientific community. In part, this is because traditional people often have different ways of ordering their universe, based on their livelihoods and preferences. In the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (CMER), rubber tappers make a living from diverse activities including mainly subsistence and some market driven farming, Brazil nut, rubber and other non-timber forest extraction, small-scale cattle ranching, small animal production, hunting and fishing (Vadjunec *et al.* 2009). However, before the creation of the reserve, less than half of rubber tapper families actually worked in agriculture, preferring non-timber forest (NTFP) extractivism. In interviews with local officials, some recalled having to actually fight with some rubber tappers to convince them to plant small subsistence agricultural plots. Long-time leaders of the social movement wanted to be able to make a living from extractivism alone, and wanted government support to do so. Some, especially elder rubber tappers, did not want to work in agriculture, although their offspring preferred such work to the long hours involved in latex production (Vadjunec *et al.* 2011).

During my fieldwork, rubber tappers were in a heated debate at the time over whether or not residents of the extractive reserve should be able to invest in selective hardwood extraction. For many rubber tappers, it didn't make sense that while they were allowed to deforest two hectares a year to plant beans and rice in a swidden (rotation and regrowth) system of production, they were not allowed to sell any hardwoods from those very same plots they were, in effect, now encouraged to deforest. To make matters more complicated, many rubber tappers were using the 'two-hectare per year' rule to augment their cattle production every year, with a large proportion of rubber tappers converting their agricultural plots directly to pasture (bypassing the traditional swidden rotation/regrowth system) (Gomes *et al.* 2012). Some rubber tappers expressed anger at the growth of cattle ranching inside the reserve, instead promoting selective hardwood extraction, as complementary to NTFP production. At an annual meeting, one movement leader challenged the tappers saying, *"Our brother Chico did not die so you could stab him in the back by becoming a cattle rancher"* (Vadjunec 2004). As a result, both cattle ranching and selective hardwood extraction were highly controversial, politically charged 'hot potatoes' at the time.

Local environmental agencies and NGOs were concerned over the impacts of various land uses (mainly cattle and extractivism) on both flora and fauna. Given the complexity of this unique mixed property system, with distinct ownership rules, and land-use patterns, I sought out local land-use and forestry 'experts'. As a result of their input, in an attempt to get beyond black and white labels of 'good' and 'bad' land-use activities, I adjusted my biodiversity sampling approach from random samples and ecological baselines to natural forest transects of rubber trails based on land-use preferences, values, and life histories, to look at trade-offs between mainly cattle and extractivism on both land-cover and biodiversity within the reserve. While I feel that this work has the most potential value in terms of policy implications (supporting a diversity

of land-use activities based on user preferences while understanding the trade-offs between land use, livelihood, forest cover, and biodiversity), it took us three years to publish it, with attempts at three different journals, finally publishing it nowhere close to its original form and effectively stripping out much of the qualitative component to satisfy the ecologists (and other natural scientists) (Vadjunec and Rocheleau 2009).

'Solidarity science' may be something to strive for, but it is often difficult to publish. While rubber tappers look to their forests and see well over a hundred years of human enrichment, extractivism, and making a living off of forest use, often ecologists want 'pure' ecological baselines of untouched 'primary' forest for rigorous scientific comparison. However, the rubber tappers have been using their forests for so long (let alone those before them), one would be hard-pressed to find the 'undisturbed' forest needed to validate one's research. The rubber trail forest is also actually its own entity, a category in its own right that merits study on its own terms. Yet the prevailing recognized categories of 'forest' land use still rest on western scientific binaries and biases. Beyond the difficulties in publishing studies that transcend those boundaries, the broader reward system of academia is not necessarily structured to acknowledge, encourage, or reward activism, advocacy, participation, or service.

18.6 Conclusion: in support of 'solidarity science'

In the end, *Proambiente* ran out of federal funding before it ever really got off the ground, but still continued to exist as an idea and an experiment of sorts due to the support of the local unions, municipalities, PESACRE and the Acre State government. During fieldwork in 2010, I found that there was still an active waiting list to be part of the programme even though the programme was officially stalled. In fact, many rubber tappers were more enthusiastic about the programme after it had ended than while it actually existed. Many rubber tappers in the union felt that they were being held up by the federal government as their funding sources froze. Yet local leaders pushed forward, committed to the programme. They redirected funds and energies, and had many small but gratifying grassroots successes (Vadjunec 2011). Union leaders later explained that they didn't want to be dependent on anyone for funds, yet they were glad that they had in fact received government funds because it allowed the experiment time to grow and evolve.

In 2010, a reincarnated *Proambiente* of sorts morphed into the Acre State System of Incentives for Environmental Services (SISA) influenced by California's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation+ (REDD+) (Duchell *et al.* 2013, Schmink *et al.* 2014). While some in Acre have expressed concern over what they call the 'REDD capitalism trap' (APAEPL *et al.* 2011), SISA is reportedly different from many REDD+ projects in that, by its own account, it stresses flexibility in land use, uses an indirect, locally defined incentive structure (rather than direct payments), adopts a heavy social justice discourse, and emphasises human rights and the need for transparency and joint decision-making

(Acre Government 2010). Although SISA is currently well beyond the scope of my own research, like most sustainable development programmes, I suspect that only time will tell the success or failure of this ongoing social and environmental justice experiment. Although REDD+ has received increasing criticism worldwide, it is important to note that in Acre *Proambiente* was originally articulated by the local grassroots movements (rather than being imposed from above). It remains to be seen if the unique PES vision once articulated by rubber tappers and small producers for rubber tappers and small producers can easily be inserted into the REDD+ agendas that could actually fund such an endeavour. While the state sees REDD+ and the MOU as a way to fund SISA (of which REDD+ is only one component), it is less clear what the true transaction costs will be in the long-term, especially as a once grassroots endeavour becomes mainly a top-down approach.

As for me, I learned that field-based, social movement-related, participatory, human-environment research is a necessarily messy process. In the beginning, I tried to keep 'my research' and *Proambiente*'s research and the communities' research separate, but this was not only naïve but also utterly impossible, as I became heavily identified by community members as a field agent working for *Proambiente*. Yet, science, we are taught, by its very nature hinges on the idea of objectivity. Keeping myself in check required constant reflexivity (a process which in itself can be seen in opposition to science).

While many of my colleagues have given up on 'doing science' because of the uneasy contradictions between science and participatory approaches, I would like to argue that instead of avoiding something called 'science', we need to expand our idea of science to encompass 'science with' or 'science along side of' (Rocheleau 2013) to better engage with social movements and related actors, and to inform social and environmental justice issues (Brannstrom and Vadjunec 2013). This takes time and persistence, characteristics not always conducive to academic calendars. But for me, that's what 'solidarity science' means — doing all the important stuff that can actually make a difference, even if it might have no official place on your CV. Making a difference, even if it is a cliché, is what inspired me to become a human-environment geographer in the first place.

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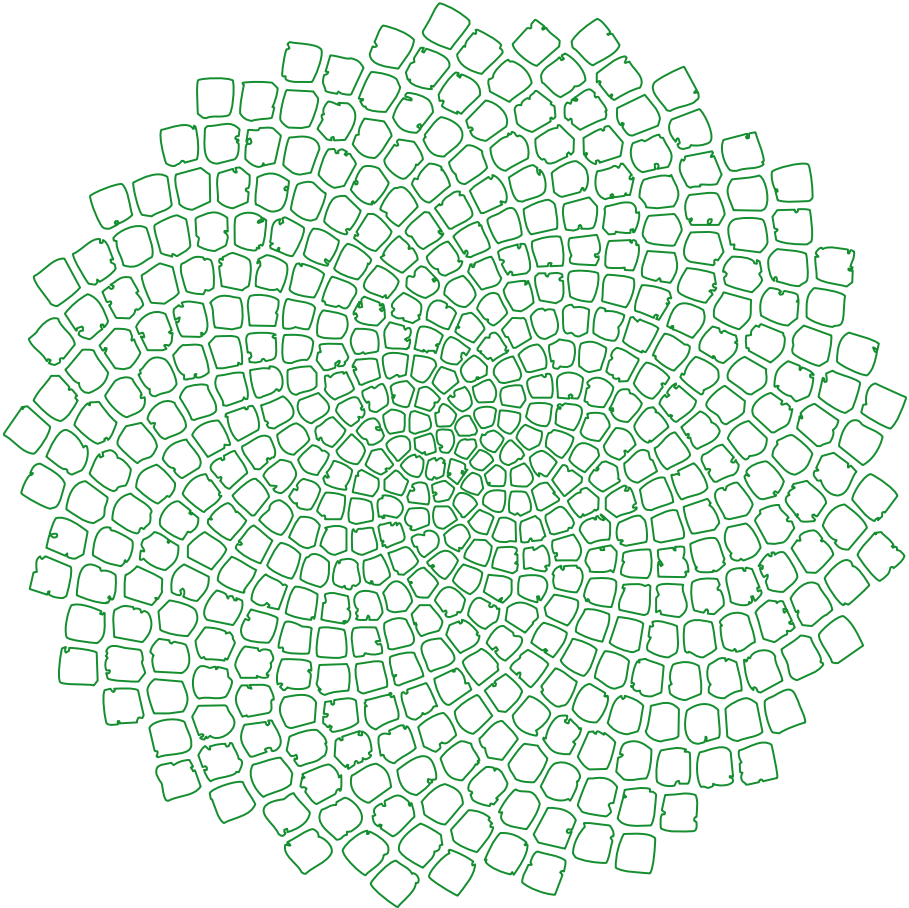
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19



Community engaged action research and food sovereignty in Canada¹

Lauren Kepkiewicz, Rolie Srivastava, Charles Z. Levkoe,
Abra Brynne and Cathleen Kneen

Geographical location: Canada

Chapter highlights: This chapter focuses on nine community-university collaborations across Canada that took part in the action-based research project *Community First! Impacts of Community Engagement: Community Food Security/Sovereignty Hub*.

It highlights the need to take concrete steps to ensure community-engaged research better supports food sovereignty in Canada.

It draws out three common lessons around the need to unpack assumptions around knowledge production; develop a shared vision of community-campus partnerships; and commit to building relationships over time.

These lessons are discussed in relation to how they resonate with broader discussions in the transnational food sovereignty movement as well as the specific context of settler colonialism in Canada.

The research also suggests that working within a settler colonial state such as Canada presents unique challenges for community-campus engagement.

Keywords: community-campus engagement, food sovereignty, collaborative research.

¹ This chapter is the product of a collaborative research and writing effort through Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) by three community-based researchers/practitioners: Rolie Srivastava (community researcher), Abra Brynne (former Food Secure Canada staff and current Director of Engagement & Policy with the British Columbia Food Systems Network), and Cathleen Kneen (CFICE community co-lead) as well as two academics Charles Levkoe (CFICE academic project co-lead) and Lauren Kepkiewicz (CFICE research assistant).

19.1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the ways universities engage with the public. In Canada, one aspect of this is community-campus engagement, an umbrella term covering a range of approaches including community service learning, community-based research and participatory action research. In its ideal form, community-campus engagement enables reciprocity, builds respect, and provides meaningful learning for all those involved. However, community groups have challenged the motivations of academics and the assumption that partnerships are inherently beneficial, particularly in the context of increasing neoliberalisation within universities (Giroux 2014). These criticisms include the allocation of funding (eg. reductions in public funding and increases in private funding as well as difficulty using funding to pay community members honoraria and wages for their work and other contributions), what constitutes knowledge and outcomes (eg. the individualisation and professionalisation of higher education), and a host of other issues that often undermine relationship building.

Recognising these realities, *Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement* (CFICE) was designed as a pan-Canadian action research project that asks, 'How can community-campus engagement be designed and implemented to maximize value for non-profit community-based organisations?' In this chapter we focus on CFICE's Community Food Security (CFS) Hub, a collaboration between Food Secure Canada/Réseau pour une alimentation durable, the Canadian Association for Food Studies/L'Association canadienne des études sur l'alimentation and a wide range of community and campus partners engaged in food systems work. At the core of the CFS Hub's work is the effort to better understand how community-campus partnerships might contribute to food sovereignty in Canada by learning from our twelve partner projects (for an overview of these projects click the following link: <https://batchgeo.com/map/ab612e0c755f13df028d9b594a138ab3>).²

While the CFS Hub began by adopting the frame of community food security, input from our project partners has led the Hub to embrace food sovereignty as our unifying framework. We understand food sovereignty as a framework and a transnational social movement that challenges the corporate industrial food system and works to transform how food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed and valued (Desmarais and Wittman 2014, Levkoe 2014, Martin and Andrée 2013). Although

2 The twelve CFS Hub partner projects are: 1) The Regina Community Food Assessment; 2) A Developmental Evaluation to Explore a Budding Community/Academic Collaboration; 3) Creating a Food Hub Through University-Community Partnership; 4) Edible Campus: From Showcase to Living Classroom; 5) Planning for Change: Community Development in Practice; 6) Local Food Multipliers and Accessibility in Northern Ontario; 7) Models of Community University Collaboration in the Waterloo Region Food System; 8) Cross-Cultural Food Networks: Building and Maintaining Inclusive Food Security Networks to Support Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Communities; 9) Campus Food Initiative Study; 10) Paying for Nutrition: Income and Food Costs Across Canada; 11) Sharing the Table Manitoba: Sustainable-Local Food Systems, Regulation and Policy-making in Manitoba; 12) The British Columbia Food Systems Network: Responsibility and Relationships: Decolonizing the British Columbia Food Systems Network/Indigenizing our Praxis.

This chapter focuses primarily on the work of the first nine projects.

not all our partners see themselves as part of the food sovereignty movement, much of their work reflects its key principles, including the desire for transformational change (for more on how each of the projects relate to food sovereignty see our map, available at <https://batchgeo.com/map/ab612e0c755f13df028d9b594a138ab3>, and newsletter, available at: <http://carleton.ca/communityfirst/wp-content/uploads/cfice-cfs-hub-newsletter-2014.pdf>). Additionally, our core partner Food Secure Canada is a key player promoting food sovereignty in Canada.

In this chapter we draw on a series of interviews, evaluation reports, conversations, meetings and workshops conducted with our demonstration projects and supporting community and academic partners to examine the following questions:

- What lessons have community and academic partners learned from participating in community-campus engagement?
- How do these lessons resonate within broader discussions about community-campus relationships in the transnational food sovereignty movement?
- What concrete steps can we take to ensure community-campus engagement better supports food sovereignty in Canada?

19.2 Food sovereignty and community-campus engagement in Canada

In Canada, food sovereignty was introduced through the work of the National Farmers Union (one of the founding members of La Via Campesina in the 1990s) as well as the Union Paysanne, based in Québec (Desmarais and Wittman 2014). This occurred in the context of the failure of neoliberal policies introduced by the Canadian government in the 1980s, which purported to remedy (though in many cases exacerbated) low farm incomes, rural depopulation, hunger and environmental degradation (Wiebe and Wipf 2011). The implementation of the People's Food Policy Project from 2007-2011 and its adoption by Food Secure Canada has served to further embed food sovereignty in Canada, particularly by developing an additional pillar/principle to the initial six outlined by the international movement.³ This seventh pillar – food as sacred – was introduced by the Indigenous circle of the People's Food Policy Project, a group of elders, researchers and practitioners who helped guide the process (PFPP 2011, Kneen 2010). This pillar emphasises food as a sacred responsibility that cannot be commodified, reflecting how Indigenous activists, scholars, and knowledge

³ The six principles of food sovereignty:

- Provides food for people
- Values food providers
- Localises food systems
- Puts control locally, and
- Works with nature

(ISC,2007).

holders have challenged and enriched food sovereignty as a concept and practice (Morrison 2011). Indigenous activists have also critiqued the agriculture-centric focus of food sovereignty in Canada as well as the need to engage with how land, self-determination, and colonialism intersect with food systems issues and alternatives (Desmarais and Wittman 2014, Morrison 2011). In response to these critiques, the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN) has changed the language of its mandate from the protection of 'farmland' to the protection of 'foodlands' and is still seeking a broader term that recognises the connection of Indigenous people with the land for much more than food.

Although vibrant discussions and debates about the meaning of food sovereignty continue to unfold globally, the concept is still in its initial stages in Canada (Desmarais and Wittman 2014, p. 17). More specifically, little has been published about the ways that universities and the food sovereignty movement interact in Canada, even though a lively discussion on the role of academics and researchers has long been a focus within food sovereignty politics and practice. In this context, our research suggests that academics have the potential to play an important role in the movement if they enter into respectful relationships, understand and seek to change "the histories, social relations, and conditions that structure groups unequally" (Verjee 2012, p. 66), and, in turn, "create new structures of engagement" (Sheridan and Jacobi 2014 p.143). However, critics have argued that community-campus engagement can also reproduce the prioritisation of academic needs while co-opting the language of participation and engagement. For example, partnerships between community and academics are often designed to meet faculty publication and tenure requirements and/or students' educational needs. This prioritisation is encouraged not only by a long history of elitism and detachment of universities from the public but also by the neoliberalisation of higher education, which promotes a business-like model for post-secondary institutions that prioritises grants and publications over pedagogy and public service. It is vital that we better understand and develop practices that go beyond the rhetoric of engagement if we want to challenge, rather than reproduce, existing power structures within universities. While community-campus engagement alone may not be enough to change these processes (a point made by one of our community partners during an interview), we believe that learning how this engagement can be part of collaborative movement-building provides an important avenue for engaging in transformational change.

19.3 Collaborative research processes and methodologies

Within the CFS Hub, we have developed a collaborative governance model and participatory action research methodology through ongoing input from our community partners. This integrated approach fits well with food sovereignty as it attempts to place community partners at the centre of research, taking cues from those directly involved in on-the-ground work and engaging with multiple ways of knowing. One of the ways we

attempt to create space for collective engagement across community-campus divides is through the composition and governance structure of our core management team (see Figure 19.1). The team is comprised of two academics and two community partners, as well as a community-based researcher who plays an important supporting role, conducting interviews, analysing results, participating in conferences and co-authoring this chapter. As Figure 19.1 suggests, we have worked to create a horizontal governance structure that allows us to develop the CFS Hub's goals, analysis and writings with collective input from all management team members. We meet regularly using virtual platforms and in person whenever possible. Spending time talking, eating, planning, and laughing - and also working through conflicts and tensions - is important to our ability to work together. Our team dynamic is also facilitated by a shared commitment to transition to a food system based on the principles of food sovereignty.

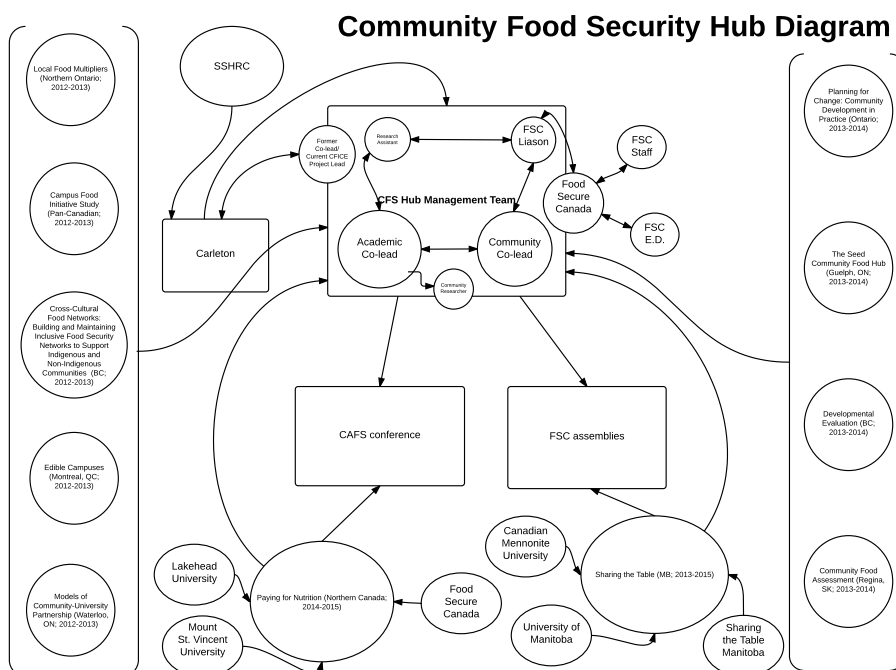


Figure 19.1. Community Food Security Hub Diagram.

In addition to meeting as a management team, we remained in regular contact with the twelve demonstration projects, working collaboratively through teleconference calls, online documents, in-person meetings, and workshops. We also met on a regular basis with the program committee of CFICE, Food Secure Canada and the Canadian Association of Food Studies to obtain feedback on the progress of the broader project. These collaborative processes within the core management team

and with the demonstration projects are two ways we attempted to subvert top-down research. This approach has been vital to our project and has helped improve our practice as the project unfolds.

This chapter draws on collaborations with twelve demonstration projects over the last four years. It focuses on projects taking place in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014, as well as two phases of research between December 2014 and June 2015. The first phase involved twenty-five semi-formal interviews, in which interviewees reflected on their experiences with the CFS Hub. The second phase involved an interactive workshop and feedback session held in June 2015 at the Canadian Association of Food Studies Assembly in Ottawa, Ontario with about fifty CFS Hub partners and participants.

The methodologies involved in this research have been an important part of our collective learning. Our agenda was not solely driven by academic or community priorities. It was a joint effort between multiple groups as well as a process in which the lines between these groups were often blurred. In attempting to better understand and develop different ways of collaborating across university-campus divides (sometimes blurring boundaries and sometimes respecting the division for its ability to position people differently), we have noticed similarities between the lessons outlined by our partners and the discussions occurring internationally around food sovereignty. In the next section we consider these lessons and attempt to place them into conversation about the relationship between academics, community practitioners and food sovereignty movements.

19.4 Making community-campus engagement work for community-based organisations

The findings from our interviews highlight three common lessons around the need to:

- Unpack assumptions around knowledge production
- Develop a shared vision of community-campus partnerships and
- Commit to building relationships over time

Our research also suggests that working within a settler colonial state such as Canada presents unique challenges for community-campus engagement.

Unpacking Assumptions

The first lesson that emerges from our research is the need to unpack simplistic binary conceptions of community and academia. Many of our partner project leads emphasised that community-campus engagement brings multiple actors to the table and that these actors do not often fit into dualistic community-campus categories. This means deconstructing assumptions that a faculty member's role is to teach, a students' role is to learn, and a community-based organisation's role is to provide a laboratory or set of needs to explore. Fluid roles and blurred boundaries were apparent

in the Local Food Multipliers project where an 'in community' method was used. Using this method, academics "approach the issue of food security as a community member first, one who is immersed in the context of this community and its food security issues" (Harrison *et al.* 2013, p. 103). This 'in community' method allowed the group to negotiate the focus of their work and the roles of different players, building a strong and fluid relationship between a university-based research network, students in a community service learning course and two regional workforce planning boards. In another example, the Planning for Change service learning class brought together two student activists and a provincial food systems organisation attempting to support relationships between producers, eaters and public sector organisations. While the students focused on the assigned tasks, they also drew on their experience in the food sovereignty movement to critically assess the project and provide further recommendations for action. This project, like many others in the CFS Hub, blurred the boundaries between academic and community roles.

CFS Hub partners also emphasised the need to challenge assumptions about knowledge creation. In our interviews, community partners demanded their knowledge be valued, respected and not considered 'below' academic knowledge. Community partners underlined how knowledge generated in community is at the centre of food systems transformation and that without this knowledge and praxis, academics would have no data to gather or theorise. At the same time, community partners noted the value of academic contributions to knowledge creation. For example, in the Campus Food Initiative project, one partner told us that collaborating with academics opened them up to new ways of looking at their work as well as helping them think through how to frame relevant questions. Other project leads noted the valuable contribution of academic partners in generating and analysing data to back up community organisations' advocacy work.

The need to unpack assumptions has also been noted within the food sovereignty movement more broadly. During the Day of Dialogue on Knowledge for Food Sovereignty⁴ participants discussed the integration of researchers within the movement and the integration of movement activists within the university. They reported that integration is "creating a growing body of organic intellectuals who are in a powerful, but complicated, position to contribute to the movement" (Sandwell *et al.* 2014, p. 5). The food sovereignty movement also calls for breaking down assumptions of 'who knows' and how knowledge is produced, emphasising the need to prioritise the knowledge of local food providers and their communities (Sandwell *et al.* 2014, ISC 2007, p. 39, Pimbert, 2010).

While our projects reinforced these conversations they also demonstrated the need to recognise how actors are positioned differently in respect to power and privilege. For

4 The Day of Dialogue was held in January 2014 and involved seventy academics and activists who came together to discuss key challenges within the food sovereignty movement. This event was a follow-up to a larger conference held by the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague called *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue*.

example, in the Edible Campus project, it became clear that university partners had a range of resources that were unavailable to the community partners. Through ongoing negotiations with the university, the faculty partners managed to leverage additional funding and a physical space on campus to locate a garden as an extension of the classroom and for the community partner to expand their work. Understanding how we are positioned differently as faculty, students and community members (whose identities may stretch over one or all of these categories) is necessary if we wish to address power disparities and different lived experiences.

Developing shared commitments while respecting difference

Throughout our research, both community and academic partners emphasised that making time to establish shared commitments and consensus about the nature of the relationship is a necessary first step. Although valuable, identifying mutually beneficial projects can come later. Developing Memoranda of Understanding, terms of reference, and/or protocols can help to develop shared understandings and commitments by providing space for partners to articulate their needs, values and ideas, and in doing so, work through differences. For example, in the *Decolonizing the British Columbia Food Systems Network/Indigenising Our Praxis* project, writing, sharing and rewriting several drafts of a collaborative agreement at the beginning of the partnership helped to clarify and work through different understandings of the project. In combination with conversations over the phone, on Skype, and in person, writing several iterations of the collaborative agreement allowed us to come to a better (though certainly not perfect) understanding of our shared commitments to and expectations of the project and partnership.

In the *Cross-Cultural Food Networks* project one participant explained how relationships are “built on common visions, goals, critical knowledge and awareness”. In this project substantial labour was invested in developing protocols to govern community-university relationships to guard against the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge. This process was key to developing a common understanding of the nature of the relationship. It was particularly important within the context of a long and continuing history of theft of Indigenous knowledges. Without it the partnership would not have been able to move forward.

In order to develop shared protocols, participants noted it is also important to acknowledge that people come to partnerships from different experiences. For this reason, a community member in the *Cross-Cultural Food Networks* project noted that everyone involved “need[s] to know themselves and know how to listen to each other”. Additionally, this project showed it is important to look to community rather than institutional protocols and understandings of community engagement, particularly in the context of a settler colony such as Canada where research often reproduces hierarchical and colonial relationships (Battiste 2008, Kovach 2009, Tuck 2009, Smith 1999).

The transnational food sovereignty movement has drawn from Indigenous scholars and activists in British Columbia because they are at the forefront of developing research protocols between academics and communities. These kinds of protocols help to ensure that research “aligns with the vision, values and goals of communities” as well as “outlin[ing] an ethical process for working across cultures (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to decolonize methodologies” (Nyéléni 2014, p.2).

Our research with CFICE demonstrates that a shared vision is an important part of meaningful and respectful community-campus engagement. Research also suggests that this shared vision might unfold or be guided by different principles depending on the context. In Canada we continue to work within ongoing structures of settler colonialism, meaning that we must engage with the different ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come to this land. For example, settler peoples come to this land as a result of violent and ongoing processes of colonisation that institute land as private property (King 2012, Tuck and Yang 2012, Lawrence and Dua 2005). In contrast, Indigenous peoples’ relationship to North American lands is based on “creation stories, not colonization stories” (Tuck and Yang 2012, p.6) where land “and all it has to teach, to give, and all it demands, is what it means to be Indigenous” (Alfred 2008, p.10). At the same time, differences exist within the broad categories of Indigenous and settler peoples. For example, those “who are racialized, criminalized, [and/or who] hold precarious citizenship status...do not benefit in the same way from their relationship to the state” as white Canadian citizens (Pasternak 2013, p.49). Understanding one’s relationship to land and how this relationship positions us differently (and often complexly) is therefore necessary if we wish to get to a place where we are able to develop shared visions and respectful protocols rooted in food sovereignty.

Building relationships over time

The third common lesson is the need for deep relationships based on personal connections. For example, in the *Developmental Evaluation* project in British Columbia, the community partner noted how her pre-established relationship with her academic partner (who was employed outside the university when they met) helped them to work on an equal footing from the beginning of the project. As noted by another partner, “Good CCE [community-campus engagement] work happens at the grassroots level when two people share a concern about an issue, connect over it, and bring their resources together to address it”. Project participants also underlined the importance of face-to-face meetings or, at the very least, regular phone meetings in order to maintain and strengthen relationships. Our management team has found that regular meetings in which everyone has the opportunity to speak provide space to address challenges and celebrate accomplishments (whether personal or professional). Meeting face-to-face helps us develop respectful relationships, whether it is through a walk in the forest, making lunch together, or sharing tea. While these may seem like simple actions, these personal forms

of communication can be radical because they challenge the notion of academic professionalism and objectivity.

Providing multiple platforms for engagement also helps build relationships because it enables the sharing of knowledge and experiences among a range of partners. Opportunities to meet at conferences, host webinars and participate in teleconferences have helped to build and widen our partnerships, brokering connections between local partners and broader networks. For example, at the 2012 Food Secure Canada Assembly we held a workshop designed to support community groups in articulating their research needs to academics. The workshop also focused on ways to connect with academics and departments that might be able to work on issues useful to community groups. A powerful presentation at the Canadian Association of Food Studies conference in 2013 by two Indigenous leaders opened participants' eyes to the manifold ways in which Indigenous knowledge is rooted in tradition and ongoing practice. Supporting our community and academic partners to attend and present their work at these conferences annually has been an important part of building relationships beyond CFICE as part of the food sovereignty movement. Further, a series of [webinars](#) run by some of the partner projects allowed participants to better understand the relationships created as well as the concrete dimensions of the project overall.

When developing relationships and creating platforms for engagement, we have found that it is necessary to engage with the ways that partnerships between communities and academics often involve a variety of power relationships. For example, tenured professors often come to these partnerships with more resources than community organisations including personal salaries, job stability, health benefits, research funding, and institutional legitimacy. Faculty also have an easier time navigating university bureaucracy whereas community organisations continually noted their lack of capacity to deal with the administrative processes required within community-campus partnerships. Community partners rarely have access to the same funding, training, support, or paid staff time to deal with the academic ethics processes, student interns, and other administrative work; for these reasons they noted that 'partnering' with academics often required more effort than benefit. Some community partner organisations also noted that academics often have the privilege of stepping away from community work whereas community organisations do not. Whether this stepping away was due to personal reasons, job responsibilities, or because academics assumed the role of arms-length researchers, the tendency for academics to engage with community organisations in the short-term was frustrating for community organisations involved in the inherently long-term process of movement building. At the same time, community partners noted that considerable contributions were often made by graduate students or contract faculty, who had little control over sudden departures from the partnership (i.e. due to finishing a degree, landing a new job elsewhere, etc).

Relationship building lies at the heart of food sovereignty approaches. In the 2014

report on the Day of Dialogue, academics and activists discussed the importance of personal relationships and the ways that “deeper encounters” beyond professional relationships are “pivotal for building a robust movement” (Sandwell *et al.* 2014, p. 12). In some of our projects, the formation of deep relationships was apparent in partners’ emphasis on establishing long-term personal connections, as discussed above. When deep relationships were sought, partnerships challenged ideas around professionalism in the university; for example, that academics’ role is to maintain ‘objectivity’ and remain at arm’s length as researchers. This is particularly important for academics because when one is operating within a deep relationship, it becomes difficult to follow traditional research assumptions discussed above – particularly those that see communities as objects of study rather than active knowledge producers and holders.⁵

19.5 Reflections and recommendations

In order to engage in meaningful community-campus engagement, experiences from our demonstration projects suggest the importance of unpacking assumptions, developing shared visions, and building respectful relationships. At the core of these lessons is the need to understand our own identities and how our experiences may position us differently. Our positionality is influenced by overlapping dimensions of privilege and oppression, for example, as a faculty member or contract worker in a neoliberal university, or as an Indigenous person or white settler in a colonial state. While many of these lessons are echoed within broader food sovereignty literature, our projects aim to contribute to a better understanding of how these lessons might unfold in Canada. We highlight the necessity of reflecting on shared lessons within the movement while at the same time understanding how these lessons might apply differently depending on one’s positionality within social, political, and historical contexts.

Learning from the lessons outlined above, we invited our partners to identify concrete actions CFICE might engage in over the next four years in order to better support community organisations working towards food sovereignty in Canada. Through interviews and during a workshop at the Canadian Association of Food Studies, our partners highlighted three areas for future action:

- 1) In response to institutional barriers, participants agreed that working with universities can be challenging due to hard-to-navigate bureaucracies, funding structures that privilege academics, and timelines that are often out of sync with community organisations. A key suggestion was the need to *align institutions for community impact* by creating formal protocols and/or evaluation processes that hold universities accountable to the communities they work with and make university cycles and practices less opaque to community

⁵ At the same time, a community partner tells us that “it is important to acknowledge – with gratitude – the challenge this poses to academics, who are then forced to justify this different, and entirely valid, approach [to the university]”.

partners. Participants also emphasised the need to include a budget line item for 'community impact' within academic grants, and to institutionalise community-based organisations' input as part of the peer-review process for knowledge mobilisation.

- 2) During discussions about connecting academics and community organisations, participants agreed on the need to develop *community-based brokerage models* that could support campus-community partnerships. Participants emphasised that these models must be context specific with respect to the focus and scale of their operation (eg they might work better at regional levels or in specific sectors) and that infrastructure may be necessary to build and maintain relationships as well as ensure accountability. For example, several project partners suggested a web-based platform that links community organisations with academics who are conducting research that supports community advocacy. As CFICE moves forward we are examining what kinds of brokerage models exist and which models are best suited for connecting food sovereignty activists and academics in Canada. Discussions also revealed a need to build bridges with rural and remote communities so they can better engage and connect with academic partners.
- 3) Participants suggested the need for *community-first partnership tools and practices*, including guidelines on how to include honorariums for community members in grant applications, as well as providing templates for protocols and sample ethics forms from which academic and community partners can work. Participants also talked about the necessity of educating faculty and students in how to develop meaningful relationships with communities rather than merely using the language of partnership to forward careers and legitimise research.

These actions, suggested by our partners, will inform CFICE's research. Our aim is to translate the lessons learned during the first three years of the project (outlined above) into concrete actions that work towards system-level change. As CFICE moves forward, our goal is to engage with each of the actions by forming three working groups composed of academic and community members.

These action areas, intended to address systemic issues, were also accompanied by a conversation about disrupting the university as a bureaucratic institution that often acts to silence and delegitimise Indigenous knowledges. We believe this last point is particularly important because of the exploitative (and ongoing) history of academic relationships with Indigenous nations in Canada and elsewhere. Examples of these types of disruptions can be seen clearly within the work of our partners on the cross-cultural communications project, including performing ceremonies as an integral part of research, or continuing to practice Indigenous ways of knowing. These kinds of actions highlight the many ways that Indigenous peoples continue to disrupt the academy through everyday actions of resurgence and resistance (Simpson 2011).

Thinking through how our primarily settler CFS Hub team might support these types of disruptions from within academia, we have begun to engage with how to decolonise our community-campus relationships within CFICE. While cognisant of critiques that decolonisation is an unsettling process and not “a metaphor for things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 1), we echo the statement that “no justice can happen on stolen land”. For us, decolonising community-campus engagement centres on the understanding that “colonization matters” (Byrd 2011, p. xxiii) and that settler colonialism in Canada is an ongoing structure, not a past event (Wolfe 2006). Our intention is not only to further this understanding but also to challenge colonial structures and the ways in which they are replicated in our own practice. In the next phase of CFICE we will explore how to apply these ideas in ways that disrupt inequities within the university and in community, recognising that decolonisation will be different depending on the context. For those beginning to think through some of these issues we echo Jeff Corntassel's call to think through questions such as: “What does it mean to acknowledge the Indigenous territory you're on? Are you coming to community, place-based relationships as a settler or as an Indigenous person? Additionally, how are you entering Indigenous homelands – as an invited guest, uninvited, trespasser, visitor, resident, immigrant, refugee etc?” (Snelgrove *et al.* 2014, p.4).

In this chapter, we have outlined a variety of lessons that guide the way we do research and which inform and are informed by the broader food sovereignty movement. We have also laid out three action areas that our community and academic partners believe are necessary and will attempt to enact in the next phase of the research. Lastly, we put forward the proposal to decolonise community-campus engagement as a way to address the lessons outlined in the context of doing this work in Canada, a settler colony. As one of multiple projects attempting to improve community-campus relationships, we aim to provide resources and support the advancement of community work, to break down the elitism and disconnection that has long characterised academia, and to lay claim to educational institutions in the service of community. Not only do we hope the lessons and action items outlined in this chapter will help to better understand how community-campus engagement can support food sovereignty in Canada, we will also continue to incorporate these lessons within our own research design, using them as a springboard for our future work to engage in relationships that put community first.

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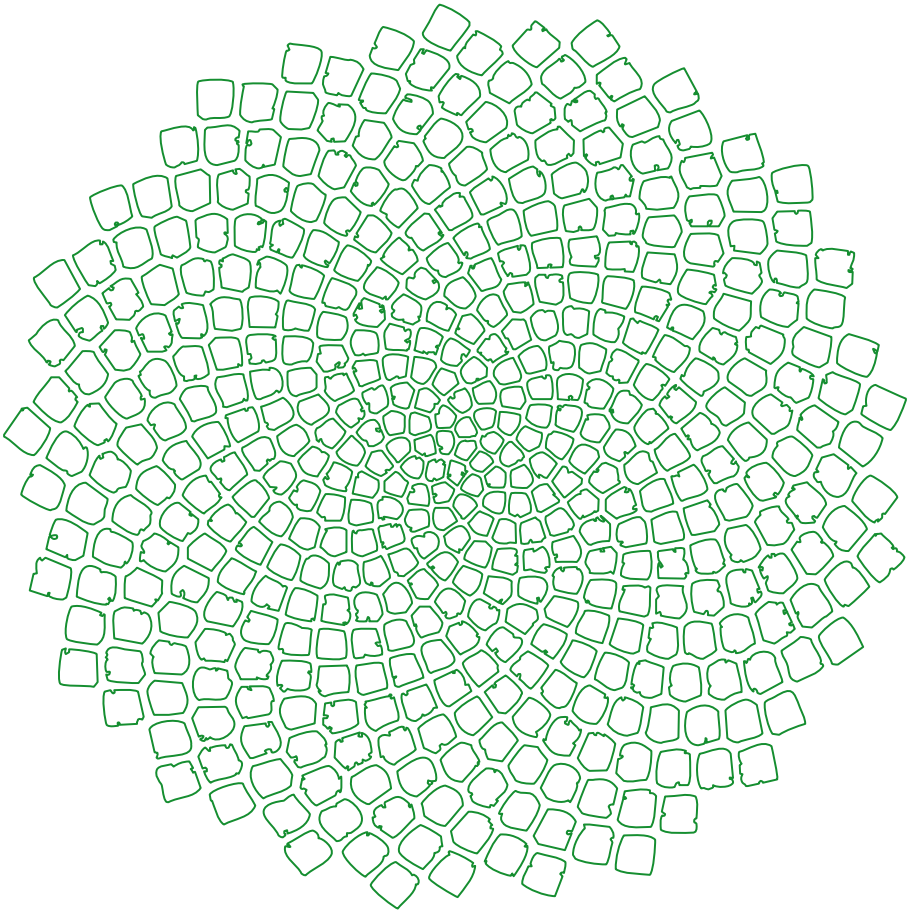
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20



Involving smallholder farmers in participatory research on pollinators in agroecosystems: a case study from Eastern India

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Geographical location: India

Chapter highlights: This chapter is about a participatory project involving researchers, smallholder farmers and government agencies to promote pollination-friendly farming and increase food security and pollinator conservation in India.

Distinct and actionable ideas on participatory techniques are discussed with the aim of closing knowledge gaps within the farming community and enhancing the relationship between pollinators and people.

The changes that came out of the participatory process are evaluated here as problems and success stories, from which lessons and recommendations can be taken by those interested in participatory pollinator conservation in other areas.

Keywords: pollination, India, Centre for Pollination Studies, Odisha, Tripura, pollination-friendly farming.

20.1 Agriculture in India: history and status

India is predominantly an agrarian country and has one of the oldest histories of crop cultivation (Rishi 2009). Due to vast diversity in landscape and climatic conditions both spatially and temporally, India also has one of the most diversified cropping pattern and

crop rotation systems in the world (Zhou *et al.* 2014). However, the country's food security became a major concern within two decades of its independence in 1947. The agricultural production system appeared inadequate to feed the fast-growing population of the country and the cereal import bill started to soar (Dasgupta 1977). In the face of this challenge, the Indian agricultural establishment chose to usher in high external input intensive Green Revolution technologies to improve crop productivity starting in the 1960s (Singh 2000). This relied heavily on extensive use of chemical fertilisers, chemical insecticides and ground water (Chakravarti 1973, Parayil 1992). With liberal availability of state subsidies and credits, vast areas of northern India and later the river basins of south and eastern India came under this type of agriculture (Roy *et al.* 2007). The immediate effect of the Green Revolution was stunning; most of the food grain production increased at least 4-5 fold (Dasgupta 1977) which met the increasing population demand (Dastagiri *et al.* 2014). As a result the country rapidly attained self-sufficiency in food grain production (Singh 2000).

Although it did bring about food grain sufficiency, Green Revolution technology changed the anatomy of the cropping system in India. On the one hand it increased the productivity of most of the dominant crops such as rice, maize, wheat and oilseeds, while on the other hand it led to clearance of natural and semi-natural vegetation in the rural landscape leading to habitat homogenisation (Pingali 2012, Dastagiri *et al.* 2014). Land use patterns also changed significantly during this period (Roy *et al.* 2007). Crop diversity was another casualty as many crop varieties and types disappeared with the inroads made by rice and wheat and the homogenisation of the farming landscape (Singh 2000). Over the years there has also been a sharp decline in the groundwater table (Tilman *et al.* 2002). In summary, the natural health of the ecosystems of the rural hinterlands of India was seriously hit (Shiva 1993, Forster *et al.* 2013).

Critics of the Indian Green Revolution also point out that the benefits of its technologies did not have equitable reach all sections of the farming community (Dastagiri *et al.* 2014). The large and medium-sized landholding farmers cashed in on the newly available technologies and state subsidies along with market access; the status of the millions of smallholder farmers with an average landholding of 1.42 hectares (Chand *et al.* 2011) remained largely unchanged (Paneerselvan *et al.* 2011). The state has realised that the early benefits of the Green Revolution have tapered off and that the country is facing yet another agrarian crisis. The vast majority of smallholder farmers are at their wits end as farming has become a non-profitable enterprise.

There has also been a rising concern about the deleterious effects of this large input of chemicals including harmful insecticides used in Green Revolution agriculture and the impact on the health of the various ecosystem service providers (including the various organisms that provide ecosystem services e.g. pollination, pest control, soil fertility, which are collectively known as ecosystem service providers) (Tilman *et al.* 2001). Large numbers of bees in India are dependent on crops for floral resources

(Batra 1967). Visitation by insect pollinators is crucial for maximising crop yield in pollination- dependent crops. (Sihag 1988). Although pollination biology has been a neglected field in India, especially in the context of vegetable farming systems (Aluri 1990), a recent study has identified that there are indications of pollination service loss in the vegetable farming system in India as well as in various parts of the globe (Basu *et al.* 2011, Basu *et al.* 2015). The use of chemical insecticides and habitat alternation has been attributed to this loss (Sihag 1988). The major brunt of this decline is likely to be borne by smallholder farmers for whom even a slight decrease in crop productivity would have a large impact because of the failure of pollination services. Unfortunately, there has been little effort in the country to promote pollinator-friendly farming.

20.2 Starting the project: goal and objectives

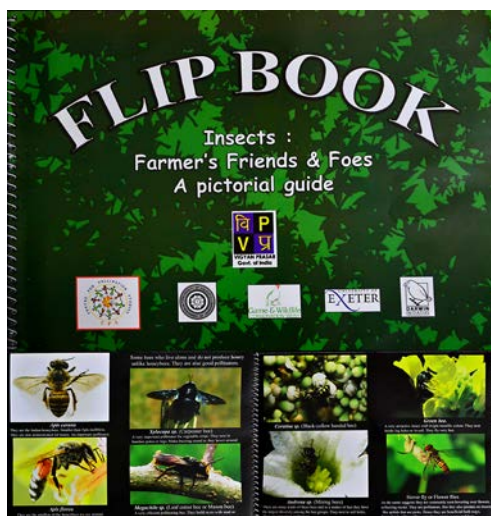
In 2012, there was a joint initiative between the University of Calcutta in India and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust in the UK, to initiate pollinator-friendly farming and awareness in two East Indian states under a Darwin Initiative program. As part of this program a Centre for Pollination Studies (CPS) was established, which is the first of its kind, at least in this part of the globe, to monitor the status of pollinators and act as an information hub for farmers as well as for other researchers working on pollination in India and around the world. The goal of this initiative is to act as a platform for researchers and as a resource for communities to facilitate direct sharing of information. At the inception a series of meetings with stakeholders took place in order to identify the nature and magnitude of the problem of pollination service loss in the two East Indian states. Research and knowledge gaps were identified and future objectives were developed. The objectives were grouped into two categories. The first category comprised the scientific knowledge gaps on the status of pollinators and the extent of service loss, while the second category dealt with knowledge gaps within the farming community regarding the management of pollinators. Our focus in this chapter is this second objective, and its goal of developing suitable and sustainable processes to facilitate the flow of information between academics at the Centre and the farming community with the aim of developing pollinator-friendly farming practice.

20.3 Enhancing the relation between people and pollinators: participatory research ideas

At the inception of this project the goal was to initiate participatory research with scientists, farmers and other boundary partners including local government, to make an impact on pollination-friendly farming. Boundary partners are defined as “those individuals, groups, or organisations with whom the programme interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate opportunities for influence”. At the first stage several meetings were conducted with small farming communities.



The main purpose was to extract their knowledge of pollination and its status. Knowledge gathered from one group was discussed with several other groups to understand the difference in each community's knowledge, and to develop appropriate action plans.



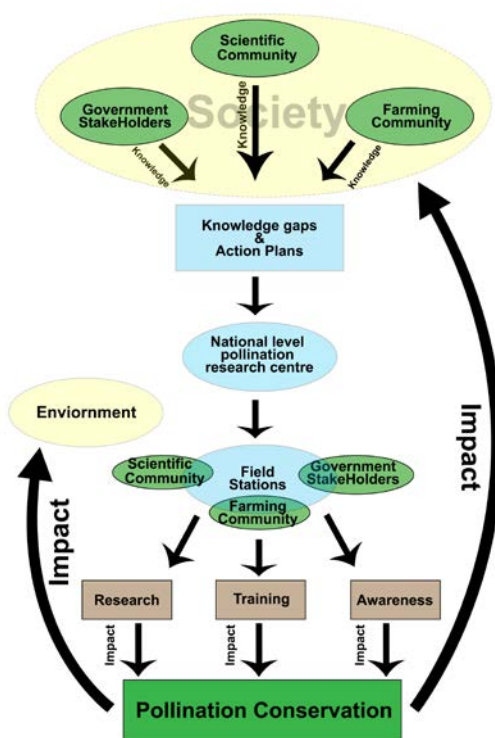
A flip book was designed to see if they could recognise pollinators and to gauge their perception about pollinator population decline. Farmers were also asked to suggest possible ways to increase pollinators on their farms, and invited to participate in different awareness programmes organised by CPS. During the programme farmers were asked to deliver a short talk on pollination and pollinator status.



Farmers from the audience had the opportunity to raise their voices for or against conventional and pollination-friendly farming. Knowledge gathered from the meetings and awareness programmes was discussed with other partners (for example, the Agriculture Department and the Biotechnology Department). Researchers and partners then critically revisualised farmers' perception, and the knowledge gathered from the farming community and partners was transformed into future action plans. Several knowledge gaps were identified from these meetings. The most important one was the lack of understanding among the farmers about pollination. Most of the farmers did not know what pollination was and could not recognise useful and harmful insects. Most of them had no idea that pollination could affect their yield. Therefore before implementing action plans several awareness campaigns were conducted to convey the importance of pollination.



Several books and calendars were designed and distributed among the farmers to give a basic guide on pollination biology. Several meetings were again conducted with the farming community and their voice was then translated into action plans. Each of the action plan components is described below.



National level pollination research centre

A need for a national level pollination research centre was identified at the outset by researchers and partners. The idea was to build a centre to monitor pollinators and their impact on crop yields, gather and maintain data, act as a hub for both researchers and farmers, share data and knowledge, disseminate research outcomes and newly developed management approaches, as well as influencing policymakers. The Centre for Pollination Studies (CPS) was developed at the University of Calcutta and the primary goal of this centre is to monitor long-term trends in bee populations in East India, which was one of the primary research gaps identified at the outset of the project.

Developing a field station for each state

Farmers, boundary partners and researchers identified the need for state-level research stations given the physical distance from the national research centre. The role of the state-level research station was to conduct field level research activities and act as a local information hub for farmers. The idea was to create a local training centre where farmers could directly interact with researchers, take part in research activities and

initiate and encourage pollinator-friendly farming. Two state-level research stations were established in 2012 in Odisha and Tripura and have been operating successfully since then.

Collaboration with boundary partners

We collaborated with different boundary partners in the two states. The idea was to create joint initiatives to make the process more robust and ensure the movement could have more voice. We collaborated with farmers unions and panchayat (local government) committees who directly influence farmers' decisions and also act in the farmers' interests, as well as with the State Agriculture Department and Department of Biotechnology (Tripura) who influence policy making. We directly included our boundary partners in our activities so the farmers could also communicate directly with both researchers and government. As an example we jointly organised training events and Farmer Festivals (see below), combining efforts with the Department of Biotechnology in Tripura.



Training field assistants

To facilitate interaction with the farming community and to create autonomous pollination-friendly farming groups, we selected a few interested and progressive farmers from the community with a basic level of education. We trained them in basic scientific procedures such as pan trap installation, pollinator identification, pest identification and the philosophy behind pollination-friendly farming. We trained three field assistants in Odisha and four field assistants in Tripura. These field assistants

acted as bridges between the researchers and the farming community. They actively participated in all research activities and supported the maintenance of long-term monitoring in the two states. The aim was to engage and train enthusiastic and motivated farmers to carry on the initiative after the project ended.



Involvement of rural advisors

The initial aim had been to identify a single rural advisor in each state to act as a coordinator to provide support to field assistants and to provide a central contact point for farmers. In Tripura this system worked well. However, in Odisha there were internal differences in social structure, landholding capacity and landscape structure. Farmers in different areas had locally specific needs and challenges, which created diverse problems that the field assistants felt ill-equipped to deal with. To address this problem we selected three rural advisors in Odisha from three different areas: an area comprised mainly of forested areas inhabited by tribal populations, all of whom were small and marginal farmers; a second area comprised mainly of intensified farming areas where most of the farmers were non-tribal and had relatively large agricultural land holdings; and a third which was moderately intensified and inhabited by a population of non-tribal smallholders. Our rural advisors were representatives of these three levels of intensification with different social structures. A coordinating advisor was also appointed. The advisors were trained in basic research techniques, especially pan trapping and how to maintain and spread awareness within their own community. Rural advisors communicated directly with the field assistants. The idea was to create a self-sufficient system where field assistants and rural advisors would be able to work and act together after the project ended.



Direct participation of farmers

We also encouraged other farmers to participate directly in the research and make changes in their farming practice during the course of the project. Farmers from

fourteen villages in Odisha participated in this programme. Rural advisors and field assistants trained them in pan trapping and basic identification to enable them to distinguish between pollinators and pests. They maintained their own database for three years and systematically sent collected samples to the Centre for Pollination Studies to contribute to long-term monitoring. We hoped to generate interest and convey messages among the farmers allowing them to maintain healthy pollinator populations autonomously and for their own benefit.

Farmer festivals

The Centre for Pollination Studies actively engaged in an awareness campaign by organising farmer festivals. These varied in size from 70 to 200 attendees and took place at least once a year in each state. The aim was to generate large-scale awareness among farmers, as well as among non-farming citizens (such as school children and local officials). Other organisations working in different areas of sustainable farming were also invited. The events acted as a hub where farmers from different regions and communities were able to interact, share knowledge and receive training and provided an opportunity to extend the reach of the project.



Bee box distribution

The Centre for Pollination Studies encouraged and facilitated the involvement of interested farmers who wanted to improve pollination services on their farms but were unable to due to their poverty level. The first initiative was the distribution of bee boxes (managed honeybee colonies). Bee boxes were distributed to 60 farmers in

Tripura and 15 farmers in Odisha with training and ongoing support. The idea was to encourage a nucleus of smallholder farmers who in turn would encourage the wider farming community by passing on their experiences. The farmers responded positively to this initiative, while many reported that they felt that having bee boxes in their fields had benefited them by increased yield.



Video 20 A farmer in Tripura sharing her beekeeping experience. https://youtu.be/_Hei-I7TYFw



Video 20.2. A farmer sharing his experience of beekeeping. https://youtu.be/QOzBI_BddgY



Video 20.3. A farmer sharing his experience of beekeeping. <https://youtu.be/RGe5yCyHfsc>

20.4 What changed?

Change is scale dependent. Our aim was to make an impact on a small scale in the short-term with the long-term aim of increasing the impact on a large scale via dissemination through local and national actors. At the outset, few farmers were aware of the critical role of pollination in crop production and were more concerned about other aspects of farming such as pest management or soil fertility. Through the project process farmers became increasingly aware and approached the rural advisors and other project staff for knowledge inputs, as well as taking part in the participatory research.



The project directly or indirectly motivated several thousands of farmers (a figure that was revealed during an appreciative enquiry process in the two states). The greatest success was to initiate community participation and make it sustainable. The farmers continue to experiment with ways of increasing pollination services on their land. Another positive outcome has been the 'voice' that farmers found, independently of the project staff. Through to the end of the appreciative enquiry process we aimed to understand the extent of knowledge-sharing among farming communities regarding pollinator-friendly farming. Farmers in Odisha independently approached the State Agriculture Department for pheromone traps and sticky traps for pest management so that they could reduce the amount of pesticide they use and thereby protect pollinating insects. In addition, farmers involved in participatory research activities felt empowered as they were better informed about pollinator-friendly farming. Insect specimens systematically collected by the farmers are now preserved in the Centre for Pollination Studies' insect repository, which is an inspiring legacy for participatory research. Additional positive impacts include the following:

- In Tripura 450 farmers have been in touch with the field assistants to ask for information about pollinators and on sustainable agriculture.
- Farmers in both Odisha and Tripura have been using mustard and other flowers as reservoir crop for pollinating insects and trap crops for pests.
- Farmers in Odisha reported that since adopting new farming practices as advised by the Centre for Pollination Studies there has been at least 10% increase in yield.
- Farmers report feeling healthier after reducing pesticide use.

20.5 Transformation through time: a need for monitoring long-term transformative changes

What we started was transformative participatory action. The strength of this action relies on knowledge flow within farming communities through peer-to-peer learning. This change is time consuming and its true success is difficult to assess in a three-year project tenure. This is a challenge for many short-term projects, which generally underestimate what is needed to bring about long-term changes. We underline the importance of monitoring long-term transformative changes and question the value of the short-term approaches favoured by governments and agencies.

20.6 Lessons learned and recommendations

The whole process was a huge co-learning experience. Some of the key recommendations that emerged are:

- Awareness building and implementation of pollinator-friendly farming practice is only possible through sustained participatory engagement with the farming community and cannot be carried out in a top-down fashion.

- The process brought increased respect from government agencies and local community leaders for those farmers involved.
- Spending time together as a team of researchers, assistants, advisors and farmers was key to the success of this project.

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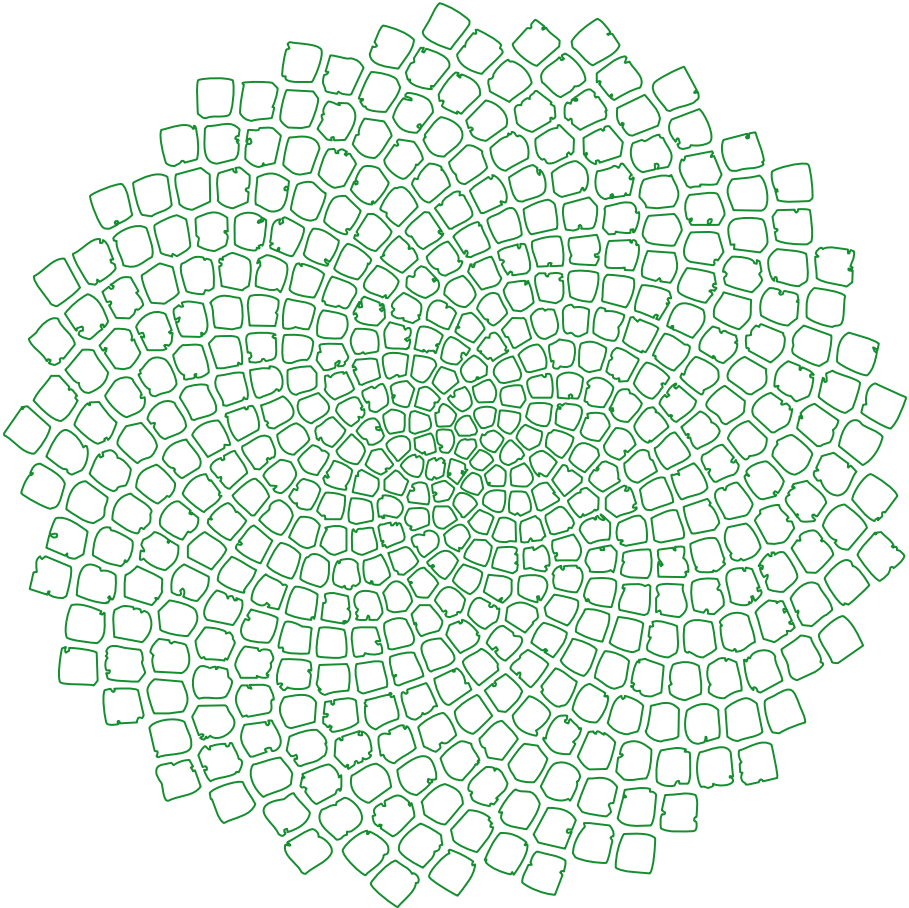
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21



Reclaiming the plots: struggles and strategies from London's Community Food Growers Network

Christabel Buchanan, Rob Logan and Marina Chang

Geographical location: London, UK

Chapter highlights: This chapter discusses strategies for accessing and retaining land used by the London Community Food Growers Network (CFGN) with the goal of reclaiming parts of the city for food production and community space.

Through a process of critical co-reflection between academics and members of CFGN, the strategies were collated and analysed against the backdrop of the concentration of global capital in the city of London.

The chapter concludes that one of the challenges ahead for the movement is how to build collective capacity to deal with struggles of land issues more effectively and collaboratively.

Keywords: urban agriculture, community food production, access to land, gentrification, accumulation by dispossession, London, co-learning.

21.1 Introduction

A global food crisis is upon us. While the whole food system needs change, urban agriculture has been seen as a critical pathway to transform our food system (Biel 2013). This chapter was written through a process of critical collective reflection in an attempt to understand how to reclaim the city as a food productive space within the context of the global capitalist regime. London is the focus of this chapter as it

is a major site of neoliberal activity: capital flows and accumulation of wealth and property are at an all-time high.

London is also the home of the Community Food Growers Network (CFGN), a network of diverse urban agriculture initiatives stretching across the city. London is in a unique and contradictory position: it fiercely promotes the global value chain while also being a site of grassroots attempts to drive sustainability and democratic control at a local scale. In the context of the intensifying pressures towards private land accumulation in the city, what are the strategies for networked urban growers to secure land for collective food production?

We began to write this chapter at a time when land for food production was increasingly threatened by development and gentrification. As such, accessing and maintaining land were central topics for discussion and collective learning among CFGN members. This chapter is thus based on a critical conversation amongst the authors, combined with interviews and conversations with the wider membership of CFGN. At certain points during the reflective writing process, we asked for opinions and thoughts from CFGN members, which you see as quotations. At other moments, we came together as a team of authors to discuss and synthesise the land issue in relation to the network, creating a learning process of our own. This exercise of writing as a mode of academic-community relationship building was a way on the one hand to share insights into CFGN as an example of a social movement network with a broader audience, and on the other hand, through collective learning, reflection and editing, to gain a deeper understanding of the network's past, present, and future.

21.2 The Heygate Estate: a story of exclusion

On Saturday November 17 2012, CFGN held a seasonal gathering at the Heygate Garden in the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle, bringing members of the network together to hear news from projects, respond to calls for support, and plan campaigns and joint events for the coming season. One year later, the Heygate Estate had its final eviction, the estate was empty of residents and there was no access to the community garden. The estate was being 'regenerated', which did not mean improvements for existing residents but rather their replacement by those able to pay more. After the eviction of tenants, Southwark council made no profit from the Heygate Estate sell-off, while Lendlease, the developer, was expected to make £194 million (Steadman 2013). More worryingly, land sales like this one are often carried out without consultation processes and, in the case of the Heygate Estate, appear to be intentionally undemocratic: "The whole thing was decided in documents that the council's planning committee wasn't even allowed to see," (Kitson 2013) it was reported. The Heygate Estate is a particularly clear example of loss of public land to private interests without any semblance of public participation in decision-making.



Figure 21.1. Strata SE1 and the Heygate Estate redevelopment, Elephant & Castle (March 2014)

The Heygate Estate is not the only example of loss of land to private interests. Land in London is rapidly being snatched up by property developers as a highly profitable asset and, especially given the instability of the growth-based global economy, is considered safer than many other investments (Aldridge 2014). As one of the original global sites of land accumulation in the form of enclosures (Hari 2005), London has become a haven for the super-rich, resulting in soaring rents and growing inequality (Massey 2007, p.18).

Local councils have in part been complicit in this trend. Alongside the sell-off of council houses and land, councils have given in to corporate pressures to prioritise profitable land sales over local residents' needs. For example, Haringey Council made multiple concessions for the multi-million pound football club, Tottenham Hotspur, which allowed the building of its new stadium to wipe out local businesses (Mohamed 2013), knock down whole estates and drive out some of the poorest people in the UK from their communities (Haringey Housing Action Group 2013), without guaranteeing that 'affordable' homes are included in the final regeneration plans, as initially promised by the club (Conn 2013). The initial promise of building of affordable housing was 'deleted' by the council since it was argued that it would "have a negative impact on the viability of the scheme" (Haringey Council 2012). Affordable houses, at 80% of the market value, are still unaffordable for most Londoners (Foster 2015), demonstrating the huge extent of gentrification and exclusion in the capital city.



Figure 21.2. Heygate estate pre-demolition (March 2014)

All over London, ‘redevelopment projects’ are underway. Over the past few years, a number of CFGN members including Friends of Tottenham Marshes Permaculture Garden in Tottenham, 3D Groundation in Brixton and the Heygate Garden in Elephant and Castle, were all forced to close down through processes of gentrification. Many CFGN member projects facilitate growing practices and the development of garden spaces in council estates. The rapid gentrification of neighbourhoods and displacement of working class communities is now being experienced, to varying degrees, across the entire network.

21.3 Securing land and CFGN, but for how long?

“We need to go forward, not back, to the land ... The recent trend in North London for the provision of short-life ‘plots’ constructed of readily mobile building sacks or skips is, in many ways, to be welcomed: but it also epitomises an approach that casts community food growing as a disposable event that can temporarily fill a space in transition, not a permanent right to relate long-term to the earth under our feet ... CFPs (community food projects) would greatly benefit from better access to better land, and improvements in entitlement to that land: for a CFP movement to grow, these are prerequisites ... A more land-conscious CFP movement would confirm it as a counter-culture ... Questioning the current distribution of land is questioning the fundamental forces that underpin and reproduce a society driven by profit not need” (Ru, Organiclea).

Since its inception in 2010, access to land has been a major area of focus in the aims and practice of CFGN. The democratically created manifesto states, “We exist to ... create and control our own food systems by reclaiming enclosed land for common use” (CFGN 2010).

The terms “reclaim” and “enclosed” place the intention to access land within a political discourse related to the history of the enclosures in the UK, to make land for common/public use rather than private. The statement also shows that the network holds the creation of “our own food systems” to be inextricably linked to the reclaiming of enclosed land, as an entirely essential strategy to “increase community food growing activity” (CFGN 2010) from the outset. As a continuation of land enclosures, the buying up of land for private interests is acknowledged by the network as a current threat to sustainable food production. Simply put, without access to land, the network would not have the foundation to achieve its visions and goals.

Land access has been a recurring theme in CFGN and indeed has become more salient as pressures to develop land in London have increased. On February 4 2013 CFGN ran an event titled ‘How we got our patch of land’, inviting Organiclea, Grow Heathrow, Land Matters, and the Community Land Advisory Service to share their diverse experiences of gaining access to land, whether through borough council tenureship, squatting, purchase, or renting from landowners. The event aimed to raise the issue of land access as a fundamental necessity for community food growing in London. During the creation of the London Community Food Map (CFGN 2015) in 2014-2015, community food projects were asked to share their key needs. The most common answer was the need to secure longer-term tenureship or control of land: the majority of the projects had, and still have, short-term contracts with the proprietor, if a contract exists at all.

21.4 CFGN's strategies for land access

At this time of austerity where public spending and grants are decreasing, CFGN has been thinking about strategies to gain and keep land. In parallel with these conversations, our team of authors drew together reflections and stories based on successes or struggles by members of the network.

Networking between food growing initiatives

The Granville Community Kitchen, a member of CFGN in North West London, has until now had an informal arrangement that gave access to a small piece of land and a community centre for cooking classes, sharing days and food assemblies. Due to huge cuts being made in council services, community projects are losing such venues, along with council staff members who are sympathetic to their project aims. Because of this, Dee Woods from Granville Community Kitchen is concerned about the future of their growing project, since “Brent [council] is getting rid of the youth service so they will get rid of the manager too.” This case shows the difficulties in retaining land in an era of austerity, where organisations and services that cater to social needs are experiencing huge cuts. David Harvey (2014: 58) sees this as part of the new form of “political economy of outright dispossession” through what he describes as a combination of aggressive austerity politics and further land accumulation. One of the

benefits of the network, Dee says, is to have support from other CFGN members in difficult times like these. At the CFGN Autumn gathering in November 2015, the most popular proposal for the network's activities was to back the Granville Community Kitchen in their struggle to protect their project which is under threat. Network members strongly articulate their commitment to defending existing community spaces, in this case by concentrating resources and campaign efforts on one land struggle in London. Follow the update on the campaign on Granville Community Kitchen's website: <https://granvillecommunitykitchen.wordpress.com/>



Figure 21.3. Granville Community Kitchen

Grow Heathrow was a founding member of CFGN and has squatted on land since 2010. Greenhouses permanently occupy the community space and garden in the village of Sipson, which is under threat from Heathrow's plans for a third runway. Grow Heathrow is an interesting case as occupations of land and buildings are rare in London since squatting in residential buildings became a criminal act in September 2012 (UK Government 2012), made more difficult by the rise of precariously-housed property guardians (Wallis 2013), and derelict spaces being increasingly developed by investors and speculators. As CFGN's only member on squatted land, the network has supported Grow Heathrow through years of court cases and eviction threats by sharing gardening expertise, statements of support, publicity and presence on days of eviction. Grow Heathrow's successful form of direct action in reclaiming enclosed land has been a way for CFGN to undertake an age-old tactic of land occupation which brings a dynamic dimension to the network's strategy around land ownership, and has built relationships with pro-landsquatting networks such as Reclaim the Fields.

Developing a good relationship with local authorities

Because of the limited available land in London, community gardens are squeezed into small plots of disused land which are brought to life through common use

(McGuirk 2015). Short leases and insecure land arrangements are highly damaging to community food production in terms of accessing funding, building strong community relationships, and investing in long-term soil rejuvenation and health. The experience of CFGN shows that building a good relationship with local authorities is essential to sustainability and future opportunities to scale up. For example, Organiclea has secured a long-term lease with Waltham Forest council. Working in estates across several boroughs, they are better able to access and sustain growing spaces. In another example, Living Under One Sun in Tottenham have increased the size of their community garden fourfold since they began in 2011 after showing how they were being effective stewards of land and building good working relationships with the Lee Valley Authority.

Organiclea is one of several larger projects in the network that exist on the fringes of London. The greater availability of land in the periurban space is an obvious advantage for food growers, yet an imminent concern is that, as people are displaced from their homes through gentrification in inner London, land values on the outskirts will rise, increasing the risk of food growing land being developed and turned over to investors. This raises the question of how autonomy can be secured at the community level whilst at the city and national level pressures are increasingly forcing an agenda that is in direct opposition to grassroots initiatives. Experience tells us that local and city-wide planning directives and socioeconomic trends must be engaged with and understood by community groups, yet as Dee says, currently, "A lot of community groups lack knowledge and training about legislation and policy and how to approach the local authority, to how to speak to them." This fact also points to the need to build links between communities across the city, not just between community gardens but also with other movements for change, in order to form an alliance to face the challenges together.

Forging broader alliances outside of the network

In London, alliances are already forming around the issue of land. CFGN has worked with the Radical Housing Network to organise the first ever demonstrations against the world's largest property fair, MIPIM, attended by nearly 20,000 investors, developers, local authorities, and banks, and linked to undemocratic deals of public land being sold off to private developers, as was the case with the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle (Radical Housing Network 2016). The demonstration on March 6 2014 was largely created by housing groups from around London and focused on housing justice in relation to rising rents and gentrification (Radical Housing Network 2014). CFGN built relationships with housing campaigns, added to the agenda the issue of land access for food growing, and now make up a broader coalition in this new political movement (Lewisham Green Party 2014). This has been an important union, so that housing and food production demands are able to negotiate and strategise around land access together, rather than competing directly with one another.



Figure 21.4. Londoners tell Boris 'Our City is Not for Sale' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ombli_Indeo



Figure 21.5. 'London not for sale' demonstration outside London City Hall (March 2014)

The 'No to MIPIM' coalition has had three further mobilisations since March 2014. Discourse has expanded to link the housing crisis in the UK to land ownership and the

relationships between councils and developers, and to discuss how workers, residents, public service campaigners and food-growers can mobilise collectively. In partnership with Radical Housing Network, CFGN co-organised a workshop addressing land inequality, mapping out land, access, ownership and management at the UK Food Sovereignty Gathering in October 2015. Long-term strategies are now being sought to challenge unjust land ownership in the UK linked to vast economic inequality and lack of access to basic human needs. CFGN, the Radical Housing Network, New Economics Foundation, Shared Assets, Landworkers' Alliance, Three Acres and a Cow, and Just Space worked together to organise the 'Land, for what?' conference in November 2016 to increase land literacy, network between different sectors, and raise questions to launch a twenty-first century land reform movement.

Proposing an alternative London Plan

"Land is important not only to grow, but to explore, to play and simply to be. Getting more land should always be a priority [for community food growing initiatives]. In Tottenham there are people from all over: it is bringing elders from different nationalities who are used to working the land. I feel we are lucky to have these people in the community. Lots of volunteers will do their thing and share and learn from one another. You can see the message about using the land to grow starts from when people are children" (Sandy, Living Under One Sun).

CFGN has advocated that the Greater London Authority and borough councils recognise the multiple benefits of community food growing including providing access to green space, job creation, training, mental health support, enhancing community relationships and increasing biodiversity. Based on these multifunctional benefits, CFGN argues that councils should provide land and resources to support existing and additional community food growing projects. This approach is strengthened by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (Milan Food Policy 2015), signed by city mayors and government representatives across the world, including London, to commit to municipal and community level urban food policy making which engages all sectors of the food system in its formulation and implementation, including civil society and small-scale producers. This pact adopts an approach that is "comprehensive, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional" and takes into consideration these multiple benefiting factors of urban food production.

Since Spring 2015, CFGN has become involved in shaping the food production section of Just Space's Community-Led London Plan which is the Greater London Authority (GLA) policy to shape London planning until 2036 (Mayor of London 2016). Just Space is a network of local and London-wide metropolitan groups campaigning on planning issues such as housing, transport, services, environment, rights of minorities, working class and low-income groups. Activists and groups support each other in influencing formal plans and policies at scales ranging from metropolitan through municipal to local.

The food production section of the London Plan proposals encompass a strategy for mutually supportive relationships between borough councils and community food projects to be replicated borough by borough across London to increase community food production and related activities. This is already in action on a small scale in the case of Organiclea's FarmStart programme. A CFGN member and workers' co-operative, Organiclea supports food growers to find land to set up food production sites. The programme expands food production and access to fresh, healthy foods in London, whilst enabling new relationships with borough councils.



Figure 21.6. Organiclea Hawkwood nurseries

This FarmStart programme also links to another feature of planning in relation to food production. It proposes that the GLA and established food production enterprises identify food production sites on GLA-owned land for new entrants in the sector, giving examples of successful economic and social models through existing relationships between food projects and councils, such as Organiclea. This strategy intends to include organisations working in the day-to-day running of food production enterprises as a part of citywide planning processes.

This evidence and these issues have been developed as successful case studies bringing together many CFGN strategies around land to highlight social, economic and environmental benefits of community food and access to healthy food. In collaboration with the Just Space London Plan launched at City Hall in February 2016, CFGN has proposed policy recommendations to influence councils and empower community food project partnerships to replicate their efforts to increase access to land and

resources. CFGN sent out a petition calling on mayoral candidates in March 2016 to commit to including policies in their plans for London and implement the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (Milan Food Policy 2015). A final version of an alternative London Plan and related action plans are underway, and will be presented to Sadiq Khan, the newly elected London Mayor.

21.5 Some conclusions

“Land is the element, par excellence, which connects people to a sense of sovereignty in their lives. Free access to it and the ‘capital’ associated with it, gives people a sense of control over their life purpose, as individuals, and a collective sense of purpose as communities ... As symbolic of our role and part in the circle of life, ... it becomes a mechanism to re-root our nature into what is emblematic of our source of power and autonomy ... Each man and each woman deserves to be responsible for a piece of land in right relationship with themselves and each other in a communal sharing of the one Earth we all inhabit” (Mama D, Community Centred Knowledge).

Everywhere there are examples of land acting as the motivating force for strengthening community and triggering a whole spectrum of food-related activism, from land occupations to campaigns against development projects, putting forward progressive urban plans or forming collective ownership agreements. When communities are guaranteed access to land they are able to create sustainable alternatives to commodification and to the built environment; when this is threatened so is the community that inhabits the space and their process of knowledge production. There is a lot at stake.

London has reached a critical point at which land value has increased beyond most people's means. While solutions to food insecurity are appearing quite literally on the ground, with local initiatives re-embedding food growing in the local community, the development of CFGN as a network shows the necessity of linking up with other initiatives to reject the privatisation of land. This chapter gives expression to voices of a broadening movement of food growers and land activists and the strategies and tactics they are using to gain political and social agency in the context of harsh structural conditions. These voices are part of the fight against hegemonic trends of global capital, dwindling support from the public sector and the continual hollowing out of local authority power. Together CFGN members are directly tackling the barriers to food growing in London, principally the limited access to land and the instability of land tenure arrangements for food growers in the city. Affordable housing and long-term food growing spaces are facing intense pressure from the push for more unaffordable new developments across London; speculation is at an all-time high. This common struggle between those interested in the right to housing and the right to grow food has created opportunities for CFGN to form alliances beyond their network of food growers.



Figure 21.7. Grow Heathrow resist eviction in Sipson (August 2014)

As the authors reflected together on the evolution of CFGN's land struggles, and contextualised this in relation to the private accumulation of land, we observed that local grassroots food initiatives are finding strength and resistive power by expanding over larger physical and political scales by collaborating with other campaigns concerned with dispossession and gentrification. Now, through their contribution to political platforms with Just Space and the mayoral campaign, food initiatives are gaining influence on multiple levels: grassroots, cross-network, between networks and at a policy level, strengthening their struggles to save single initiatives while at the same time laying the foundations for a city oriented towards food production in the future. As a result of their involvement in broader movements, debates on land issues have been opened up; a key debate being the knowledge and skills needed to increase agroecological productivity, livelihoods and local food economy within the current capitalist political economy of London. One of the challenges ahead for the movement is how to build collective capacity to deal with struggles of land issues more effectively and collaboratively, whilst carving out more space for food production within the city.

We hope that with the publishing of this chapter, more network members and community food growers elsewhere will be able to learn about the experience of networking from CFGN and join in the conversations and struggles about land issues for food producers.

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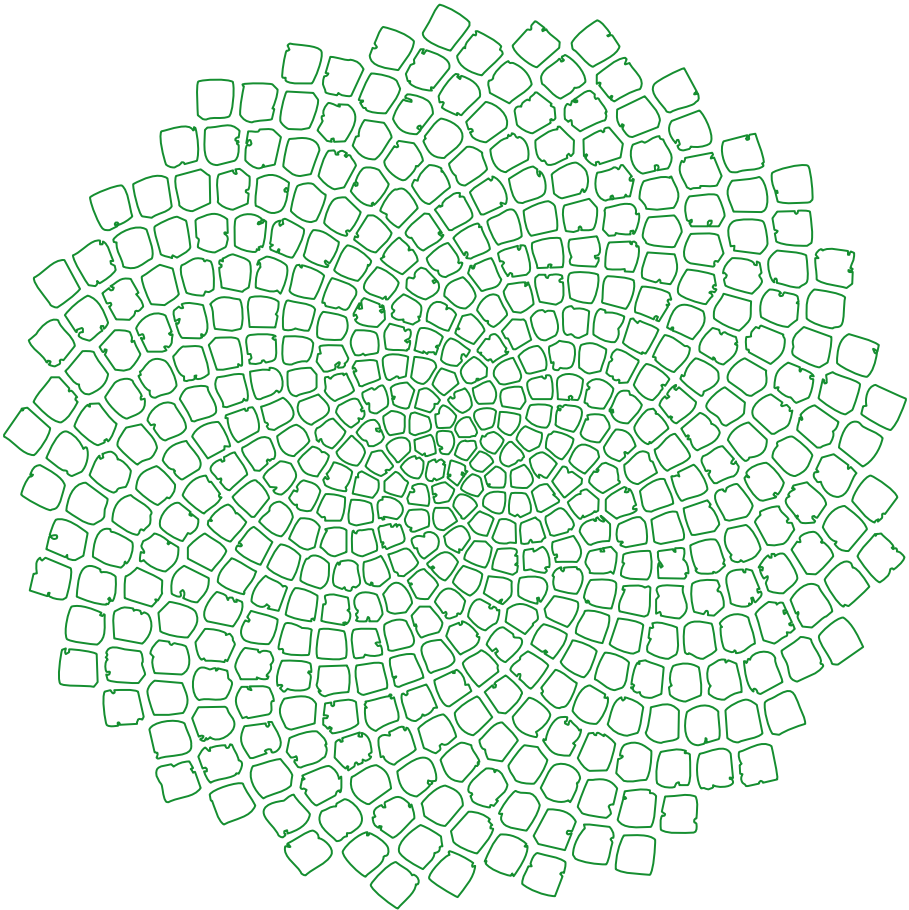
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22



Urban and rural women building economic solidarity between the city and the countryside: a political agroecological approach to food security

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Geographical location: Cali, Colombia

Chapter highlights: This chapter examines how the authors, as urban and rural women in Colombia, worked together to create links between the city and the countryside by improving production and marketing techniques and using conscious consumption of agroecological products as a food security strategy.

It looks at how we challenged conventional research methods that were found to have no relationship with what is happening at community level and used to produce statistics that undermined local people.

It describes a gendered economic rights approach focusing on elements needed to ensure that human rights and cooperation are a priority in the development context.

The chapter includes critical reflection on the participatory action research process and how it could facilitate the participation and inclusion of women in the Colombian peace process.

Keywords: Urban women, rural women, partnership, conscious consumption, food security, agroecological, C Factor, participatory action research, mapping, Colombia, solidarity.

22.1 Introduction

“The C Factor means that the formation of a group, association or community which operates on the basis of cooperation and coordination provides a range of benefits to each participant and increases the profits and efficiency of the economic unit as a whole, through a series of economies of scale, economies of association and positive externalities related to joint and community action.” Luis Razeto Migliaro (1998: 52)

Our women-led project, known as REDMUCEM (*Red de Mujeres Colombianas Creadoras de Empresas*, or the Network of Colombian Women Creating Social Enterprises), aims to increase political and economic solidarity among Colombian women through selling fresh, processed, artisanal and craft products in conversion to agroecology. It has influenced the development of public policy relating to women in the municipality of Cali and the department of the Cauca Valley. It works by supporting the development of small-scale peasant farmers (*campesinos*) and producers (both men and women), and contributes to food sovereignty, autonomy, and food and nutritional security in the area. By doing so, it constitutes a process of resistance to policies and laws that promote the national and multinational agrochemical industry. Within REDMUCEM, we call this process ‘linking rural and urban women’. Important underpinnings of our work with women include Latin American theoretical concepts such as a new theory of economics based on the ‘C Factor’, and participatory action research (PAR) as an ongoing way of learning through practice.

The authors are the co-founders of Redmucem. We are women from the grassroots with a history of participation in social, artistic, community and political organisations. Our work is based on solidarity, human rights approaches and a gendered perspective.

22.2 General context

The Cauca Valley in Colombia, with its capital Cali, has a population of 2,040,000. It covers an area of 22,195 km², and is known for its large expanses of land dedicated to sugarcane monoculture for the national market and neighbouring countries. Cali is a city of seven rivers, six of which are taken care of by the rural population. These provide the city with drinking water, along with the bigger River Cauca which crosses the entire department.

Rural Santiago de Cali comprises fifteen districts (*corregimientos*). It produces coffee, aromatic herbs, plantain, onions, tropical fruit (bananas, avocados, oranges, lemons) and vegetables. Hens, chickens, rabbits, pigs, cows and horses are kept, and crops are grown in small quantities to cover the needs of the districts using regional seeds. The campesino population of rural Cali resists efforts by the state to bring in laws to sell water sources and the rights to local minerals to multinational companies as that will end agroecological production by peasant farmers (Cardenas Motta 2007).

As a nature reserve and national park, the area does not have the capacity to provide food for the city; this is brought in from the north of the department and from the neighbouring department.

The Colombian political context is complex. Women make up the majority of victims of the war crimes perpetrated by the state and illegal armies (ABColombia 2013). Colombia's four-year peace process in Havana, Cuba, between the government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) is currently going through some tough times. This peace process has been supported by many international organisations and has been enriched by the participation of several of the country's political and civil society sectors where the victims' voices have been heard. After the initial negotiations which mainly involved men, congress was asked that women should be in these discussions. It was a struggle but women representatives were able to influence the final agreement, and there was great participation of women across the country. However, the referendum on the peace agreement was marked by deceptive misrepresentations that concealed the true intentions of those from the Colombian far right regarding impunity (Semana Magazine 2016).

The referendum left us with a bitter taste as we had expected a 'Yes' result in support of the peace agreement. Unfortunately, the 'No' vote won. The 'No' campaign, promoted by traditional far right conservatives represented by wealthy landowners like former president Alvaro Uribe Velez and procurator Alejandro Ordoñez, was particularly effective among dormant forces that had been taken for granted by many: the growing evangelical churches (Cosoy 2016).

It is important to note that areas most affected by the war voted 'Yes' to the peace agreement. Turnout in some regions in favour of the peace agreement was exceptional, notably Choco with 79.76% and Cauca with 67.39% (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil). However, most of the population eligible to vote did not exercise their right, with overall turnout only 37.43%. It was a very close result with 49.78% 'Yes' and 50.21% 'No'. This result leaves more questions than answers, especially for us women at the centre of the conflict.

For many organisations, the peace process has been a great opportunity. Urban women in particular have participated in the Women's Municipal Round Table, which works at a municipal level. Other initiatives include the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres,¹ Mujeres por la Paz (Women for Peace), UN Women and the Departmental Convergence of Women's Organisations. They all aim to deepen understanding of the reality of women, and to use that as a basis for understanding the conflict in Colombia. We have used these processes to share our work and put forward proposals related to the negotiation of conflict resolution, highlighting our project and the work of peasant

1 Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, a coalition of women working for peace in Colombia. The women of 'la Ruta' declare themselves 'pacifist, feminist, and anti-militaristic'. They routinely organise protests and large demonstrations in Colombia against the war and gender-based violence. See more at: <http://www.lawg.org/our-publications/76/162#sthash.xk8Dylm6.dpuf>.

women as a beacon of hope for those who live in the countryside. We hope this will generate new forms of solidarity for campesino initiatives, and that they will provide a response in the post-conflict peace agreement in Colombia.

22.3 What is Redmucem?

The organisation is a non-profit mutual association of women based on solidarity. Founded in March 2009 as a political response to economic problems by women in the city, it seeks to link civil society with governmental bodies, development organisations and women's self-help organisations, with the aim of generating economic development and wellbeing for the members' families. The organisation is legally registered and has a management committee. It facilitates learning through involvement in the organisation as well as training in project design, public policy formulation and design and women's leadership offered through our organisational and individual links with different women's organisations locally, regionally and nationally, including the Women's School of Politics, the Women's Peace School, and Women Weaving Knowledge.

Redmucem has a revolving leadership to enable all members to have the opportunity to develop their potential and increase their political, economic, cultural, environmental and social awareness as grassroots women who can demand their rights and commit themselves to the transformation of our society — or at least add their grain of sand towards building a world of equality and equity of possibilities and opportunities for every man and woman.

Members participate in different events including the Regional Gathering of Producers. To prepare for this event we made links through the Regional Coordination of Agroecological Organisations (*Coordinación Regional de Organizaciones Agroecológicas*, CROAC), we raised awareness through the media, and we coordinated logistics for 200 people through the departmental government of Valle and the municipal government of Cali. This ensured the participation of men and women producers with a great variety of food and countryside products.

Within the network, we have meetings every Monday morning, which highlight our campesino-led approach. As an organisation without premises in the city, the meetings take place in a central location, preferably the public library. On some occasions not all the directors are able to attend, but the meetings go ahead anyway, with the women putting forward ideas that will benefit all, recognising that everyone has something to contribute to the work.

The directors also carry out advocacy work on issues relating to women's rights. This includes finding spaces to sell products, or ongoing awareness-raising about the benefits of consuming products which are in the process of agroecological conversion, or facilitating the sale of agroecological conversion products grown or made by peasant and Indigenous populations.

Redmucem also facilitates visits by urban women to the countryside. These visits highlight the vulnerability of rural women in the face of a lack of opportunities to work, to communicate and to create social enterprises. Lack of income made their situation desperate: without access to transport, they were reliant on selling their products to intermediaries who did not pay a fair price, and they became demotivated. They were also vulnerable to violence, which combined with these other vulnerabilities led to a crisis situation. These visits to the countryside by empowered, politically aware urban women with a gender perspective have led to growing solidarity between rural and urban women. Members of Redmucem have discovered that rural women use agroecological principles for growing, as well as using ancestral knowledge to raise livestock and make processed products that are healthy and valued.

Redmucem has also influenced the implementation of the Women's Public Policy in the municipality of Cali (Santiago de Cali 2010) particularly in terms of Article 3 (Women and the Economy) and Article 9 (Women, land, environment and mobility). After a request by Redmucem, the municipality approved resources to carry out a mapping of women's productive units through a project administrator, working with professional economists and with our organisation as grassroots women who know the area. Our aim was to increase visibility of the needs of rural women producers, transform their reality and ensure their inclusion in future government budgets. We discuss this mapping in more detail below.

22.4 The strengths and weaknesses of mapping rural Santiago de Cali²

In 2011, we were involved in mapping the productive units of rural Cali, and found ourselves faced with economic models and data gathering forms that we felt were inappropriate. We objected to the design, which we felt disguised the economic realities faced by the rural population. The models used by academics and university-based professionals are based on inflexible formats that have no relationship with what is happening at community level, and produce statistics that favour the State. This has dangerous implications for municipal resource allocation, with the rural population being most affected if resources are not allocated to meet their needs.

The mapping looked at 40 productive units in the rural area. Women's participation was found to be significant across these units, producing:

- Prepared foods, such as fried food platters, chutneys, condiments, antipastos, jams, *dulces de leche* (caramel spread), snacks, puddings, biscuits, *desamargados* (decaffeinated citrus sweets), maize products such as *chicha* (maize drink), *arepas* (flat corn bread), *empanadas* (patties), cassava pasties, frozen food, tamales, fruits such as blackberries, tamarillo, maize, beans, butter and meat products.

² For more detail on the mapping and percentages see: <http://redmucem.jimdo.com/> (October 2016)

- Fresh flowers such as orchids and geraniums, handicrafts made of lemon peel, seeds, wood, eucalyptus oil, citronella, plantain, coconut, peach palm fruit, coconut candy (made by Black women in Navarro district).
- Other products include leatherwork, plant-based craftwork, textiles (scarves, shawls, poncho-style *ruanas*), tourism services, bird spotting, restaurants and rest stops.
- Cleaning equipment, Internet and photocopy services are also among the economic activities (in one district only).



Diversity of products sold in the agroecological market: orchids, root vegetables, yogurt, arepas, and medicinal plants.

In rural Cali, women heads of family are involved in most productive units, which are generally made up of between one and four people. There were fewer larger units involving five to nine people, and only a very small percentage of units involving more than 10 people. Women heads of household and women producers predominate in the economy of rural Cali.

Women with productive units in the rural areas of the municipality of Santiago de Cali mostly owned their units, with some renting and a small proportion sharing with other families.

The development opportunities available through the Seed Plan (the Government of Colombia's *Plan Semilla*) included two key components: support to build local capacity to provide seeds for the campesino agricultural economy, and provision of seeds using differentiated strategies for different species, depending on the rate of renewal and multiplication among other factors. We found that most of the productive units surveyed had not received help under the Seed Plan, with only a very small proportion having done so.³ We also found that access to capital was

³ The National Plan for the Conservation and Production of Seeds for Small Farmers is a government initiative to boost production of seeds of 17 key crops, aiming to meet the food needs of families and increase income generation for Colombians. <https://www.minagricultura.gov.co/noticias/Paginas/Gobierno-lanza-Plan-Semilla-para-apoyar-a-peque%C3%B1os-productores-del-campo.aspx>.

extremely difficult, with many women having to use informal loans (from friends, family members, or loans in instalments and from high-interest loan sharks, etc.), some feeling that capital finance is insufficient to acquire materials and equipment, and others feeling that interest rates are too high to take out loans.

Of the 40 productive units surveyed, almost half were too small to be considered micro-businesses, as they involved just one or two women from the community in which the unit was located. About a quarter involved three to six women from the area. A significant number did not involve any women from the area.

The survey asked about the numbers of women employed by each productive unit. We defined 'employment' as having a contract providing legal benefits including: salary in line with the minimum wage agreed nationally with the workers' unions, parafiscal payments (made by the employer to family compensation funds) and health coverage through the Labour Risks Administration (ARL, *Administradora de Riesgos Laborales*), and the Health Promotion Bodies (EPS, *Entidades promotoras de salud*).

Many of the women interviewed said they were 'employees', but this was not 'employment' as we define it above. The smaller productive units involving one to four people create relationships for income generation, rather than 'employment' as defined above.

22.5 Critical reflection

We challenged the standard mapping model used, since it did not enable the community surveyed to participate in the development of the questions. We felt it was a tool only good for government purposes. As grassroots women, our work is based on solidarity, popular education, and an environmental and gender-based approach. We could not stay silent and accept an approach which made a farce of facts and disrespected people — especially women — by applying data based on conventional economics and a misconception around 'employment' of rural women.

This survey was led by economists and used a standardised, rigid model based on neoliberal capitalism and statistical data to create indicators which made invisible the realities of women in rural areas. It is important to note that a team of women from the network participated in the survey, and they were extremely careful to clarify the point about employment with the women surveyed. However it was not possible to change the format, although we were able to improve the questions asked. On completion of the work we presented our analysis and challenged the approach to this task, explaining our position to the municipality. As a result, rural women began to be explicitly taken into account in municipal proposals.

As active participants in the survey, we believe that a different approach is needed, which should be adapted to the realities of the area and focus on human

development, priorities for sustainable local development, solidarity, women's rights and strengthening of production. Academic input should promote and facilitate the links of solidarity which are fundamental to the weaving of countless ways of organising among campesino women, with academia, and with the urban population, to improve crops and their distribution, consumption and marketing.

22.6 Organising to resist the dominant discourse: the campesino markets

The network has made links with organisations such as Oxfam and the National University of Palmira, and with grassroots organisations like the Network of Agroecological Markets of the Northern Valley and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca, with the aim of increasing the sale of products produced by campesino women from the rural areas of Cali and Indigenous women from the Cauca Valley, through setting up two campesino markets in two communes of the city.



Agroecological market planning meeting

Market days are wonderful occasions of community spirit. When the campesinos arrive, community members around the market area help them unload the fresh vegetables and poultry. Together they erect the marquees and organise the products in a colourful display. All of this takes place in a lively atmosphere where people joke and pull each other's legs. People ask about the family back home, how are the children, the husbands and the farm? Relationships and fondness have developed to such an extent that some of the local inhabitants bring breakfast to the stallholders. Members of the local community help sell the products to other consumers, making sure that the right prices are paid and that there is no stealing. It is a true family atmosphere so that the line between producer and consumer starts to become blurred. These relationships of solidarity become relationships of empathy between growers and consumers. We have noticed a rise in the numbers of new conscious consumers

interested in obtaining food directly from the countryside, shortening the chain from primary producer to final consumer.

Markets place the women producers in locations where they can sell their products. Producers participating in the markets keep track of price changes through information they receive from other producers who sell in the city centre. This means that before each market they know the going rates. Before closing, any remaining produce is sold at lower prices which reduces waste, saves the cost of transporting unsold goods back home, and increases motivation and incentives to buy, as well as creating an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. Another practice is to give free samples of the product to new consumers as a way of increasing client numbers.

The ongoing encouragement given to rural women to participate in the campesino markets in urban areas has led them to re-evaluate themselves, their products, their sense of solidarity, and their participation. They have lost their sense of shame at being campesino women, gained pride in their ancestral knowledge, and assigned new meaning to themselves and their products, which has increased their self-esteem and encouraged them to seek out new knowledge.

The markets take place in a context in which the rural population is fighting an uphill battle in a country with high levels of corruption, where the authorities set standards which are not easily reached by the campesino and Indigenous populations, particularly women. They are routinely prevented from accessing economic resources, access to credit and technical assistance. They are also dealing with having been uprooted, thrown off their lands, and displaced. The lack of titles to land is an important factor. In the Cauca Valley, murders, violence, threats, rapes, and teen pregnancy are common, and this hinders the growth and development of agroecological food in the region.

The current model is based on promoting 'rural enterprise' for the production of commercial food crops and biofuels, financed by international technical cooperation. These resources are not used to support the cultivation of food crops. Instead, they are used to support goods and services which are rural in origin, but which involve chains of business people who then make investments and policies that promote free trade treaties. This undermines the production, distribution and consumption of small-scale agroecological foods based on solidarity to support self-reliance, autonomy and the strengthening of the local market through a production structure that can generate basic goods to feed the population and provide for their nutritional and cultural needs.

An example of policies designed by bureaucrats without the participation of *campesinos* that are directly affecting their livelihood can be seen in the new Territorial Land-Use Plan for the city of Cali.⁴ This strategy gave the go-ahead to a new area of urban expansion stretching towards the Hormiguero district near the river Cauca. The Plan

⁴ http://www.cali.gov.co/planeacion/publicaciones/pot__pub

restricts the rural use of the land, and converts it into an urban area — in other words, allocates it for the construction of homes. For the *campesino* population of rural Cali, the biggest threat is losing their land.

Another example of these policies is the case of Andres Felipe Arias, former Minister of Agriculture who handed over money from the agrarian budget through the AIS programme (Secure Agri-Investment, AIS-2011) to rich landowners including TV celebrities, and even paramilitary bosses, to support their private agro-industrial businesses (El Espectador 2014, Restrepo 2014).

22.7 Theoretical underpinnings of our experiences

The C Factor is 'the force, the energy of active solidarity, a force which has a productive effect, and which generates, in businesses where it exists, increases in production and thereby absolutely fulfils all that is required by economics to be regarded as an economic factor'. Luis Razeto Migliaro (1998:33)

Our organisational motto is 'For the economic rights of women and a life free of violence'. From our perspective, based on social action, the Chilean theorist Razeto Migliaro (1998, 1994), a contemporary of Manfred Max Neef (1986), provides a new approach to economics which incorporates the elements needed to ensure that human beings take priority in the development context.

The mapping of productive units found that more than half of those surveyed are paid for piece work based on a percentage of sales but without including the cost of labour. We found that many people join forces, combining efforts to share the work and other productive activities to make best use of their skills and scarce resources, technology, means of production and land, and constantly making collective decisions. It is clear that the rural women's economy has what Razeto Migliaro calls 'the C Factor'.

Understanding how solidarity is built is vital for forging links between the city and the countryside. It is this spirit of solidarity that underpins the relationships of cooperation, collaboration and commensality (eating together) which enable *campesino* women to organise, grow and sell their products, while we as coordinators do what we can to ensure their efforts are rewarded by making strong links with the communities to ensure the markets become an integral part of life and something the local urban population relies on.

Through building solidarity, Redmucem has enabled urban women to support rural women's empowerment by seeking out places in which to hold the markets. Urban women have contributed by volunteering, new leadership, local understanding of how to access rights, and clarity about the importance of recuperating ancestral knowledge. For the urban coordinators, this work has not been rewarded financially

— the reward is seeing the beginning of a transformation of places where Redmucem has a presence. We believe this is a step towards the transformed reality we seek and evidence of positive externalities (when a person or business does not receive all the profits from their activities and enables others — and society in general — to experience benefits without cost).⁵

We see the markets as gathering places that benefit the whole community and create unity and atmosphere in the areas where they take place. In Commune 10, for example, the market takes place in a space that previously was used by young people exclusively as somewhere to use psychoactive substances. This is no longer the case, at least while the market is taking place.

Meanwhile, rural women are raising the profile of the organisation and strengthening it, by taking on the risk of being in the market and paying rent, generating sufficient resources to pay the people who help set up the market stalls. In the market places, we have created atmospheres of solidarity, respect, consideration, harmony and acknowledgement, and progress is being made to recuperate ancestral *campesino* culture and self-respect. This promotes a culture of change in terms of rationality and relationships, and also raises awareness among and influences local leaders to promote the initiative.

For us, the thinking of Orlando Fals Borda is also important. We see ourselves as playing an active role in making transformative connections between the city and the countryside. The food market has traditionally revolved around traders setting up selling-places, or simply reselling to other food businesses without any form of integration with peasants, Indigenous people and consumers. Redmucem actively supports ideas that challenge and resist capitalist business models. We facilitate connections among people allowing conscious participation in deciding how and where markets happen and are organised.

Redmucem is an organisation that is actively involved in researching our local realities as women from rural and city backgrounds. This enables us to be in a constant state of reflection about what affects us collectively, and develop strategies together to challenge patriarchal misogynistic society. Because of this level of engagement by all of us in the organisation, we have been able to develop the *campesino* markets and are involved in changing public policy to bring about change for women. The relationship of doing and reflecting on the doing proposed by Fals Borda (2001) has been key to women's organising, and has become a way of life for many of us committed to social change. For us the best way to think about participatory action research (PAR) is the following:

“Participatory (action) research was then defined as a vivencia necessary for the achievement of progress and democracy, a complex of attitudes and values that would give meaning to our praxis in the field. From this time

5 <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Externalidad>

on, P(A)R had to be seen not only as a research methodology but also as a philosophy of life that would convert its practitioners into a 'thinking feeling person'." Fals Borda (2001:31)

Participatory action research as proposed by Fals Borda places us in a reality in which we are both present and engaged. In PAR terms, we consider that we are in a phase of reflection on our own practice. Writing this paper has helped us to evaluate what we have brought to this context in two sectors in Cali. We are also conscious of the need to gather more systematic information on the markets by developing data collection tools to be used every Saturday to show progress more clearly.

However, in terms of the qualitative aspects of the experience, progress can be seen in a number of ways.

- There is a new population of conscious consumers.
- The population speaks up in favour of the markets to their community leaders.
- People show their support for this approach on social media such as Facebook.
- The lives of the families involved in production have changed for the better.

As a result, there are leaders in these communities who are more aware and who promote the consumption of agroecological products and products in conversion to agroecology. The consumers are now learning about the realities of life in neighbouring areas. Standards of living are improving and ancestral practices are being adopted. The community is increasingly involved in the markets, and solidarity is growing. Peasant farmers – both men and women – offer visits to their farms, and this creates fondness and empathy among people, which in turn leads to mutual learning. In this way, the city and the countryside are becoming more connected through markets in public places within the city.



(left) The market in the Guabal area, Comune 10, Cali. (right) Women from Redmucem in the Gubal market, involved in public policy advocacy work relating to women

The theories advanced by Luis Razeto Migliaro as a solidarity economist and Orlando Fals Borda as a critical sociologist have given us a lens through which to analyse and reflect on our own practice and reality as women seeking change in

our social and political environment. They have allowed us to come together from our different identities and taken steps towards a collective vision of organising to sell agroecological products in the cities as an economic strategy for campesino, Afro-Colombian and indigenous men and women. This project is small, unlike those which have the backing of international technical cooperation through the large NGOs, but it is ours, developed collectively at a grassroots level on the basis of women's realities and our daily fight for a more equal world and for social and environmental justice.

22.8 What the project needs now

Our research has identified the need for a warehouse and permanent shop space, as well as state investment in infrastructure, such as adequate roads and paths, and a laboratory where rural and urban women can improve and process their products. There is a lack of comprehensive public policy to promote solidarity economies, agro-ecology and the peasant family economy, and direct support from international cooperation for projects involving political, economic and social advocacy for work like ours, which starts from the grassroots and not from the perspective of large agribusinesses.

22.9 Lessons learnt: women must get involved

Urban women collaborators learnt that it is very important to be involved in order to know how to claim State resources. The ongoing armed conflict and corruption at every level of the State means that resources that should be allocated to agrarian development are diverted to unscrupulous hands, which do not contribute to the development of the country. We believe it is important to discover what prevents resources reaching the peasant population or producing positive results in rural areas. We have learnt that even documents produced with our participation with the aim of improving the situation of women, are — like those produced by officials — only words if empowered women do not take up positions leading the struggle for our rights.

Feedback from some of the rural women included:

"We have learnt that working in a team is something we have got better at through the markets. We collect the products of other indigenous women and sell them directly here. I grow onions, and every time we harvest we leave two stalks so that we carry on producing ... if things go well, we get five or six stalks." (Nilse Yalanda)

"How to make inputs to improve production, such as organic fertilisers made of the local plant nacedero, tomato leaves, banana peel, cake soap, ash and dandelion; or for tomatoes, using bell pepper, sage, anamu and mullein which is chopped up and fermented and used for spraying." (Rosario Muñoz)

"For spraying and fertilising we go to talks and learn how to improve our products in ways that are not harmful to us or the people who buy them."
(Idalia Medina)

"Team work. We have learnt that the sour grape was being lost, and hear people ask for it and now we use it." (Nilse Yalanda)

We asked what the community liked about the products and the markets:

"The products generally; the direct relationship with men and women farmers, the friendship and affection for people who sell to us. We like the empathy in the relationship. Also I can call them to ask them to put things aside for me." (Alejandro Cortes)

"The friendliness of the stallholders. They are very professional, and we trust each other – the ladies trust me when I don't have quite enough money and they let me pay them the next week." (Amparo Moreno)

"I like that it is close to home, the prices are good, and the stallholders are nice." (Lutaime María Gómez)

"I like the cassava, squash, peas ... everything." (Olga Lucia Yuco)

"The vegetables because they are fresh. Sometimes the prices are different."
(Luisa Fernanda Rivera)

"The fresh produce, and sometimes the prices are better: bananas, chicken, all the herbs last longer. When I store them well they last two weeks before they turn yellow." (Cecilia Fernández)

"I like everything they bring — the fresh vegetables from the countryside. We would like to see more people coming with more products. I have suggested that they bring sliced chicken. It is great for creating employment."
(Patrocinio Mina)

22.10 Recommendations

Through the process of writing this paper, we have discovered practical ways to ensure that urban women support rural women. This has been extremely valuable, firstly for peasant women who today are empowered and recognise their own value, their respect for Pachamama (Mother Earth), their ancestral knowledge, the value of what they cultivate and how they cultivate it, their value to the community, who they are and what they signify in this value chain of healthy and healthful foods.

This project has been significant in terms of care for the environment, the advocacy that takes place every Saturday towards a transformed food culture in the areas where the two markets take place. It is our intention to continue to:

- Encourage more people to believe in these projects through different kinds of advocacy and publicity, such as a megaphone on market day, Facebook, word of mouth, advocacy aimed at government leaders to accept and support the projects.
- Focus on ensuring that products in conversion to agroecology and those which are not agroecological move in that direction to improve the health of the population.
- Focus on autonomy and food sovereignty, and to develop new projects with other women.
- Work in collaboration with academia in promoting agroecological crops and practices.

As we write about our work, we see that our contribution to this process of linking rural and urban women is political influencing work which aims for cultural, economic, environmental and political transformation using the solidarity markets in agroecological conversion. Not only does it improve the lives of the women we have made commitments to, we also see that these women, in the city and other cities of the country, have a significant role to play in post-conflict Colombia.

We realised from the mapping of productive units that such exercises can fail to take into account the realities of the communities surveyed. We therefore conclude that this kind of initiative should come from the community themselves, using grassroots-based participatory methods, and not oppressive formats designed by government or academic institutions.

We have learnt to have a different discourse that distinguishes us from other processes, and through which we are recognised for our insistence and persistence regarding our beliefs about what people are capable of.

Importantly, we have seen at work what Luis Razeto Migliaro calls the C factor in the solidarity economy. Our organisation, Redmucem, is based on solidarity, and we now see the C factor model as a form of development among well-organised women.

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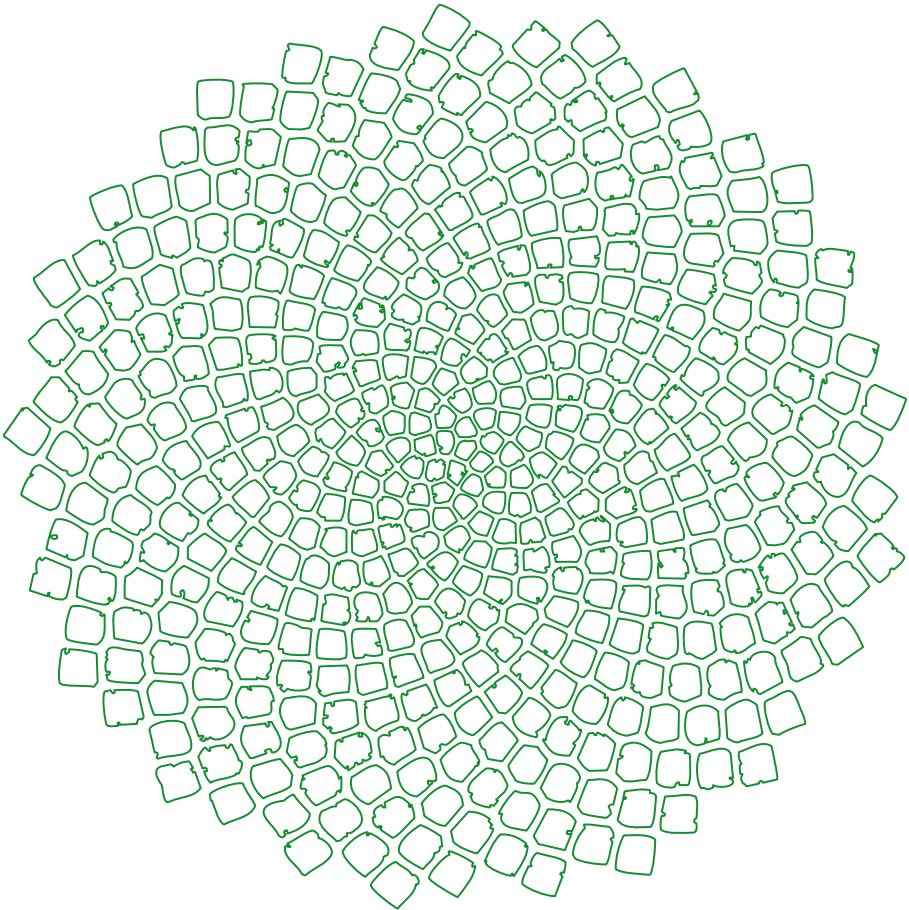
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23



Connecting the dots and closing the loops: a living lab for living well

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Geographical location: London, UK

Chapter highlights: This project presents a case study of the Calthorpe project in central London as a community-based, small-scale, closed-loop system, examining how this approach can contribute to a sustainable food system.

A living lab is an experimental project integrating research, education, public policy, community development and enterprise to build a coherent force for change.

'A living lab for living well' demonstrates the role and potential of a closed-loop system and the possibilities for *buen vivir* (living well) within and beyond the current neoliberal capitalist economy.

Keywords: closed-loop systems, living labs, *buen vivir* (living well), community-university collaboration, academic-activist.

23.1 Introduction

Food is one of the most fundamental parts of our existence, and our relationship with food is reflective of our broader relationships in society. Concerns over health, food quality, social and ecological impacts, and the pressing financial crisis, have led communities to take action to control our food systems. Over the past few years, I have been engaging with numerous community food initiatives in London as a researcher and as a food activist. I have mapped and investigated the current landscape of community food initiatives and their role and potential in developing sustainable food systems in London.

One of the key insights I have gained is that London is like a living laboratory, rich in like-minded people, ideas, resources and opportunities, welcoming all sorts of

experiments. However, isolated attempts by individual projects lack the coherence of a coordinated governing strategy that could be provided at policy level to build towards positive social change. 'Connecting the dots' relates to at least two levels: first, connecting localised food systems (the entire urban food supply chain); and second, connecting with wider urban systems such as water, energy, waste and land. Though some community food initiatives seemed to be satisfied with a purely localised focus, many participants in my research highlighted the urgent need to develop a more comprehensive and systematic mechanism to connect the dots.

As an academic-activist, I take the view that the university plays an important role in helping to form multiple and reciprocal connections with society. Given the diversity of resources, knowledge and networks universities possess, I ask myself, "In what specific ways can universities contribute to designing an integrated system by connecting the dots in order to build a coherent force for change?" In this chapter, I tell the story of such an attempt, 'A living lab for living well' at the Calthorpe Project, King's Cross, in central London, and share some reflections gained at the early stage of its development.

23.2 An urban closed-loop system at the Calthorpe Project

It is a warm June afternoon. Lunchtime. The small 1.2 hectare garden site of the Calthorpe Project, in King's Cross, central London is full of activity. In the open space, a group of mental health patients are thinning the beans, a couple of Asian women are growing vegetable varieties which were common in their hometown, and a community bee-keeping tour is underway in the Wild Garden. You can also see people enjoying a break from the office with a kick-around on the football pitch.

In the community centre, while young children are taking English language sessions, three grey-haired Latin American women are cooking Colombian *arepas* in the kitchen. These *arepas*, along with freshly picked vegetables from the garden, will be served by two young female volunteers at the newly opened Calthorpe Garden Café. At the back of the kitchen, another two volunteers are sorting out donated unsold food from the local supermarket.

Perhaps the busiest area is around the solar panel hut. Here a man is wheeling a food collection trolley towards the 1m³ anaerobic digester recently assembled and installed by a team of community members with supervision from professional engineers. A group of college students are collecting samples of liquid fertiliser produced by the digester, trying not to disturb the woman who is spreading organic waste collected on site, as well as waste from the local areas.

Seven days a week, throughout the year, the Calthorpe Project is always busy. It was initially set up in 1984 when local groups saved the land from a proposed development. The overall aim is to provide a community centre and garden with facilities that enable people to improve their quality of life. It caters for a wide range of different users, with more than 1,500 people attending their programmes, and the

site attracting over 30,000 visitors in a typical year. Regular users of the site originate from countries all over Africa, Latin America and Europe, reflecting the diverse cultural make-up of this London neighbourhood.

However, behind the vibrant scene, like many community organisations in the UK, the Calthorpe Project is facing severe challenges in the face of the changes brought about by the economic crisis that began in 2007. Nearly 10 years on, many community organisations that have traditionally provided grassroots support to the vulnerable are in crisis. The numbers seeking support are increasing, yet the funds to provide this support are drying up in an era of government cutbacks. The Calthorpe Project is facing increased pressures to become more financially self-sufficient.

As a local resident, I have been volunteering at the Calthorpe Project ever since I moved to the neighbourhood when I started my doctoral study. The Calthorpe Project is like a microcosm of London, boasting people, ideas and organisations endeavouring to transform our current unsustainable food system. Witnessing the crisis of the Calthorpe Project, I have been convinced that challenges can be transformed into opportunities. In 2014, one such opportunity appeared: connecting the isolated dots through an organic closed-loop system on-site, which in turn became a great opportunity to bring those lessons learnt from my investigation of the current landscape of community food initiatives in London to a real world example.

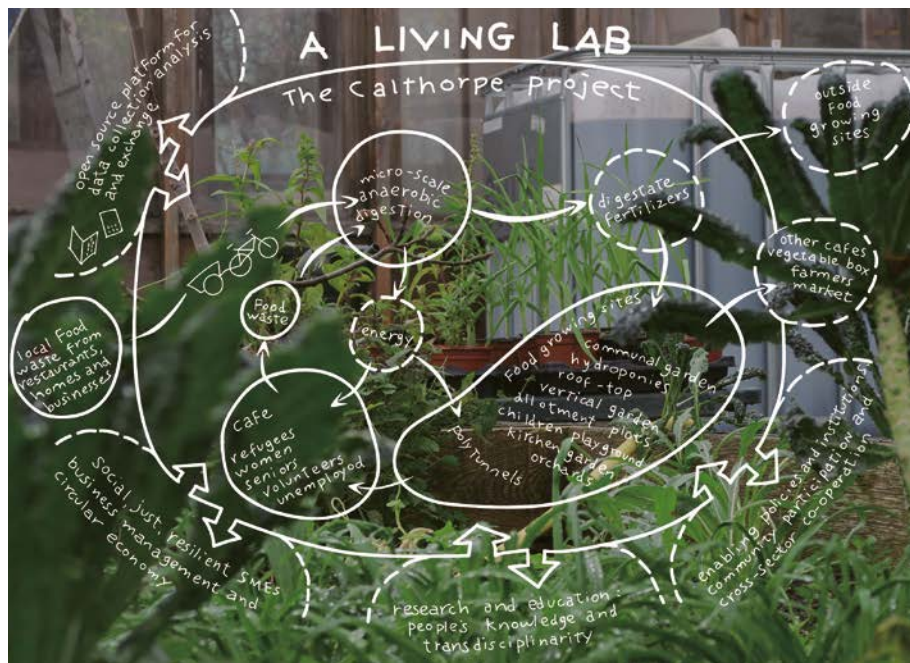
Fortunately, my initial idea to set up a demonstration site of a closed-loop system received immediate support from three other women who are also key protagonists in this project: Louise Gates, the Director of the Calthorpe Project; Mila, an experienced urban food grower and a community chef at Calthorpe Garden Café; and Rokiah, co-founder of a community-based social enterprise, Community by Design, dedicated to the development of micro anaerobic digestion and closed-loop waste-energy-food systems in London. This collaboration itself is another kind of connecting the dots to build a coherent force for change. As Louise Gates said, “The Calthorpe Project must be more entrepreneurial and more of a risk-taker and must seek out like-minded co-operators to have any chance of surviving”. In brief, several important elements have made the Calthorpe Project a unique place to create a closed-loop demonstration site, aspiring towards a thriving and viable model of urban resilience:

- Long-term relationships and mutual trust among existing multi-stakeholders;
- Diverse urban agricultural practices such as communal gardens, individual allotments, wild urban forest, orchards, urban beehives;
- A simple model of a localised food network involving production, distribution (e.g. vegetable box scheme and selling plants), consumption (e.g. community kitchen) and waste composting;
- A prototype linking waste, energy and food systems with installation of a micro-scale anaerobic digester;

- An inclusive communal space, especially for more excluded populations such as children, disabled people, mental health patients, migrant women and elders;
- A well-established learning centre for adult education and volunteering programmes;
- King's Cross itself being a site of connections with rapid and radical urban transformation.

23.3 A living lab for living well

What would be an appropriate approach to create this complex closed-loop system in which multiple initiatives are connected and constantly interact with one another? I proposed applying a living lab approach to respond and adapt to an open-ended development of this urban closed-loop model. While there is no one single definition of living labs, it is generally agreed that a living lab is both a site and an approach to a user-driven innovation built on a real-life environment with the participation and co-creation of users, partners, and other parties (Bergvall-Kareborn *et al.* 2009, Liedtke *et al.* 2012, Niitamo *et al.* 2006, Nyström *et al.* 2014). User communities in this setting are not only viewed as observed subjects but also as a source of creation. It presents a unique blend of technical and localised human culture towards socially innovative ways of engaging with user communities.



A Living Lab: An experimental, community-based, small-scale, closed-loop system at Calthorpe Project, King's Cross, central London

While we are taking the existing understanding of a living lab as a starting point, our living lab reveals some major differences. First, we have identified four distinctive yet interconnected categories that would contribute to the effectiveness of the closed-loop system. These include: (1) enabling policies and institutions through community participation and cross-sector co-operation; (2) research and education via people's knowledge and transdisciplinary work; (3) social, just, resilient small and medium enterprises (SMEs) knowhow through business management and practice of the circular economy; and (4) technological innovation through open source platforms for data collection, analysis and exchange of information and communication technologies.

As an action research approach, our living lab investigates, documents, disseminates and evaluates those innovations derived from complex and dynamic relationships evolving over time on at least two levels: a) with the closed-loop system in and around the Calthorpe Project; and b) between the current landscape of community food initiatives in London and the Calthorpe closed-loop system. I have kept records of the processes, experiences and outcomes of the project based on my own observations, surveys, and interviews. The consolidated documents have been disseminated to the core team members, the management committee at the Calthorpe Project and project partners and participants for feedback via emails. We are planning to organise bi-monthly meetings to allow different stakeholders to exchange ideas face-to-face and to strengthen the connections among them. Thus, this living lab also closes knowledge loops by integrating theory, practice and policy through on-going iterative cycles of action and reflection in a systematic and rigorous manner.

Second, unlike innovations and practical solutions, which are mainly driven by larger-scale industry often involving public-private partnership, we are promoting small-scale, community-based and grassroots innovations with support from universities, collectively developing new social, ecological, economic, intellectual and technological solutions to connect the dots and close the loops at the Calthorpe Project, and making these skills and ideas widely available to other community food initiatives in London.

Rokiah explained the ethos the technological innovation of this living lab as follows:

"Technology can distract unless it's seen as part of an overall vision. Food waste reduction and community benefits must come first. In the urban context, anaerobic digestion and composting are options for unavoidable food waste only. On the other hand, the technology can add a bit of excitement and novelty so can be used as an engagement tool – also working at the small scale makes technology more human ... I don't think single, small-scale systems will solve big problems but once they're up and running, they can be optimised, attract interest and in time, could become widespread enough to make a difference by diverting food waste from landfill and transforming behaviour and perceptions around waste as a resource. Look at computers, mobile phones etc. Over time, they became more compact, easier to use. Now, because these systems are smaller, they can actually spread out quickly

... It's more like a decentralised development strategy. That's the aim with our vision – to establish an open source platform, engage more people and harness skills at the community, university and business level to find better, more replicable solutions for future cities.”

Third, this living lab presents an alternative normative vision to the dominant development narrative. The contemporary Latin American notion of *buen vivir* ('living well') has brought a renewed interest to the debate on alternative development paradigms and a deeper understanding of political, social, economic objectives of community organising around production, consumption and exchange. Rooted in and originating from Indigenous cosmovisions which are holistic rather than reductionist, three key elements are inextricably connected in *buen vivir*: a critique of the existing development paradigm; a comprehensive strategic approach to social change; and the integration of theory and practice (Gudynas 2011, Vanhulst and Beling 2014). Inspired by the notion of *buen vivir* and a collective vision to pursue a good life at the Calthorpe, our living lab calls for significant transformation towards a post-neoliberal global political economy based on human dignity and community solidarity in harmony with nature. As one Argentinian volunteer said at a lunch gathering:

“What is in your heart? Growing, harvesting, cooking and eating food all reminds us that we are connected with the earth and with one another ... we live well ... able to feel, to think, to act and to share ... Connected with our roots and history, we have the present and we have the future. But we have to act now for the future. We have to build that future ... Our life and our community is our laboratory.”

Our living lab, in this sense, is a lab for experimenting and pursuing a good life – not as an inspirational metaphor, but a lived and everyday reality of ordinary people.

From a more personal perspective, the living lab opens up spaces for self-inquiry and reflection. How do different stakeholders feel about this urban changing space? How will the various initiatives impact on the hinterland of King's Cross? Will our project at the Calthorpe Project contribute to the perception or reality of this gentrification? Whose voices are heard and whose not? How can we engage with more community members, especially those more vulnerable and marginalised local residents around King's Cross, and make them also feel the Calthorpe Project can be their home as well? Will our project function as a good example of what is possible in a London currently undergoing social and cultural upheaval in terms of community asset loss and power?

Mila shared her perspective on the living lab:

“We don't have to have all the answers to these issues but that's precisely why it is important this living lab helps create the space for people to participate, to learn and to debate these questions. We should allow people to find their own interest at their own pace. We don't have to promote radical issues, but, instead, we need to try to find ways that helped those issues

become more accessible to more people. Growing food, sharing a good meal together, reducing waste are easy ways to attract people and we can start to show people how different issues, projects and people are already connected and can be better connected."

Moving forward in the spirit of open enquiry, without necessarily having all the answers, takes a leap of faith and a commitment to the process of discovery. Adopting the living lab approach turns a straightforward demonstration of closed-loop principles in action into an exploratory, dynamic journey that engages all players in a fluid, creative process.

23.4 A living lab for living well in action

Our living lab has demonstrated a few examples of a good life by connecting the dots and closing the loops on a modest scale. It is important to note that this notion of a good life is not a philosophical debate, but more like an instinctual and informal expression of quality of life used by the key persons involved in the living lab. The first example is the transformation of the existing community kitchen into a closed-loop café – the Calthorpe Garden Café – providing a focal point for the closed-loop model. More organised, intensive food growing, closely linked with the café menu, would provide a strong focus and good outcomes for volunteers and trainees at the Calthorpe Project. The garden café has used food (vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers) grown in the gardens using fertiliser made from digested food waste, serving healthy food and introducing people to the closed-loop ethos. Biogas will be used in the winter to extend the growing season – especially of vegetables – in the new polytunnel. As Louise commented, "Previously everyone looked after his/her own project separately, this closed-loop model seems to allow everyone to see that their efforts are well connected with one another and the success of the whole system, an experience of virtuous circles."

Stimulated by Mila's idea to invent new recipes based on what is grown in the garden in season, more creative ideas are proposed. A young British college student suggested that the lab should examine and incorporate the needs of a wider range of user groups: *"Wouldn't it be wonderful to see the football players queuing to buy sandwiches tailor-made for them after finishing the game?"* Another Indian grandmother highlights the importance of Indigenous knowledge: *"It's lovely to see youngsters interested in learning those plant stories, their nutritional and medicinal properties, and spiritual connection to people, history and nature."* In addition, different user groups agree to help shape the menu by contributing their 'secret' recipes based on their memories of their cultural identity and heritage. A mother from Eritrea, a recent member of the garden café, echoes this warm sentiment: *"In participating in this garden café, I experienced a renewed sense of inspiration, community and hope that things can change in both individual producer and consumer as well as the entire food system."*

The uniqueness of this garden café has attracted a number of individuals and other enterprises to participate in this initiative. For example, in addition to increased food waste collections, food-growing space will be expanded with more vertical growing along walls and rooftops, and a new area on the old playground may be created. In order to make good use of the organic liquid fertiliser generated from the digester, a new intensive, low-cost hydroponic system will be installed. Further plans have been discussed. For example, it has been discussed that mushrooms could be grown in darker and shadowy areas. Surplus produce (after supplying the needs of the café) could be sold at the local farmers' markets. Pizzas using locally produced heritage flour in support of regional small wheat and grain farmers could be made in the pizza ovens. A catering service would be offered to all group bookings at the Calthorpe Project, which could be extended to local offices and organisations.

The second example is collaboration with universities in the locality. Students from the BA in Product Design at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London were asked to use their design skills to create a clear message about the living lab's closed-loop system and an engaging experience for visitors and regular user groups. Students explored all its physical touch points: the café, food growing areas, and micro-anaerobic digester to optimise its role as an educational resource and inspire community users and visitors to reflect and act on issues around food, waste and sustainability. The process of collaboration has benefited both the student learning experience as well as the Calthorpe living lab project. Students offered a multitude of fresh ideas, many of which seem implementable, for example, a hydroponics pizza lab and bicycle-powered maceration to enhance the anaerobic digestion process. To have young minds applying their creativity to a complex issue, as individuals and in groups, seems to help break it down into manageable pieces, and the diversity of the offerings means we now have developed ideas in many areas which we can take further.

Researchers, both students and staff, from the Development Planning Unit and the Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering at University College London have co-conducted a series of user-led research projects and activity-based educational programmes with the multi-stakeholders involved at the Calthorpe Project. These include:

- Learning first-hand about the organic circular economy, identifying crops and growing methods suitable for using liquid fertiliser, which is one of the two by-products produced by the digester;
- Determining quality/quantity and processing requirements of the liquid fertiliser to achieve growing objectives;
- Working out how to use, store or even trade surplus liquid fertiliser and biogas;
- Researching infrastructure requirements and regulatory issues to facilitate low-cost intensive urban food production;

- Carrying out food growing trials informed by the research findings;
- Engaging with communities, schools, universities and local authorities to communicate this closed-loop waste-energy-food model.

Unlike most research projects in universities in which researchers raise the research questions and control the processes and methods of research, these projects represent a mutual interest and respect among academics and non-academics in sharing knowledge and skills to resolve real world problems. Since its launch, several researchers constructed more extensive research projects building on this work.

More recently, while the core team members have been excited about working with different universities for our living lab, it is hardly surprising that sustaining and widening collaboration still depends on their committed voluntary input, which can be difficult to maintain. Responding to this impetus to give our living lab a regular place in the university curriculum, rather than the current *ad hoc* approach, one particular model has caught my attention: the UK's first 'Faculty on the Factory Floor' at Coventry University. Inspired by this model, we are experimenting with a new initiative called, 'Faculty in the Living Lab', to create closer links between academia and industry and allow students to apply their learning direct to 'live' projects in the community-based, small-scale, closed-loop systems and circular economy. This approach aims to cultivate a younger generation in community-based urban closed-loop systems as an entry point to developing sustainable urban food systems and wider urban systems by connecting the dots and reassembling the existing units into a new system. Not only could this ensure that graduates make an immediate impact when they leave the university but it would also give our living lab an opportunity to access appropriate talents to work on embedded enterprises in the short and long-term.

We are also exploring the possibility of creating a short Continuing Professional Development course focused on the organic circular economy, using the Calthorpe living lab as a real world exemplar. This would be offered to relevant professionals as a means of simultaneously promoting the work and ethos of our living lab, while generating much needed income to help cover management and running costs. Where issues raised might be addressed by the expertise of participating attendees, the training sessions could help uncover unexpected solutions and galvanise collaborative, problem solving discussion across wide-ranging disciplines.

23.5 Some reflections

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, for many community initiatives I investigated in London, whether explicitly or implicitly, food has become a focal point to express their concerns and visions, materially and symbolically, towards a better way of living. A living lab for living well as presented here can be seen as a response to the insights gained from my investigation of the current landscape of community food initiatives

in London. The question at stake is how to create a systematic and coordinated approach towards sustainable food models as well as sustainable cities. While it is too early to assess the outcomes and impacts of our living lab, I would like to share some reflections on my personal involvement in this project.

First, some inherent limitations of many community projects are observed in our living lab. For example, it is not always easy for community groups to maintain a unified vision. For example, while the Calthorpe Garden Café is well appreciated, some question whether this is the best way to make the closed-loop system financially viable by serving high-end customers with a tailor-made menu. It is also challenging to interact with more marginalised people who sometimes prefer to undertake specific tasks given to them rather than getting involved in the development and planning of the living lab. In addition, team dynamics can be negatively influenced by unbalanced distribution of power within less stable organisations. In particular, the transition at the Calthorpe Project from a traditional charity organisation that mainly relies on grants and public funding schemes to a social enterprise that aims to be self-sufficient in financial terms has been difficult. These limitations add extra uncertainty about expected outcomes due to the very nature of such a complex system.

Second, from the feedback I have obtained, our living lab based on community-university collaboration seems to demonstrate an effective yet underexplored pathway in fostering innovative modes of learning and producing new knowledge. Participants have expressed that the living lab helps to promote a more horizontal and interactive knowledge exchange and sharing of experience. It has also facilitated a process that helps participants to build more personal connections with nature and culture and begin to understand the broader issues around sustainable food systems as well as sustainable urban systems.

Third, as an established grassroots organisation, it is not surprising that our living lab at the Calthorpe Project has generated new interests and aspirations involving do-it-yourself approaches (DIY) as a means to pursue a good life, both individually and collectively. DIY or self-help should not be regarded only as a survival strategy. It is also a good way to invite people to think out of box. Taking what is at hand and doing something with it is more important than having what we think we need. Indeed, from what I have observed, many 'innovations' that have emerged are not a breakthrough but a recombination of existing yet hitherto disconnected components. In addition, all those involved seem to become highly aware of the issues around the closed-loop system. This awareness is the first step in transformation.

Finally, while our living lab has achieved some level of success as a demonstration site and an experiment introducing people to an urban closed-loop system, it has not yet developed a viable and self-sufficient social business model for a circular economy. On the one hand, we have explored how to create new forms of collective and community-based social entrepreneurship in the neoliberal contexts that face public sector budget cutbacks, austerity financial policies and severe privatisation. On

the other hand, we have endeavoured to understand and promote other alternative economic models such as wellbeing economics, degrowth economics and solidarity economics that go beyond the neoliberal capitalism. The challenges ahead are of course immense. However, since its launch, we have witnessed a strong appetite from both existing and would-be social entrepreneurs to engage with our living lab to explore how they can play a role in connecting the dots and closing the loops in order to build a coherent force for change towards a long good life for all.

23.6 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Louise Gates, Rokiah Yaman and Mila Campoy for their kind support and encouragement to produce this chapter. Also, special thanks go to Colin Anderson, Mama D, Kaori O'Connor and Nicola Baird for their useful suggestions about how to improve both the content and presentation of this chapter.

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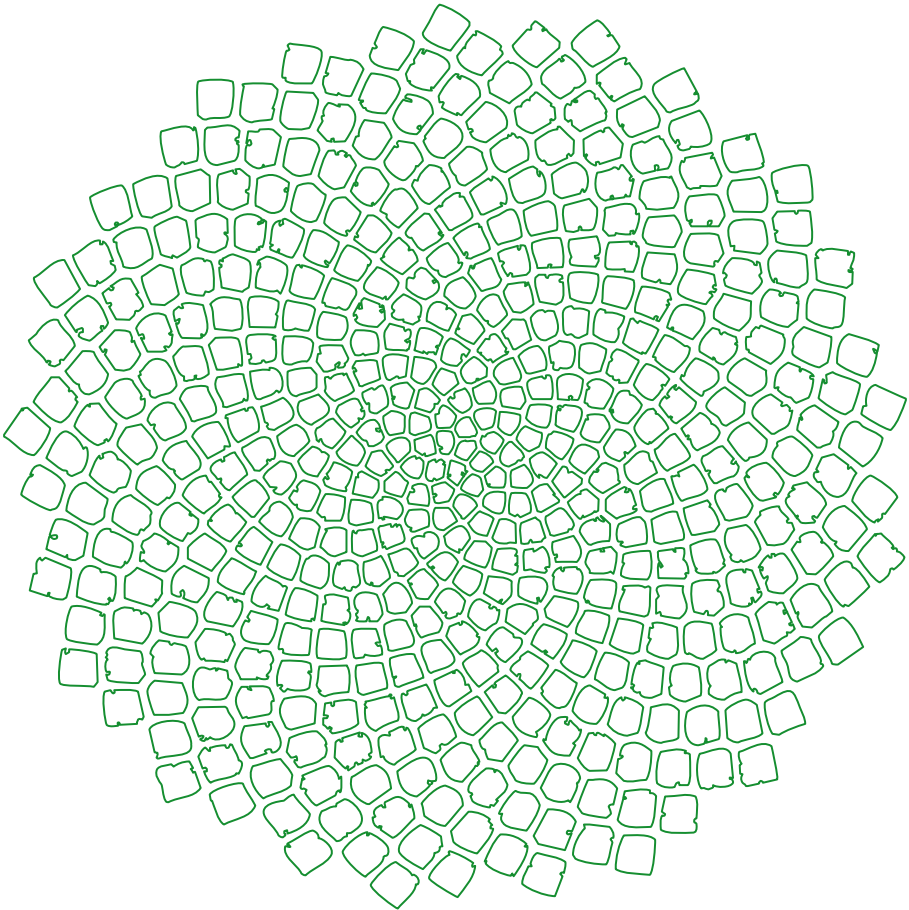
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24



Brokering innovation and fostering action learning – towards promoting ‘agroecological entrepreneurship’ in the new Cuban economic model¹

Humberto Ríos Labrada and Juan Ceballos Müller

Geographical location: Cuba

Chapter highlights: This chapter describes action research and learning intended to offer an alternative route towards an agricultural innovation system that contributes towards improved food security, sustainability and wellbeing.

The authors have been coordinating action research and learning around an innovative model based on agroecology as an alternative to conventional high-input agricultural state enterprises.

Initial stages focused on building participatory processes around production methods. In light of recent changes in Cuba, the latest stage has emphasised supporting farmers in navigating the entrepreneurial approach, supporting the emerging business ideas of small farmers.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, brokering, action research and learning, Agriculture Innovation System, agroecology.

¹ The authors are based at the International Centre for development-oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA), the Netherlands. ICRA aims to support leadership and to develop critical mass in facilitating learning and action for agricultural and rural innovation.

24.1 Introduction

Before 1959 Cuba's history was inextricably linked to large-scale sugarcane monocropping. Many small farmers did not have access to land and were very poor.

After the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 two agrarian reforms provided land to small farmers. However, technologies generated by research institutes, experimental stations and universities in Cuba were for big agricultural state enterprises only. These were characterised by large areas of land in monoculture (between 1,000 and 100,000 hectares), with intensive mechanisation, high levels of agrochemical inputs and artificial irrigation systems. New technologies (i.e. seed varieties) were approved by a national state committee. The primary farming modality in Cuba continued to be large-scale plantations, now managed by the state.

The collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989 generated a deficit of energy, supplies and chemicals, and forced significant changes to the ways food was produced and distributed in Cuba. Due to these deficits, in the 1990s Cuba moved from being the largest consumer of agrochemicals in Latin America to become the country with the most experience of organic agriculture.

In this process of change, state enterprises gradually lost importance in the production and supply of food for local consumption, and low input family farming emerged to supply the local markets.

This transition period went hand-in-hand with a severe economic depression. The income of scientists, lecturers, technicians, government employees and the public sector in general was so low that many professionals emigrated to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Behind remained a socialist public sector uncertain how to deal with the emerging non-state farming enterprises.

In 2000, first steps were taken to strengthen family farming. A participatory seed multiplication and diffusion project started. This was a challenge for Cuban scientists who were not used to involving farmers in the decision-making process and recognising them as equal partners. This project further evolved to become the Local Agricultural Innovation Programme, or PIAL in its Spanish acronym (*Programa de Innovación Agropecuaria Local*). PIAL is acknowledged as one of the leading programmes in Cuba facilitating collective action in support of family farming.

This chapter describes the role of innovation brokers and of action learning in promoting seed diversity, agroecologically sound practices and participatory principles in the development of family farm enterprises in Cuba.

24.2 The first stage 2001-2007: participatory seed diffusion

In 2000 under the umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education, a first multidisciplinary team was formed, made up of representatives of the National Institute of Agricultural Research, the Agrarian University of Havana and the Centre for Psychological and

Sociological Research. This team started organising seed diversity fairs in different districts (La Palma, San Antonio de los Baños and Batabanó) in the Western Region of Cuba. Dozens of small farmers chose plant varieties (figure 24.1) and took small samples of seeds back home to test them. Subsequently farmers started experimenting themselves and distributing validated new seeds, forming a network and giving birth to a Participatory Seed Diffusion (PSD) process. The diversity of seeds released to farmers came from the seed banks of research organisations as well as informal sources, and established an opportunity to breed new varieties through a collaborative effort between farmers and scientists.



Figure 24.1. Bean seed fair organised by a farmer called Coco, with support from La Palma district, Pinar del Rio Province. February 28, 2002. Photo: Eduardo Calves

Over the coming years the multidisciplinary research team engaged with district representatives of local non-governmental organisations such as ANAP (National Association of Small Farmers) and ACTAF (Association of Agricultural and Forestry Technicians) and with local district government staff, who gradually embraced PSD and participated in the organisation of new events (fairs). They eventually became an integral part of the process promoting PSD. The role of the team changed from being in charge to transferring ownership of the process to farmers and ‘champions’ in local public organisations, who were strongly motivated to ass this role as it increased their social recognition as a stakeholder whose voice counted. It also provided them with opportunities for international exposure and other experiences elsewhere, which encouraged them to assume leadership. Reflecting on this process, one may say that the team brokered the emergence of PSD in Cuba.

24.3 The second stage 2008-2011: expanding participatory approaches

From a process focused only on seeds, PSD expanded to encompass the dissemination of technology and techniques for different crops and other regions of Cuba in response to the demand from farmers to cover the whole spectrum of agroecological practices. This gave birth to an innovation programme that expanded all over Cuba. The programme focused on a bottom-up approach, involving farmers and key local stakeholders in the search for best agricultural practices, and became known as 'Local Agricultural Innovation Programme' (*Programa de Innovación Agropecuaria Local, PIAL*). By 2011 PIAL was covering 32 districts in all 10 provinces of the country and was using the action learning approach promoted by ICRA. This is a hands-on approach that is geared towards stimulating experiential learning (learning-by-doing) and purposeful interaction to adapt and coordinate activities, taking 'learners' through facilitated on-the-job learning cycles.

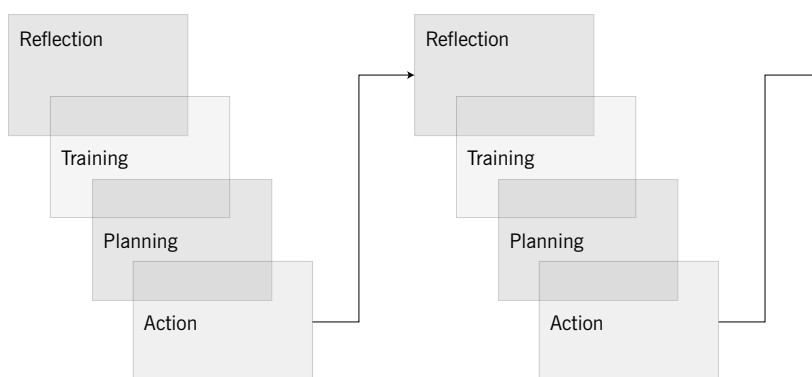


Figure 24.1. Interactive learning cycles (Source: ICRA training material, www.icra-edu.org)

An ICRA interactive learning cycle engages all actors and stakeholders facing a common innovation challenge who stand to benefit from joint learning and action. Actors reflect on the challenges they face, learn how to deal with them, plan how to apply the lessons learnt and then apply them in their own working environment.

However, for an action learning cycle to be successful, it requires someone to bring all actors together and keep them focused on the direction that has been jointly agreed. PIAL identified 'champions' who had excelled in the previous years and with the support of ICRA trained them on-the-job as innovation brokers or facilitators.

In the four years of this second stage, three learning cycles took place, each taking a two-track interactive and experiential learning approach where the 'champions' identified from different organisations at district and provincial level (university lecturers, researchers, technicians and even farmers) were trained on the job as

innovation facilitators/brokers, facilitating a learning cycle with a group of actors and stakeholders coming together to address a specific challenge.

Figure 24.2 shows an example of a learning cycle implemented in Manatí district in Las Tunas Province, focusing on options to locally produce feed for pigs. The 'champions' guided the interaction and exchange between key stakeholders over a period of six months, taking a learning group through successive moments of reflection/planning (residential workshops) and action (field work) leading to farmers determining themselves the most appropriate feed for their pig production.

The 'champions' learnt on the job how to facilitate learning groups, and the learning groups learnt jointly to address a problem and search for solutions, with organisational stakeholders recognising farmers as equal partners in the search for solutions.

The facilitated action learning cycles provided evidence that the joint interaction of key stakeholders led to the transformation of knowledge from different sources (i.e. tacit, scientific, political and Indigenous) to come up with new solutions such as different local concentration formulations to feed pigs, or integration of new crops into the farming systems.

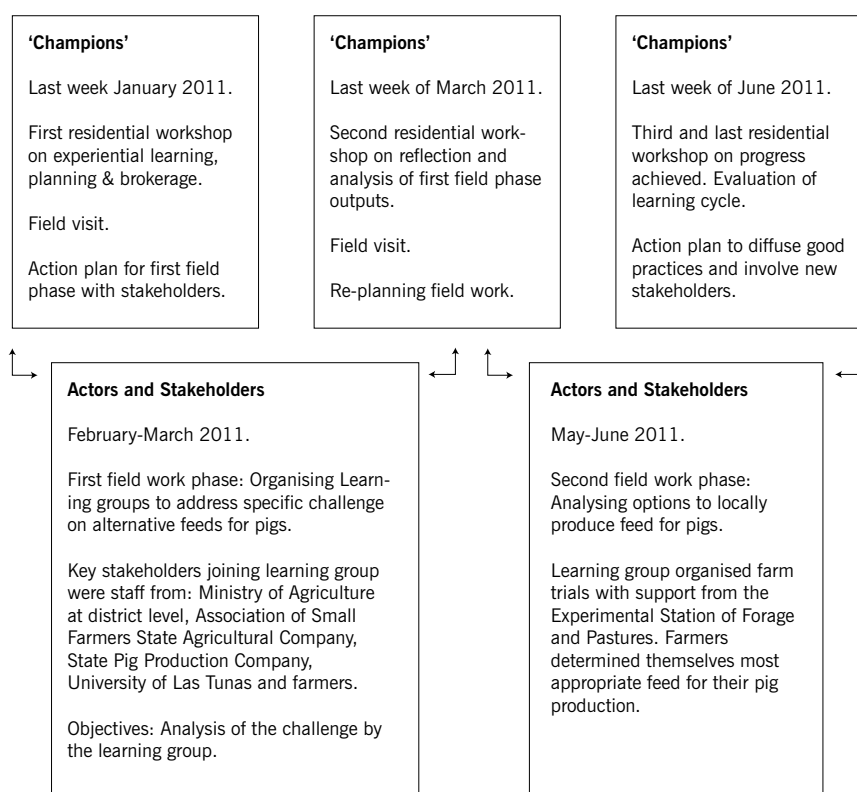


Figure 24.2. Learning cycle to promote adoption of agroecological practices in Manatí district, Las Tunas Province

24.4 The third stage 2012-2015: incorporating an entrepreneurial perspective

In the preceding years the learning cycles facilitated by local staff involved in PIAL had focussed on good agricultural practices and on increasing production and productivity. However, it became clear that the work of PIAL was not sustainable without international donor support.

Taking advantage of the fact that by then the Cuban government had started allowing people to work for themselves (*por cuenta propia*), PIAL started looking into alternatives to make farming more sustainable and economically viable. Using a business approach to development, again learning groups with key local actors were formed and farmers selected to join these groups. In previous years they had proved to be quite business-minded, and jointly they started identifying business ideas and testing them in the field (Figure 24.3). Between March 2014 and January 2015 thirteen business ideas were brought forward, analysed and validated, using the CANVAS business model.²

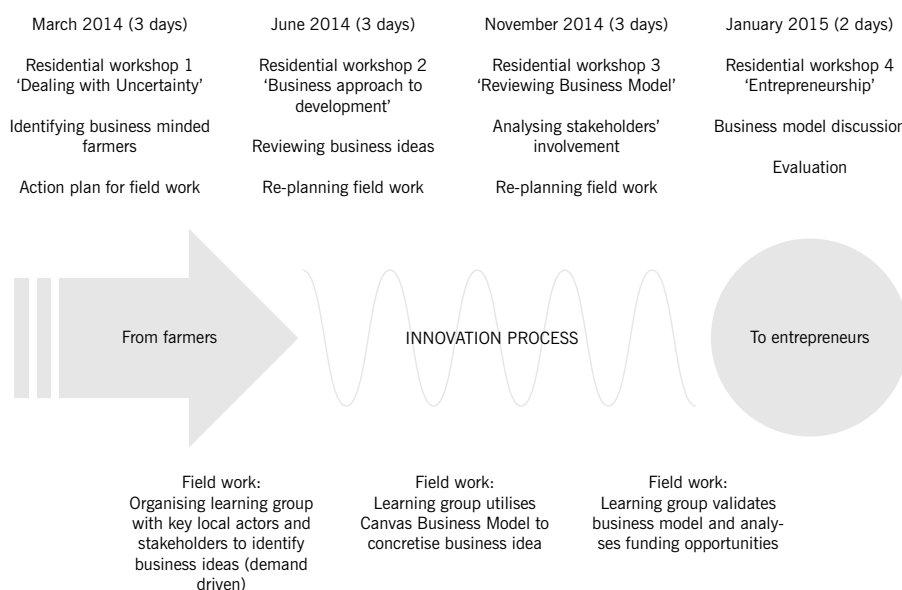


Figure 24.3. Learning cycle to promote an entrepreneurial perspective

² CANVAS business model is a strategic management and entrepreneurial tool. It allows one to describe, design, challenge, invent, and pilot a business model. http://www.businessmodelgeneration.com/downloads/businessmodelgeneration_preview.pdf.

The thirteen business models developed with farmers, processors, people interested in rural tourism and restaurant owners, were discussed on-farm and also presented at the last workshop of the learning cycle, providing an opportunity for exchange and for learning from each other.

Farmers do not have much access to agrochemical inputs in Cuba and are mostly agroecological-oriented. As a result, it was natural to emphasise this and start referring to 'green' farmers in the process of turning farming into a business.

Farmers and other participants in the learning cycle were extremely motivated by the newly introduced entrepreneurial perspective and eager to follow the CANVAS model, visualising their value proposition, clients, commercialisation channels, strategy to keep relationships with clients, business partners and investments. In short, farmers could think and act as small business people, even using the PIAL logo as a market brand for their local products.

24.5 Concluding remarks

Forming brokers, who themselves formed learning groups (two-track approach), was a successful process in generating innovations for local agricultural systems. Many local 'champions' became catalysts of innovation, who learnt to link different public stakeholders and farmers in a collective effort to introduce changes at local level.

The bottom-up approach was important, starting at local (district) level and gradually extending the learning groups to include other actors at provincial and even national level. One major success factor was that learning groups focused on real challenges farmers were facing, and the facilitators got the groups collectively sourcing solutions. This action learning helped to achieve a common understanding among a group with diverse membership including local government (representing the state doctrine), other public organisations (also conventional in their orientation) and emerging business minded farmers. It must be remembered, however, that Cuba is a socialist country governed by a different set of rules.

Nevertheless, in the last few years, the brokerage efforts have been concentrating on incorporating an entrepreneurial perspective in farming and supporting the emerging business ideas of small farmers. A future threat for these small farmers might be competition from big agribusiness that may develop due to the newly developing relations with other countries, specifically the United States, which could bring an influx of agricultural products and agribusinesses in the future. It will be important to continue developing the farmers' business skills and establishing a niche market.

In conclusion, after 15 years of innovation brokerage and action learning, over 50,000 farmers have been reached in all ten provinces of Cuba and are benefitting from action learning through PIAL.

In the learning groups new 'champions' were identified and recruited to form more learning groups and catalyse further innovation processes in their specific environments, thus multiplying the actors participating in these processes in Cuba.

24.6 Further reading

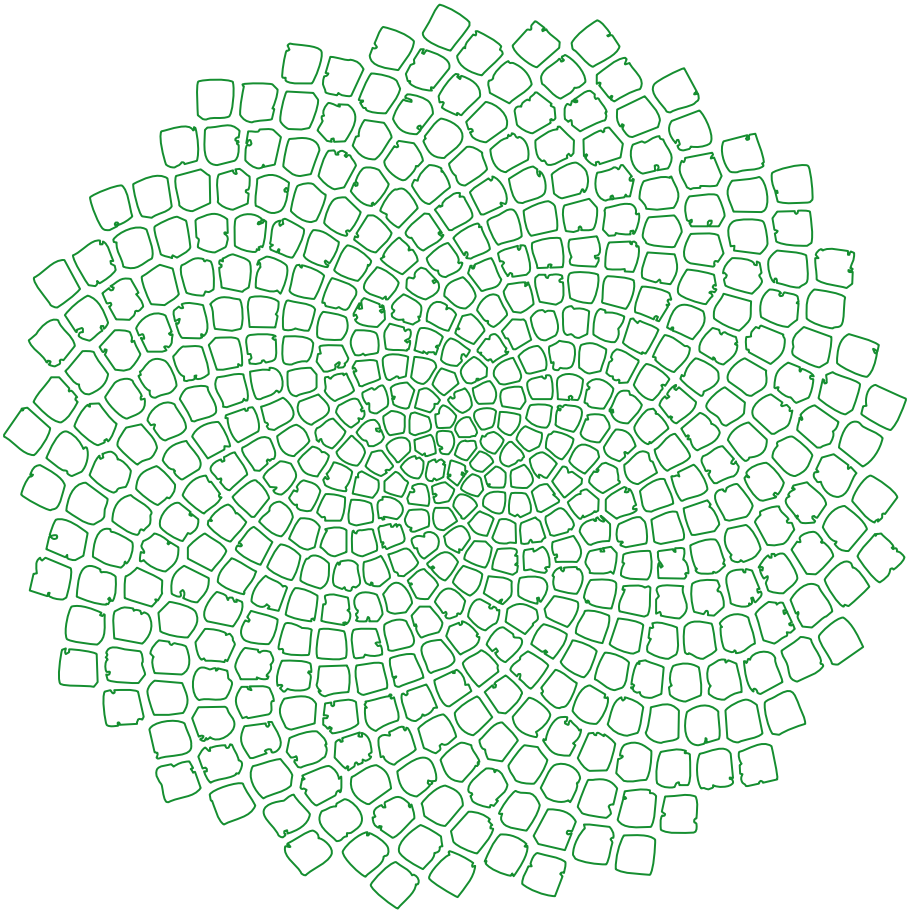
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25



The potential limitations of food sovereignty activism: a reflective case study

Ruth E. Hayward

Geographical location: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Chapter highlights: This chapter presents a case study from Northern England of a project that sought to involve socio-economically disadvantaged inner city communities in a local food hub.

It provides a description of the role that community organisations could play in enabling wider participation in food hubs.

The critical self-reflection observes that food sovereignty and environmental activists often seek to include 'others' in pre-determined projects and asks whether a more effective and appropriate approach is to start with people's own priorities.

Keywords: disadvantage, discussion, involvement, activism, feasibility study, food hubs.

25.1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, local food has been a central component of the grassroots movement to create a more just and sustainable food system. Creating local food systems is one of the seven pillars of food sovereignty and is thought to offer opportunities for both farmers and eaters to opt out of, or even resist, the industrial corporate food system and to provide more environmentally sustainable foods and opportunities to strengthen communities. Yet, in the UK and other countries in the global north, local food is often inaccessible to many people for a variety of reasons including low incomes, meaning the potential benefits of local food are not shared by everyone equally.

In this context, proponents of local food have two apparent options, both problematic. First, they can avoid altogether the question of how to be more relevant and accessible

to excluded consumers. Second, they can examine how to be more 'inclusive' and how to recruit low income and other excluded consumers into their initiatives. This chapter presents a case study from Northern England and our approach to involving socio-economically disadvantaged inner city communities in a proposed local food hub. It sets out the background to the project and gives an outline of why and how community organisations were approached, as part of the feasibility study we undertook, and the responses. It then critiques the process, asking questions about the limitations of activist-led projects, and discusses whether there are lessons that food sovereignty activists can learn from this.

25.2 Context

I consider myself to be an environmental activist. The work I describe in this chapter was partly paid and partly voluntary. Although my motivations for being an activist are rooted in a care for the environment, the years spent living and working in the West End of Newcastle have left me keenly aware of issues linked to economic inequality.

In 2013, I co-organised a conference looking at alternative food distribution models. This was organised through the Workers' Educational Association North East Green Branch, a group I have been involved with since it started in 2010. Each year we organise a day of knowledge sharing and discussion with people from across the North East of England. I was inspired to organise our event on alternative food distribution models after learning about Manchester Veg People at the Oxford Real Farming Conference, and meeting Nick Weir from StroudCo, a well-known food hub, at an event in Gloucestershire.

At the conference, participants expressed interest in developing a food hub in Newcastle and looking at ways to share food surpluses, so we formed a sub group of the Green Branch called Food on the Tyne. All conference participants were invited to join this group, as well as our wider membership and members of other North East green networks. We decided we would apply for funding to carry out a study into whether it was feasible to base a food hub in the West End of Newcastle, specifically in the Wingrove ward.

25.3 What is a food hub?

The type of food hub we are interested in is described in the academic literature as a sustainability oriented food hub (Franklin *et al.* 2011), with aims linked to social justice, environmental protection and supporting local economies. The food hubs we focused on for the feasibility study - StroudCo, Fair Food Carlisle and Fife Food Co-op - fit into this classification. However, fulfilling social justice aims can be challenging, as we will discuss later.

Sustainability oriented food hubs are often cooperatives that act as an intermediary, so that the people who grow and make food can sell their produce to the people who

buy and eat it, without the participation of corporate distributors, wholesalers and retailers. However, unlike a conventional intermediary such as a supermarket, the food hubs have a social and environmental purpose as well as being a food business. Their main aims are:

- To make it easier and more affordable to buy local food with shorter supply chains, by both shortening the distance and reducing the number of transactions involved;
- To support small businesses and farms, and pay producers a fair price for their produce;
- To support local economies;
- To support environmentally friendly farming and production methods;
- To create change in the existing food system;
- To increase understanding of food production and create new opportunities for people to be involved in food production (<https://weagreenbranch.org.uk/food-on-the-tyne/>).

The three hubs we studied all operate an online platform which helps keep prices as low as possible. For each order cycle, producers upload the produce they have available onto the website, then customers choose what and how much they buy. Their order is then delivered to a collection point, sorted into bags by the food hub and the customer picks up their order at an agreed time. This is the basic model, and each food hub we looked at has slight variations on this.

25.5 Why the West End of Newcastle?

We chose Wingrove as the potential site for a new food hub for a number of reasons. Firstly, we wanted to see how we might interest and involve people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in the food hub. Wingrove is a mixed community, with people on high incomes living beside those on very low incomes. According to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation, some areas of Wingrove are within the 10% and 20% most deprived areas of the country. The adjacent ward of Elswick is within the 10% most deprived wards in the UK and is the most deprived ward in Newcastle.

Secondly, if we had carried out the feasibility study in Gosforth, a wealthy area of the city, and then set up the project there, our concern was that the food hub would be viewed by residents from other parts of the city as not for them, and that it would be seen as a 'niche' activity for the wealthy or just for committed food enthusiasts.

However, in terms of the food hub being financially viable, there are high earners living in Wingrove, as well as many ex-students and people who are interested in the environment. We suspected that a number of these people would buy from the hub and maybe help support it as volunteers. It only takes 20 minutes to cycle (10 minutes to drive) to the affluent areas of Gosforth and Jesmond so we hoped

that committed customers from these areas would still buy from us. Wingrove and Elswick are also the most ethnically diverse parts of Newcastle, so there would be opportunities to involve these communities in the food hub.

Finally, my colleague and I both live in Wingrove so know the area well, and are involved with local community initiatives such as the community orchard. I had previously worked as the Council Environmental Officer for the West End encouraging people to take part in green activities, so had links with community organisations in the area. Furthermore, the National Lottery funded Greening Wingrove Project is a National Lottery project supporting environmental activities in the area, and there was the opportunity to bid each year for a limited amount of funding and to contact people through their networks.

25.6 Why involve people on low incomes and other socially disadvantaged groups?

One of the aims of the food hubs we looked at is to increase understanding of food production amongst participants. If this is to be an aim of Wingrove Food Hub, then as many people as possible should be part of the community of learning that the food hub could create. This community of learning about the food system could provide access to information about the origins of the food from the hub, how it is grown, and opportunities to visit farms and access educational resources. We felt that this community of learning should not only be available to those on high incomes or high education levels. The ethos of the WEA is about offering educational opportunities for everyone and widening participation (WEA 2014).

Wingrove Food Hub is part of the WEA and shares this ethos. Food hubs are part of the movement to change our food system and therefore are part of the wider UK food sovereignty movement. In my opinion we cannot build a movement if only a small proportion of people learn about and care about why our food system needs changing, so food hubs need to involve as wide a range of people as possible.

Conversely, if people don't feel able to participate, it could leave them feeling excluded. Working with community organisations is a way to involve those on potentially very low incomes, therefore removing income as a barrier to participation. However, this feeling of exclusion can occur regardless of income level as there are many, often quite subtle, reasons that make people not get involved. This weakens the wider food sovereignty movement, with the danger that sustainable food initiatives are perceived as being exclusive and for 'others' in a community, as happened to some extent in Stroud (Franklin *et al.* 2011) (see Box 25.1).

We want to avoid these divisions in any food hub we develop in Wingrove. One way of doing this is to work through existing grassroots community and faith groups with different constituencies. These groups provide a way to connect with a wider diversity of people through already-established community networks.

Box 25.1

StroudCo were aware of the criticisms that local food initiatives don't involve low income consumers (Allen 2004), and so designed Stroud Food Hub specifically to overcome this by situating the drop off/collection point at a primary school situated next to a low income housing estate and targeting the promotional material at residents of the estate. However, they had limited success (Franklin *et al.* 2011).

One of the factors cited for this lack of success by the researchers is the concept of 'othering'. Put simply, Stroud is divided into those who are 'incomers' and those who have lived there all their lives. The 'Green' activities, including StroudCo, are mainly led by the incomers, and many of those who have lived in Stroud for a long time see the green incomers as 'the other', therefore creating cultural barriers to collaboration.

Furthermore, the community from the housing estate was not involved in the Food Hub until it was up and running, they did not help shape it from the start.

See Limitations and Critique section in this chapter for more on this.

Box 25.2

Fair Food Carlisle reaches more isolated members of the community by providing a Meals on Wheels service made from ingredients provided by their producers.



A criticism that has been levelled at local food initiatives is the focus on the opportunities for farmers, and not on access opportunities for consumers, particularly low income consumers (Allen 2004). We sought to consciously address this through the design of the food hub. Fair Food Carlisle, one of the food hubs we looked at, set up a separate project, Fair Meals Direct, to increase access opportunities, particularly for more isolated members of the community (see Box 25.2).

And finally, food hubs could be a counterpoint to the food bank experience, as too often those with very little money are expected to eat what others won't, leaving people feeling worthless (see Box 25.3). Some of the community groups we talked to had members who use foodbanks.

25.7 Research Design

Wingrove Food Hub aimed to have both individuals and community groups as customers. We worked with existing community groups for the reasons outlined above and to find out if the potential barriers that we identified were considered to be barriers by the community groups themselves and whether working with these groups could help overcome some of these obstacles. The first stage of the feasibility study was an online and paper-based survey asking individuals if they would buy from us.

This initial research revealed the following barriers: lack of IT skills needed to access the online marketplace; concerns that the cost of food hub products may be unaffordable; and difficulties for some consumers in travelling to the central pick-up sites. Additional things we considered might be barriers were: lack of time to pick up produce from the collection point; lack of motivation and lack of awareness that the food hub existed. Subsequently we have found that concerns about online fraud deters older people in particular from buying online.

We interviewed seven community organisations in the West End of Newcastle. The organisations interviewed included existing contacts of myself and my colleague, organisations recommended to us, or organisations we met at Greening Wingrove events. They included a church group, a women and girls project, and an Islamic Association. We had discussions with the project co-ordinators, workers, and, where relevant, those who did the catering. We did not have group discussions with participants due to a lack of resources and time constraints. The discussions were based around three questions.

25.8 Research questions

The first research question took as a starting point the assumption that members of the community group would not buy from the food hub as individuals (at least not straight away). Therefore, we were looking to see if the community group would buy instead, to use this food in cooking and catering. In this way, members of the group would become part of the learning community created through the food hub via their

Box 25.3. Summary of responses

There was general interest in buying from the food hub. Examples included buying apples to include in children's snacks, bacon for a group that meet for a weekly brunch of bacon sandwiches, ingredients for cookery and nutrition classes, milk for cups of tea and coffee, ingredients for event catering so the social enterprise who organise the catering can offer people local/organic food, ingredients for the senior lunch club and fresh produce for a food co-op.

The most frequent barriers that arose were related to price. One project explained that the senior lunch club, which is run by volunteers, charges £3.50 for the meal, which covers all of the ingredient costs (the kitchen costs are covered by the host organisation). As the people who come to the meal have very little money, and pay for the meal themselves, prices could not be raised. So our prices would need to be competitive for the lunch club to buy from us. However, where the community organisation is paying for the food, although there were concerns about price, it was not so critical. Discussions covered: including food hub ingredients for just some of the food that is supplied, for example, the bacon for the brunch; including the cost of the ingredients in funding applications for nutrition and cookery courses, with this possibly even being seen as favourable to funders as it links to a wider educational remit around food. In terms of the event catering it was seen that it could improve the menu offer to customers.

The proposed food co-op at Cruddas Park was interested in buying from us in bulk, for example, sacks of potatoes and parsnips. This offers another avenue in which the food hub could trade with community organisations and others. They were appreciative of the contacts we had made with producers, which would be helpful to them. They were also interested in sourcing fresh fruit and vegetables from us. Although the food co-op is aimed at those on very low incomes, and therefore has to keep prices low, the organisers were interested in providing some food produced locally and in an environmentally friendly way, so that food co-op members can be part of the discussion about the food system and be part of changing our food system. Food sourced from the food hub will also be good quality which was very important to the organisers, as too often those with very little money "are expected to eat what others won't, so reinforces feelings of worthlessness" (research participant).

Our discussions also revealed that one group is interested in working alongside us to start discussions with providers of Halal lamb on whether the lamb could be sourced locally from environmentally friendly farmers and then slaughtered according to halal principles. Some groups were interested in receiving educational materials and workshops on the food system from the food hub. The interviews helped stimulate discussion about the shopping and eating habits of the staff present at the meeting, opening up a space to talk about food and the food system.

There was general interest in participants of the projects being included in farm visits that would be organized by the food hub, as well as hearing about specific farms they could contact to arrange their own trips.

community groups. They would also be supporting the food hub, through making decisions through their community group structures on whether the group should buy food from us or not, through including our ingredients in meals and by eating the food. We asked the organisations the following questions:

- Do you buy food in for meals for project participants? If so, what do you buy and would you buy from the hub?
- Would your participants be comfortable buying online, and if not, could you support them in any way?
- Could your organisation be a potential collection point for customers and a potential drop-off point for farmers?

The results of the feasibility study have been published elsewhere and you can visit <https://weagreenbranch.org.uk/food-on-the-tyne/> for the summary, full report, and updates on the progress of the food hub. The results revealed that working with community organisations has potential for overcoming barriers to participation in Wingrove Food Hub. It also identified some new unforeseen opportunities. Box 3 provides a brief summary of the results. In the final section of this chapter, I reflect on how Wingrove Food Hub is an activist-led project, as are many local food initiatives, and I discuss the limitations of local food activism, particularly in the context of building the UK food sovereignty movement.

25.9 Limitations and critique

Writing a chapter for this book has provided an opportunity to take a step back and reflect on what we did and why we did it. Although the work we did was valuable, it raises many questions about the limitations of local food activism. The topic we chose to look at, setting up a food hub, is something that we as activists were interested in for a number of reasons. First, it seemed like an achievable project in a context where small wins are important in terms of building momentum for wider change. Next, because there are limited opportunities on Tyneside to buy local, sustainably produced food, we felt the project would fill an important gap in improving the food infrastructure to make it more environmentally friendly and supportive to local farmers and the local economy. Finally, we felt it was an important chance to get more people talking about and learning about the environmental and economic impacts of the food system.

However, it is important to remember that the topic was chosen by us, albeit with support from people who attended the conference. So when we talked to community organisations, we had already framed the discussion around the issues in which we were interested. We then set out to find out whether community groups would be interested in buying from a food hub, and if they could support their members to buy from us. The discussion did then move on to other areas, such as locally produced halal meat, or discussions about the living wage and its connection to access to food, but the main terms of the discussion were framed by the fact we were looking into setting up a food hub. There was nothing wrong with limiting the focus, as we only wanted to discuss what we could potentially deliver with limited resources, whilst not raising expectations.

However, we were proposing a pre-determined solution, which meant we were addressing food sovereignty on our own terms. Rather than starting by asking about the priorities, needs and opportunities of the groups we wanted to work with - we were seeing how they could fit in with our proposed initiative which reflected our priorities and needs and which we had the capacity to deliver. If we had started the discussion from a position with fewer boundaries, where would it have gone? Could it have led to actions from the participants that would strengthen the wider food sovereignty movement in a different way? For example, conditions in precarious employment in fast food outlets was raised by a union representative at the Food Sovereignty gathering in October 2015. Would that have been raised by the participants? Would it have motivated them to take action more than the topic of environmentally friendly local food, especially if they work in that industry themselves or know others that do? Or perhaps starting the discussion from the perspective of health, as this often overlaps with environmental concerns, though shouldn't be assumed that it will. However, even starting with as wide a topic as health the parameters of the discussion are narrowed.

This is important to keep in mind wherever we work and whoever we are working with, not just in poorer areas but anywhere. Within the WEA, the ethos is to be responsive to participants' needs and interests in order to widen participation. In my other WEA work I have found that starting a discussion with fewer boundaries can lead to people taking action in a way that I couldn't have second-guessed for them, and as it comes from them, they take ownership, either as individuals or as a group. The discussions I initiate do utilise a framework, that of people care, earth care and fair shares (Permaculture Principles 2017), with an emphasis on the earth care, but still seems to allow enough space to interest people sufficiently that they then take action. With the Food Hub work, by coming with a pre-determined commitment to a particular project did we inadvertently close down opportunities for participation?

Is this symptomatic of local initiatives trying to change the food system? How far can we change things, and who is excluded, if the routes to getting involved are pre-determined by the initiatives on offer, that local activists have the time and motivation to set up?

Within the academic literature activists such as myself labelled as *sustainability* activists, rather than *social* activists. We are "motivated by environmental and economic sustainability goals as well as by social goals" and "an equitable balance between the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability cannot be assumed to be an automatic outcome, or for that matter, the starting point of community driven sustainability initiatives" (Franklin *et al.* 2011: 784). Although there are aspects of this I would argue with, I think the distinction between social and sustainability activists can sometimes be helpful.

So, are there more effective ways to engage people in the movement to change our food system? Rather than trying to involve people in projects that we, as *sustainability*

activists think are important, such as a community garden, a community supported agriculture scheme, a food hub etc., should we not also be facilitating people to critically look at the food system from their perspective, which could then lead to action? In the history of education for social change, there are many examples of good practice we could draw on. For example, Myles Horton set up the Highlander School so that adult students could learn to critically analyse their experiences, and then act on them (Horton *et al.* 1998). Should we be supporting people to start from where they are, rather from where we are?

To do this requires more resources. Can we expect food system activists to facilitate this process, as well as set up the inspiring projects they are already involved in? The actions people might want to take through more open-ended discussion may not be what *sustainability* activists are motivated by. We cannot then expect these activists to support people to take these actions, while working as volunteers, or partly paid, which is often the situation for activists when moving forward local food sustainability ideas. Also, do sustainability activists have the required skills and knowledge, both to facilitate the discussions and support people with the associated actions?

I think it would help if sustainability activists made better links with *social* activists and organisations motivated predominantly by inequality and social justice. These organisations and people can then bring their skills and knowledge of participation, empowerment and education, as well as their reach into communities; we both bring our respective knowledge of the food system and together we can facilitate and support open-ended discussions on the food system and support any actions that may result. To do this requires more resources as partnerships take time to build and for trust and understanding to be developed between those involved. However, working in partnership with social activists and organisations could potentially help us be more effective in the long run.

Following on from the feasibility study two of the community organisations have offered to help us turn the food hub into reality. One of the groups has indicated that a food hub would help them to sell products from their community bakery and the other that it could help improve nutrition for some of their more elderly members. A food hub would support their priorities. Their interest and support has improved the likelihood that the Wingrove Food Hub will get off the ground.

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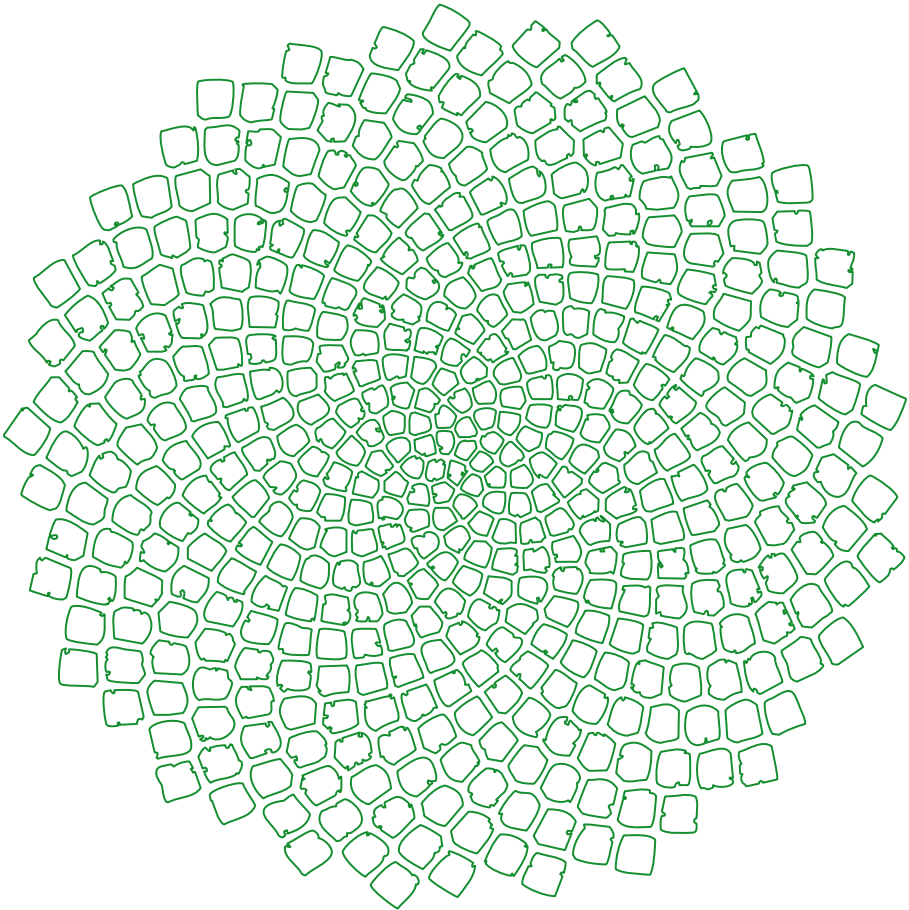
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26



Women defending their territory and natural resources in Peru: Women of Celendin Fighting to Protect Pachamama

Graciela Romero

Geographical location: Peru

Chapter highlights: This chapter is a reflective account of the author's work with the *Plataforma Inter-Institucional Celendina* (PIC, the Celendin Inter-Institutional Platform) and the women's collective *Celendinas Luchadoras en Defensa de la Pachamama* (Women of Celendin Fighting to Protect *Pachamama* or mother earth) in Peru.

It provides an account of *buen vivir* (living well) as a basis for women's agency to defend mother earth as a living being and an alternative proposal to the Western paradigm of development, which is based on the commodification and perpetual exploitation of nature.

The chapter reflects on the problematic role of NGOs in development and the importance of embracing an 'active solidarity' that addresses the power relations that exist between Northern, paid campaigners and social movements.

Keywords: women, *buen vivir*, land, water, mining, extractives, social movements, Andean cosmovision.

26.1 Introduction

“I may be poor and illiterate, but I know that our lakes are our biggest treasure,” says Maxima Acuna, the Indigenous campesino woman who has managed to temporarily halt the expansion of the largest gold mine in South America into her land in Cajamarca, Peru. Maxima is not alone in holding this ‘knowledge’, and indeed not alone in her struggle. Alongside her, there is a mass movement of people defending the right to water and land.



Maxima Acuna

The ‘knowledge’ that lakes are a treasure, as Maxima puts it, reflects the Andean cosmovision where every element in the cosmos is alive and interconnected. The spiritual life and material life are part of an inseparable whole. It is a vision of the world where the lakes and mountains are spiritual beings that protect everything (Estermann 2014).

In this chapter, I attempt to bring to the fore women’s voices in the struggle to retain sovereignty over territory, in the face of the plunder of resource extraction. This is a struggle rooted in the values of relatedness, complementarity, correspondence, reciprocity and cyclicity, which are the core of the Andean philosophy of *buen vivir* (living well) (Estermann 2014). The women’s account of their unity against the brutal repression by the Minera Yanacocha gold mine and the army, both attempting to silence opposition to the mine, bring these values to life. It also shows that within

Andean philosophy the concept of Western development has no place and is perceived as going against life.

The women's agency and approach to transforming themselves and communities, while defending the integrity of the mountain lakes are also highlighted in this article. Their approach encourages reflection on the way Northern international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and other campaigning organisations interact with grassroots movements.

This chapter stems from my relationship, as a Latin American woman and Programmes Director of an international non-governmental organisation (War on Want), with members of the grassroots movement PIC¹ and the women's collective Women of Celendin Fighting to Protect Pachamama.

Women from different social sectors and all ages form the collective. They are campesino and Indigenous women, teachers, food vendors (both market and street), health promoters, housewives, religious sisters and students. The collective grew organically around the need to defend their water and land. Initially, they had no intention of forming a group. Only later on during the resistance and mobilisations did they find themselves forming a women's collective. All members of the collective were individual members of PIC. They are now recognised as the women's group of the Platform.

My first interaction with PIC started in 2013, when some of its members visited War on Want to seek support for their struggle against the Conga Project.² Prior to my visit to PIC in Celendin in Cajamarca in June 2015, I was working with PIC to raise awareness about Maxima's resistance and to expose the impact of resource extraction, which was negatively affecting food systems and violating human and environmental rights.

The visit to the communities in Celendin was underpinned by War on Want's internal partnership principles: as member of an INGO, it was paramount to understand and be critical of the power structures that exist in the relationship between Western-Northern NGOs and grassroots groups. Under these principles, the role of an external person is, when requested by groups or communities, to support processes led by them rather than dictating them. It is mandatory to seek authorisation to collect and reproduce information from or produced by the community/individuals and to speak on behalf of them. Disclosing individual identities and statements must be followed by prior written authorisation and clarification of its consequences. War on Want does not negotiate or talk with multinationals for communities. Any fundraising or

1 The Inter-institutional Platform of Celendin (Plataforma Inter-Institucional Celendina, PIC) is a grassroots movement formed by individuals and groups from different social sectors. They have members from rural and urban communities. It is a platform made up of civil society organisations not connected to the municipality.

2 The Conga Project is a gold and copper mining project proposed by Minera Yanacocha owned by Newmont Mining Corp, the World Bank's International Finance Corporation and Peruvian mining company Buenaventura S.A.. The Conga Project is an extension of the Yanacocha mine in the Cajamarca region. The project will cause the loss of four mountain lakes (the source of five rivers) as well as hundreds hectares of land.

communication activity on behalf of the community should be agreed with them in advance.

During the visit I had the opportunity to participate in meetings already planned by communities and to interview people who had been directly affected by actions of Minera Yanacocha and the armed forces.

The style of this chapter aims to reflect that it is a piece of collaborative work. I tried to combine the experiences and reflections of members of the women's collective, using their own words, with my own reflections on my interactions with them and with other members of PIC.

26.2 *Buen vivir* versus development



Mountain lake

Maxima's narrative about her knowledge of the lakes and the perception of herself as being poor and illiterate moves between two discourses.

Firstly, one regarding the knowledge of the Andean cosmovision, which sees lakes and mountains as living beings that are essential for maintaining the balance of ecosystems. This is a vision of the world that does not see human beings as owners or producers, but as “‘caretaker’ (arariwa), ‘cultivator’ and ‘facilitator’, the only strictly productive force is Mother Earth, Pachamama and its various aspects such as water”(Estermann 2014). This cosmovision involves a philosophy – *buen vivir* – which aims at making *visible and expressible* aspects of reality that are ignored by the dominant paradigm (Soto 2012). It is a proposal from a radical and spiritual perspective of ecology, and is logically *incompatible with development and industrialisation*. It speaks of the possibility of living in common, for which the very concept ‘development’ is not only insufficient, but mistaken (Soto and Helfrich 2012).

In this cultural context, to destroy the lakes is to destroy life itself. The land and water are not commodities or goods as seen within industrialised Western development. They are living beings in complete interconnectedness with human beings. Doing harm to one is to do harm to the other. *Buen vivir* (or ‘Sama Qamana’ in Aymara, ‘Sumak Kawsay’ in Quechua and ‘Nandereco’ in Guarani) (Prada 2013) does not preclude the use of natural resources for the production of food and the wellbeing of humans. But achieving these cannot be through perpetual exploitation or production of material goods as presented by advocates of industrialised resource extraction.³ In the same line of thought, it is not enough to reclaim the land from corporations or imperialist nations, as in the case of resistance against corporate and State land grabbing and extractive industries. It is necessary to propose a model that is socially and environmentally sustainable (Gudynas 2011).

“How are we going to produce food, keep our animals and bring food to the markets if we don’t have land and water? Who is going to bring food if the mine transforms our lands into a desert?” Maxima asked representatives of the World Bank (investors in the mine) during its annual general meeting in Lima in September 2015. Maxima’s pledge to save the lakes is, in its deeper sense, a pledge to maintain harmonic food production while respecting mother earth. It intrinsically challenges the idea of imported corporate food production and distribution.

3 It is important to clarify that *buen vivir* is an evolving philosophy within Indigenous communities, policymakers, academics and social movements in Latin America. There are tensions and conflicting approaches on the issue of resource extraction and the impact on the environment (Gudynas, 2011; Prada, 2013).



Yanacocha lake before Yanacocha mine



Yanacocha lake - now Yanacocha mine

The second discourse reveals a story of plunder and destruction of nature in the name of progress and development, predicated on an ideology which conceives nature as an object to be tamed by humans and exploited for capital accumulation. Over 20 years of gold extraction in Cajamarca has led to the impoverishment of communities whose livelihoods depend on the land and water that the mining industry has commandeered. Cajamarca is currently the poorest region in Peru with more than 50 per cent of its population living in poverty (Gestion 2014). Although Minera Yanacocha is the most profitable gold mine in the world, there is no evidence that its revenue has contributed to the development of Cajamarca: “The Yanacocha gold mine in South America – which is also the third biggest and the most profitable in the world, according to its owners – has done very little for the country and the region where it operates” (Wiener and Torres 2014).



Contamination of water

Instead, communities in Cajamarca continue to suffer constant shortages of water. The supply stemming from a water reservoir built by Minera Yanacocha when the Yanacocha Lake was converted into a mine has proven unreliable. Moreover, a report produced by the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic (2015) exposes that “mining activity is linked to rising acidity and heavy metal contamination in rivers, drinking water and the food sources upon which local communities depend, all serious risks to the environment and to human health”. In a notorious case, more than one thousand people in Choropampa fell ill with mercury poisoning and related illnesses following a spill of 151 kilograms of mercury in 2000 (Arana 2009). Gold extraction has destroyed the ecosystem of the Yanacocha Lake and surrounding area.

Since its inception, the Yanacocha mine has been the cause of ongoing social conflicts and human rights violations by armed forces and the company's security staff. Communities in Cajamarca are calling for Minera Yanacocha to stop the expansion of mining in the region with its new venture, the proposed gold and copper mine, the Conga Project.

26.3 Women talking about their struggle

This section describes the conversation held by the women's collective during one of its weekly meetings. The narrative of their conversation is literally translated and has been approved by the women. They agreed that I could translate their conversation as one way of making visible their struggle and the role of women within it. Thus this section is written in first-person plural to show that the women are directly narrating their experiences. It was also agreed that the writing would be a co-authored piece, and that any resources fundraised with it would be sent directly to the women's collective to support their activities. During the meeting, the women talked for over two hours as if I was not there. I listened and took notes attentively with a sense of awe and huge respect.

Women have been critically important in the struggle against the Conga Project. This is something that is not always visible or recognised by external actors and when recognised, it has been used to attack or stigmatise us. Very often we have been challenged and accused, in order to divide and create tensions within our families. For example, Maxima has been harassed by Minera Yanacocha staff, who accuse her of undermining the role of her husband, who should be the head of the family. They want him to sign papers to sell their land.

Although shy and timid, we were the first to go around the local communities talking about the contamination of the Yanacocha mine. Men did not believe us at first. The engineers from Minera Yanacocha came to the communities around Conga (the original name of the place where the mine would be located) to tell us that there was no contamination. They also offered the health promoters 6,000 soles. One of us rejected the offer, knowing that this was a way to silence people. The others who did not know about the situation were doubtful. Around that time, a local priest shared a video with us that showed how animals were dying because of the mercury contamination caused by the spill in the province of Choropampa. We took the video, and showed the effects of mercury poisoning to the local people in improvised screenings. The women in our communities cried when they saw animals dying or losing their wool. The video was a powerful tool, which helped to convince people of the truth.

After an initial period of sensitising people to the impact of the mine on our water and animals, men became more involved and finally people went en masse to the lakes. We went door to door to talk with members of our communities, used our blankets to screen the video and gathered people in community meetings to discuss the situation.

In my community, it was a group of five women who mobilised the rest of the community for the first march. We did not have a banner, so one member of the group donated a white bed sheet for us to use. That's how we went out to march for the first time. We didn't even know which chants to use. We started with "Water Yes, Mine No".



Women in mobilisations

Then we heard that a state of emergency had been declared. A group of men and women had gone to talk with the authorities in Cajamarca to ask them to ban the Conga Project. The authorities demanded the communities stop all mobilisations immediately. The group of leaders said that they needed to have a general assembly in order to have a collective decision. The authorities responded that they would not wait for that to happen and immediately declared the state of emergency with the deployment of armed forces in Celendin.

People were at the mountain lakes when the police attacked them. Only a local radio station was broadcasting the situation at the mountain, asking for ambulances and doctors as there were many injured people. The mainstream media was silent. Nineteen people were seriously injured while running away down the mountain due to police fire from behind. A man was left paralysed, one lost his sight and another lost his leg. Two of the religious sisters who have joined our struggle walked towards the police with white handkerchiefs to ask them to stop the shooting. After this incident, the strike really took off. Teachers, drivers, city merchants all stopped activities. Hundreds of people took to the streets en masse. There were mobilisations at the lakes, and cultural activities to spread our message.



Militarisation of the mountains

We had to organise our lives to be able to participate in the meetings and mass mobilisations. We had to look after the children or our parents, to wake up earlier to cook food for our families. Some of the men did not want their wives to go out and participate in the protests. Although the father of my daughter is a policeman, I never stopped supporting the mobilisations. Many of us had to endure our partners criticising us, but this changed when they joined us later on.

As a teacher, I had to wake up at 4am or 5am to be able to participate in the school sit-ins with the other teachers. At the beginning, we had to convince our colleagues, the teachers, that it was important to support the strike, before we finally came together.

We also held vigils in front of the church at the main plaza in Celendin to raise public awareness. Women were at the forefront of the *ollas comunitarias* (community pots). We took responsibility for collecting money door-to-door, buying food, cooking on the street in big pots for all the people who were demonstrating and to send to the people in the mountains, who were guarding the lakes from the mining company. We organised these tasks in *barrio* after *barrio*. Although it was such hard work, we were happy and inspired to defend our lakes. We used to arrive home extremely tired; nonetheless we had to organise things at home for the next day. Some of us also travelled with the men to the mountains.

After 33 days of striking, we were exhausted, but we did not stop until the army attacked. The government never released a statement about the strike and the large-scale mobilisations in Celendin. When the radio made reference to the strike, it was only to say that there were a few people on the streets.

Armed forces attacked the demonstrators with rubber bullets, taking anyone they could to the stadium. There, they were forced to strip. Some were imprisoned in Celendin and others taken to Chiclayo (a city eight hours from Celendin) in order to be sentenced there, despite being Celendin residents. The city became militarised. Lots of soldiers came and marched on our streets.

During the militarisation of the city, soldiers were seen seducing young girls, some of whom later became pregnant by these soldiers. Their parents reported this to the major of the squadron but no one was charged or held accountable. It was the *rondas campesinas*⁴ who chased the soldiers out of the city during a public parade.

It has not been easy for everyone to continue defending our lakes and land. We have seen five of our friends killed in a struggle that has been going on for years, but we have always made time for action. It has been hard, but it has been beautiful to see us united. We have shared experiences that we will never forget. There is still unity among our communities. People from other provinces who are opposing mining and dam projects are coming to us to learn from our experiences.

26.4 “Talking about our experience helps us”

Oral testimonies are central to transmitting knowledge and practices among Indigenous people and peasant communities in Latin America. Remembering and recounting such experiences are ways of healing wounds, but also a way of creating reality, much in the same way that myths do in Indigenous cosmology; by recreating the origins of the universe, they play a role in giving balance to the universe.

The re-telling of our experiences is a way of healing psychological wounds inflicted by State repression and the Minera Yanacocha attacks during our mobilisations, Lynda (from the Women's Collective) told me. It is a way of rekindling the spirit of the struggle and overcoming the fear that followed the assassination and criminalisation of our friends.

While recounting the stories of years of collective work to defend the lakes, the women of Celendinas Luchadoras en Defensa de la Pachamama have realised that they have been transformed. “We have so many stories that we have shared together and they make us strong. We will continue fighting. If not, who will defend our territory?”

4 “The ronda movement emerged as a peasant response to a state incapable of providing services of security and justice to distant communities (Gitlitz and Rojas, 1983: 184). The movement's administration of justice is based on reconciliation and has always been intertwined with communal as regional social problems (Starn, 1999). The ronda movement provided the region with a structure with which to confront the imposed structure of a continuously expanding mining industry.” (Doron 2010)

The richness of this statement and how it encapsulates the way women build knowledge through telling and re-telling 'stories' cannot be taken for granted. They have become stronger because of their understanding of their reality and their decision to change their situation. They became agents of change rather than passive victims. Not only do they act as individuals but as something even more powerful and challenging; a collective. The struggle of Maxima has become the struggle of a community. She has reminded other people about their connection with Pachamama and their responsibility to take care of it.



Women in the mountains

Using Freire's argument (1996) it could be said that the women have expanded their *conciencia critica* (critical awareness) about their role in protecting their water and land. They have grown in their self-empowerment and consciousness of their capacity to change their reality. As one of the women put it, "The struggle and collective work gave us strength to act. I was the one who went to speak to the soldiers when they were kicking one of the men. I was so scared but I did it anyway. That action changed me. It broke the fear in me." Another woman commented that she talked to the authorities, something that she never imagined she would be able to do. The process of transformation is twofold: an internal process, leading to an act that changes the external social reality. The act of resistance against forces of oppression involves action and reflection, and not only a subjective or intellectual process (Freire 1996).

Their decision to defend the Pachamama has led the women to become involved in other actions that they did not envisage at the beginning. "We are now organising food

fairs to bring the produce of peasants into the city and to educate urban communities. It is a way of showing that our land has been, and is still, for food production. Campesinos are the ones who keep us supplied with food in the city" (Benita from the women's collective).

The women's collective has grown as a group. They have created a plan of activities to educate themselves on areas such as ecofeminism and biodiversity. They are clear now that it is vital to continue working with the campesino and Indigenous communities that live closer to the mine. Their animals and crops are at greater risk and there is no support from the government. The women want to strengthen the link between those communities and people living in the urban area of Celendin.

26.5 Reflecting on active solidarity: the problem is also mine

The extractive industry and the NGO sector have something in common. They have been promoted by international institutions like the World Bank and governments around the world as a driving force for development. By way of contrast, there are growing critiques about the role of NGOs (local, national and international) in perpetuating the Western ideology of progress, co-opting leaders from social movements, establishing negotiations with companies and, in many instances, silencing them in order to fit donor agendas (Choudry and Kapoor 2014, Dass and Rose 2015, Manji and O'Coill 2002).

Some Northern campaigning organisations, as well as individual activists who consider themselves more as progressives than NGO workers, are also to blame for reproducing structures of power, control and oppression. They tend to speak on behalf of others rather than allowing people to speak for themselves, taking over the agendas of social movements and maximising visibility for their organisations rather than making visible the struggle and the people (Harvey 2005). As I listened to the women of Celendin talking about their experiences during the anti-mining struggles, I could not help thinking that, for many paid professional campaigners, such a struggle is just another job, and any extra time spent at a Sunday demonstration is something that has to be paid for.

Breaking these patterns will demand a conscious effort to unveil the power relations that exist between Northern, paid campaigners and social movements. Dialogue has to take place based on mutual respect and an understanding of the difference between the two. In this context, my visit and dialogue with the people of Cajamarca defending their territory was led by a conscious perspective of active solidarity.

I have argued in many discussions within the NGO sector that the term 'solidarity' has been devalued and co-opted by NGOs and charities. With its use, people have been given a false sense that solidarity is akin to making another charitable donation to help the poor of the world. Instead, I call for *active solidarity*, which encourages NGO workers, campaigners and their supporters to take responsibility for our reality

and to recognise how it contributes to the problems we are seeking to alleviate. Active solidarity calls on us to re-educate ourselves, in order to challenge our own structures of power and our own lifestyles. The plunder of resources in Cajamarca is rooted in and promoted by Western governments and institutions. Their problem is our problem.

26.6 The struggle continues



Mural in Celendin

The social conflict created by resource extraction in Cajamarca is still at its peak. The repression by Minera Yanacocha and the armed forces has not stopped. The companies' security guards have once again attacked Maxima, her son and animals. The Peruvian government, the World Bank and Minera Yanacocha have ignored recommendations presented by PIC and Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic (2015) before the US congress about the environmental damage and social conflict caused by the Conga Project.

Communities struggling to defend their water and land from the Conga Project have now joined the resistance against the construction of mega dams alongside the Marañón River. As with the Conga Project community leaders have been blacklisted and criminalised. In December 2015 one of them was assassinated. Two of the women's collective are active leaders in organising the people against mega dams.

I continue working with members of the women's collective and the PIC. We have organised campaigning and fundraising activities with grassroots groups in the UK to expose the situation before the Peruvian Embassy and the World Bank in London.

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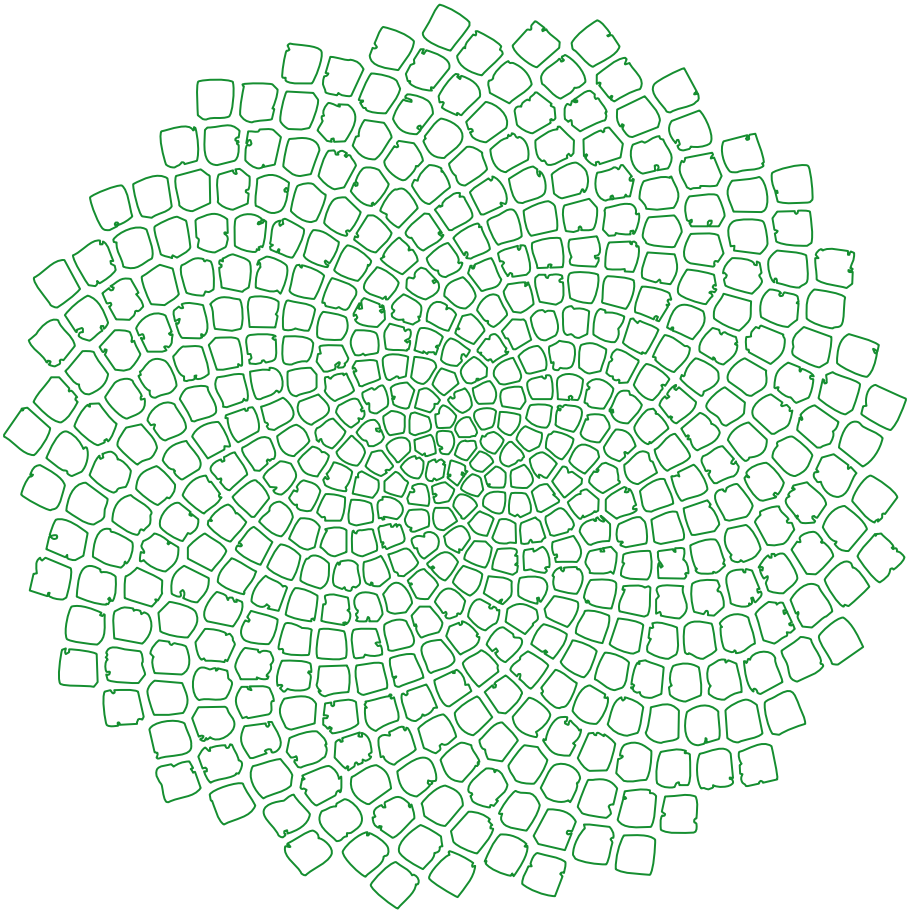
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27



Esnetik: Ethics, trust, transparency and the challenges of negotiating meaningful sustainability

Raquel Ajates Gonzalez

Geographical location: Spain, Europe

Chapter highlights: This chapter describes the research process and learning of a Basque multi-stakeholder cooperative as well as some reflections on the following three topics: sustainability, knowledge and transformation of the food system.

Esnetik members' sense of urgency and awareness that they must become allies of consumers and the environment has shaped what could be termed an 'autonomous interdependence' model of interrelations and dependencies amongst producers, workers and consumers.

The chapter includes an invitation to reflect about how willing academia is to give up control of knowledge production processes and to accept and value other ways of knowing and their holders without incorporating them into predetermined and constrained categories that hinder positive transformations in food systems.

Keywords: multi-stakeholder cooperative, 'prosumers', autonomy, sustainable food systems.

27.1 Learning from Esnetik

Esnetik is a not-for-profit multi-stakeholder cooperative based in the Basque Country. It formed as a response to the marginalisation of local traditional shepherds who were being dropped by larger milk-collecting companies or dairy cooperatives, either because they were not on a main route or because they focused primarily on milk

quality rather than quantity. Esnetik started selling sheep-milk products in May 2012 and at the time of writing, employed three full time workers and a part-time driver for deliveries and collections. Esnetik likes to represent itself as a cheese composed of the following slices: its diverse membership, its philosophy and traditional food preparation methods. The cooperative has a membership of around 200 including shepherds, consumers, workers and collaborating organisations (a combination of non-governmental organisations, local authorities and rural development organisations that were approached with the aim of bringing closer together the urban and the rural dimensions of food production and consumption).

When this research took place, Esnetik counted with five shepherds in its membership. The multi-stakeholder cooperative buys 100% of their production at a fixed, fair price agreed with the shepherds. They all receive the same price regardless of volume produced or location. This is in contrast to their previous situation, when they were offered very low prices if they were off the collection route, and in some cases, were told they could not even have their milk collected. Some of the producers milk by hand, and in general have a traditional way of production that does not fit the industrial model that values high volumes which lower transport and processing costs.



Esnetik logo

Esnetik sells as much of its produce (in the shape of cheese and yoghurt) as possible to its consumer members comprising individuals and consumer groups. The rest is sold to a milk parlour, with Esnetik covering the difference between the price agreed with the producers and the price the milk parlour is willing to pay. The objective is to grow the cooperative's network of consumer members so that demand is enough to process more milk within Esnetik and reduce the amount of milk sold to the parlour.

This chapter discusses the research process and findings from this case study as well as some reflections on the following three topics: sustainability, knowledge and transformation of the food system.

27.2 The politics of defining food sustainability

This work was part of a wider research project to study the evolution of the agricultural cooperative sector in Spain and the UK in the context of the European food policy

framework and to analyse how different types of members of farming cooperatives define food sustainability. Agricultural cooperatives account for 40-60% of agricultural trade in the EU, making them key actors in the food system with a big impact on sustainability. However, some authors have argued that many European agricultural cooperatives are promoting unfair global trade relations (e.g. by requesting trade protection for EU farmers while asking for support to enter markets abroad) (Berthelot 2012) as well as unsustainable monocultures (Soberania Alimentaria 2013). This chapter discusses Esnetik's struggle to remain true to food sovereignty principles and their own vision of sustainability, both environmental and financial.

Definitions of sustainability are normally top-down, ignoring the values and conceptions held by producers who are actually reproducing the food system in active and immediate ways through their everyday practice. Some reproduce existing destructive dynamics of industrial agriculture while others such as Esnetik members, reproduce pockets of resistance with the intention of creating wider transformation. The work of farmers has a much more immediate effect on nature and the food system than that of academics and policy makers who often have to navigate long timescales to achieve any impact.

Based on this observation, rather than choosing a definition of sustainability from the literature and assessing what types of cooperatives were less or more sustainable based on a comparison of their practices to existing definitions, this research asked members of different types of cooperatives what their definition of a sustainable food system was and how that vision was being translated in their practices. It encouraged participants to reflect on and discuss their own views and conceptualisations of sustainable food systems, compare their own definitions to existing ones, and assess how their livelihoods are affected by dominant conceptions.

Much care was taken to ensure that participants were able to describe their reality in their own words, by sharing their own opinions and understanding of sustainability rather than using existing, often imposed, definitions or categories. The theoretical assumption was that all individuals are or can become active participants and shapers of food systems (as opposed to being passive consumers or passive farmers at the mercy of large, powerful players). Participants were seen not in individualistic isolation but as they interacting with and understanding the food system through constant transaction with their environments; this approach created a theoretical space to consider how different actors construct and reproduce their own meaning of sustainability and their own version of how sustainable food systems should look.

The methodological approach of this research was inspired and informed by the STEPS pathway multi-methods approach. STEPS is the Centre for Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability. Following the same interpretivist-constructivist line discussed above, the STEPS pathway approach recognises that "who you are shapes how you 'frame' – or understand – a system" (STEPS 2015). The following quote describes the need to open up theoretical spaces to acknowledge and

document those voices and initiatives that could be key to achieving more sustainable food systems but that for many reasons are ignored:

“Too often the narratives of powerful actors and institutions become the motorways channelling policy, governance and interventions, overrunning the valuable pathways responding to poorer people’s own goals, knowledge and values. Our pathways approach pays attention to multiple pathways and, backed by a variety of practical methods, helps open up space for more plural and dynamic sustainabilities. It also aims to open up the political process of building pathways which are currently hidden, obscured or oppressed” (STEPS 2015).

The STEPS approach is also expressed in the way interviewees were asked to define sustainability in their own terms, something that is normally considered to be the role of academia. In-depth interviews were carried out with three members of Esnetik during a visit to their office and processing plant. I also reviewed the cooperative’s constitution and the content of their website. In addition, this chapter includes multimedia materials (photographs and videos) created by Esnetik which represent the cooperative in its own terms. Esnetik was happy to share this multimedia material for this project.

Esnetik’s approach and understanding of sustainability is closely linked with knowledge production and conservation: by protecting knowledge of traditional and small production units, it is also sustaining more environmentally-friendly production as well as livelihoods. All producer members are required to have small herds and a local breed of sheep called latxa. Latxa sheep are adapted to the local geography and climate. They are linked with a traditional local method of production. Another requirement is the use of non-GM feed and recycling jars for yoghurts.



Approach based on ethics, trust and transparency

Aspirations of autonomy are intrinsic to Esnetik's understanding and practices of sustainability. Sustainability and autonomy are linked in the way Esnetik members understand organic agriculture and in their direct relationships with groups of consumers. For Esnetik, organic production is a synonym of autonomy, a key dimension of the strong Basque cultural identity. Esnetik farmers oppose organic production methods that rely heavily on external inputs, as this type of organic agriculture is considered a trap that does not change the dependency of producers on agri-inputs industries. At the other end of the supply chain, Esnetik also rejects the type of organic production that relies on large supermarkets for routes to markets, developing instead a network of trusted buyers (either consumer groups or small like-minded retailers). This approach offers independence from large distributors as this quote reflects:

"The biggest learning that organic livestock has given me is the capacity for autonomy it granted me. If we don't understand that organic farming, that agroecology, are means, tools for the autonomy of farmers, to produce at lower cost of production, then I think we are getting it wrong. [...] That is the problem, that a new organic agriculture is being made, [...] just as dependent as the other [conventional agriculture]" (Esnetik member).

Redefining sustainability is another interesting part of Esnetik's vision, which is linked with its attempts to provide consumers with a serious alternative to supermarkets by aiming to offer more products to consumer members. When asking one member what sustainability meant to them, they said:

"There is a lot of debate, to me [sustainability] is whatever it allows the producer in this moment in time to live with the maximum degree of autonomy on the one hand, and to perpetuate in time the continuity of the farm. I prefer not to enter into details, for example, around local produce, zero-km products, sterile debates from my point of view, that at the end of the day, large retailers take advantage of, because they are able to absorb them quickly and in fact they are already absorbing them and local products are part of large retailers marketing. And for that reason I say, myself who am in that fight, that we need to create a complete distribution that becomes an alternative way of consuming for people who want to participate in this process" (Esnetik member).

The above two quotes reflect participants' awareness of the risk of co-option associated with narrow definitions of sustainability and organic farming based on simplistic metrics. Some members of Esnetik are starting a separate new cooperative to offer more products to consumers (such as oranges and olive oil from the south of Spain) from like-minded producers. These conceptual tensions might bring differences with members who have more purist views of sustainability based on localism, which is especially complicated in a country such as Spain where the seasons, the regions and the crops are so varied. These tensions reflect how definitions are constantly evolving, benchmarks changing, and consensus is hard to maintain.

27.3 Autonomous-interdependency: knowledge transfer and sustainability

Esnetik is very aware of the increasing privatisation of all types of knowledge in the food system. Through its work and practices, it is trying to reclaim informal processes of knowledge production and exchange and share these with producers at different levels. The main strategy is to empower producers to regain control over product price negotiations which prioritise the producers' views and knowledge of their production costs, linking the price back to them and their local realities rather than depending on the global price fluctuations which are a key issue in the global dairy sector.

Secondly, by requiring producer members to use the local latxa breed of sheep, Esnetik reinforces the relevance of producers' knowledge of their region, their traditional breeds and the production methods associated with both. It allows producers to become active holders of knowledge around quality and production methods, two aspects of the food system that have been increasingly appropriated through the long process of industrialisation of agriculture (McMichael 2000). More 'productive' but less flavoursome varieties and processing methods might be of interest to the processor and the retailer, but not to the consumer (Goodman and DuPuis 2002).

Esnetik's politico-economic conception of organic production weaves together the process of knowledge transfer with sustainability:

"The problem is that being an organic farmer is much more complex and demands much more training than a conventional grower. Why? Because a long trajectory is needed, a lot of experience, whereas in the other agriculture, you are given everything done. When you have a pest problem, you go to the nearest all-too-typical 'pharmacy' [pesticide outlet] and they give you the product. Here, the people who have the experience are the ones who are going to transfer how to act against pests, how to treat the soil" (Esnetik member).

Organic agriculture as a result becomes a political act of autonomy both as a production approach but also with regards to knowledge acquisition. These horizontal knowledge exchanges can be seen to serve three roles:

- 1) they require farmers to be proactive, shaking them off the spoon-fed dependency spread by industrial farming;
- 2) the processes of knowledge transfer strengthen farmer networks and interaction as well as increasing collective knowledge in the cooperative;
- 3) by fostering informal processes rather than standards-based approaches for certifications or labels, Esnetik reduces the risk of 'conventionalisation' through depoliticised versions of the organic and fair trade movements that have been absorbed by large processors and retailers in the food system and used as just another selling point (Goodman *et al.* 2012).

In this sense, Esnetik's efforts to create a new fair trade certification in the region might be opening up a contradictory path for the cooperative. Even if this initiative is promoted for all the best reasons, it is a step towards standards-based rather than processed-based production, which may unintentionally undermine the cooperative's uniqueness and principles. This move could be seen as clashing with the aim to remain 'unconventionalised'. However, in the light of Esnetik's vision of creating close alliances between small producers and urban consumers, fair trade certification becomes a powerful tool to connect with more distant buyers. If the certified products are traded only via like-minded small shops and kept away from large retailers, the cooperative could retain the power to resist co-option even when adopting certification. A fair trade label for foods produced in Europe would also highlight how the issue of unfair prices for producers does not only affect developing countries.

An additional strategy used by the cooperative is to exchange knowledge with other networks. Esnetik is closely linked to EHNE (a farmers' union) and the food sovereignty movement. All Esnetik members I spoke to told me about the importance given by this union not only to technical education, but political education of members.



Holding a Social and Solidarity Economy banner at one of their markets

Finally, in terms of barriers and opportunities, the following quote describes an example of knowledge exchange processes taking place in the cooperative. The quote reflects the challenges facing alternative food systems in this area and the need for socialising cooperative-generated knowledge (Ajates Gonzalez 2017):

“There is a message around technology and knowledge, that is all privatised at the moment, and we need to share the message with people that it is impossible to buy both technology and knowledge. It is impossible. If we do not approach it collectively, it's pointless. It's in our hands. Look, an example, making a version of Camembert cheese we have produced. The first shepherd here developed it and it cost him 10,000 euros. Of course, when they sent him the bill his face went ... but he passed on the knowledge for free [to Esnetik]. So why don't we do it collectively? Why don't we develop alternative products to stand up to industry?” (Esnetik member)

The above points highlight the dual relationship between knowledge and autonomy that is core to Esnetik's vision and practice. When Esnetik members talk about autonomy, they refer primarily to autonomy from agri-inputs companies, an aspect closely linked to sustainability and their desire to share knowledge in order to achieve the vision of closed-loop production systems and collective consumption networks. The second aspect of autonomy discussed by members is with regard to large retailers; in this sense, they have developed their knowledge of local networks and potential allies to protect their autonomy in terms of market access and logistics to reach consumer members.

Being part of RIPPEs (Solidarity Economy European Network) and Via Campesina, there is a sense of interdependency with other weaker groups of actors in the food system (e.g. the individual consumer) but also with other sectors of the (solidarity) economy. An Esnetik worker stated that “another economy is possible, a feminist, solidary and sustainable economy” (Esnetik member). For Esnetik, reaching out to non-governmental organisations and local authorities is a way of increasing impact, and not a sign of weakness. For Esnetik producers, to be organic means to be autonomous. Autonomy is not understood as unconnected independence; the members' sense of urgency and real awareness that they must become allies of consumers and the environment has shaped what could be termed an ‘autonomous interdependence’ model of interrelations and dependencies amongst producers, workers and consumers. Their approach to co-production of knowledge has helped them see and situate themselves as an element of a complex autonomous local system of production and consumption that exists within a bigger system of national and international partners and struggles. This awareness of being a piece of a bigger jigsaw puzzle is intrinsic to Esnetik's efforts to transform food systems and scale up solidarity economies.

27.4 Transforming the food system

Esnetik is a good example of a “think global, eat local” approach (Pimbert *et al.* 2015) to transforming the food system. The transformational elements of its practices and governance have effects at multiple levels and concern different actors and stages in the food chain:

- a) Incentivising producers through price to use, reproduce and sustain local breeds and traditional methods.
- b) Focusing on specialised products that industry cannot copy due to the complexity involved in industrially appropriating and copying the breed, method, recipe and social elements that are key ingredients of Esnetik's products as this quote reflects:

"We have to do an analysis and direct our food-making of diversified products towards those varieties of products for which industry encounters complexity, or more complexity, difficulty, to develop" (Esnetik member).

- c) Engaging other actors in the cooperative as equals, including consumers, local authorities, rural development organisations, unions and civil society organisations. The management board is made up of 50% producers and 50% consumers, including a social movement group representative. Currently, a workers' union is on the board, while other social movements and local authorities are also supporters and members of the cooperative. When I asked if engaging external partners from social movement groups was a way to have external people providing objective advice to the board, I got the following response:

"No, it's because we need to join efforts also from social movements that have to move from cooperation to development of local projects too that can foster the transformative development of society and food sovereignty" (Esnetik member)

By engaging non-governmental organisations in the board and decision-making, Esnetik has identified both a barrier to transformation and a way to overcome it:

"That is it, in one word, that is it, get them to roll up their sleeves. This is hard, you know? It is hard because they are very theoretical in their foundations, even in the area of consumption, it is hard because consumption has been much more theorised than the production" (Esnetik member).

The underlying logic is that these organisations are operating in urban areas, and their engagement is something that Esnetik considers key for reducing the rural/urban divide and building a bridge to creating partnerships with consumers. Each supporting organisation pays 1,000 euros to join and offers Esnetik different levels of support according to their remit. Furthermore, while not being a requirement, members (or in some cases new consumer groups) from these organisations buy products from Esnetik too.

- d) Organising 'ethical markets' which inform people of the challenges facing the sector and try to raise awareness and change consumer habits.
- e) Raising standards in general by proving to large retailers and larger buyers that another way of doing business is possible.

- f) Maintaining close links with two movements that also inform the cooperative's practice and operations: the food sovereignty movement and REAS (the *Red de Economía Solidaria y Alternativa*, in English the Network for Alternative and Solidarity Economy). It would have been easy to assume that cooperative principles would be core to Esnetik. However, rather than make this assumption, participants were asked to express what movements and principles they identified with more. It was interesting to learn that REAS has six principles, including feminist and food sovereignty principles, that are more central and core to Esnetik's *raison d'être* than cooperative principles in themselves.
- g) Fostering diversification instead of specialisation and supporting new people into agriculture. Esnetik has noticed that a key barrier to entering the livestock sector is the large amount of money that new entries have to invest. By not pushing shepherds to increase quantity but instead fostering diversification and production of a range of crops for self-consumption, Esnetik promotes an agroecological model that can help new producers make a living in a sustainable way.
- h) Appreciating small transformative actions from members to encourage wider transformation. The multi-stakeholder aspect of Esnetik means that members often have at least two identities in the cooperative: producer and consumer, worker and consumer, or consumer and volunteer. One of the workers I spoke to felt that being able to participate in an agrarian initiative while still maintaining his identity as a consumer was the best part of being a member. Esnetik founders were key in also founding Via Campesina and this is tangible in their model and way of approaching decisions and partnerships with consumers. In an attempt to engage as many people as possible, Esnetik represents a practical way of resisting the dominant industrial food system by offering many different levels of participation and allowing consumers with different concerns or ideologies (some of which include keeping rural areas alive, supporting the peasantry, health, defending the land and local varieties and traditional production practices, etc.) to channel their energies in a practical way through volunteering, selling, delivering, campaigning, learning, and so on. Esnetik is aware of and values the transformative power of those members who simply buy its products, without further involvement in the cooperative:

"Asking a person who wants to consume, who says 'I trust you' and asking in them on top of that to be activists, you need to give them a lot of food to attract them ... but they've already started doing something that needs to be valued, you know? That is to carry out the act of consuming, which has a huge transformational capacity. We don't acknowledge that enough, and in that sense, we are quite thick. I often say that the first political act of the day is in your breakfast, you decide what you are going to have for breakfast, from whom and why, freely. Let's become aware of that individual act that has a huge collective capacity" (Esnetik member)

- i) Additionally, fostering collective rather than individual consumption, and supporting the creation of new consumer groups in the area, which can have a significant impact on transforming consumption habits. Furthermore, Esnetik is one of the stops on the First Food Sovereignty Tour in the Basque Country, and a destination for visitors from other regions of Spain curious to learn how to replicate the model.

However, since ideas about how to best transform the food system are embedded into people's belief systems and cosmovisions (STEPS 2015), this is an area around which tensions often arise. For example, the topic of free labour and volunteering was discussed with other participants in other cooperatives. Some believed that volunteer labour is needed to make these initiatives happen because they are up against such a calculated and faceless system that without volunteers, alternatives would never get started. Others believed relying on volunteers is not sustainable and obscures the number of workers needed to create a fair and sustainable food system and associated livelihoods. The issue of volunteering also links with the problem of relying on a very committed group of people to keep the initiative running, which in turn reflects the tensions between keeping prices affordable for consumers but also fair for producers. This aspect highlights the financial dimensions of sustainability and the challenges facing those producers who internalise the negative environmental externalities often not accounted for in cheap food.

Different views on how to transform the food system have led some Esnetik members to set up a parallel linked project called Lurretik that aims to stock more products and offer a more complete alternative to consumers. The idea for this project came from the realisation that having to compete with other retailers on choice and variety is also an issue when striving for wider transformation as opposed to just remaining a niche producer covering a very limited range of products for a very limited group of already committed and conscientious consumers:

"There are more products but less quantity of each, that's it, there is more diversification, because in the network what we sell is a bit of everything. And in a market you sell a lot of cheese and the rest of the products don't sell. If we want to promote the network and link with consumer groups, we have to go for diversification and not making 20,000 kilos of cheese if we know that the network will only absorb 4,000" (Esnetik member)

Esnetik's most interesting strategy for transformation is probably its use of a double label that specifies how much money is paid to producers and how much goes to the cooperative for processing, marketing and retailing. In this way, Esnetik converts a label into a tool for competing against large retailers that will never be able to copy or appropriate this strategy as it would uncover the pressures they exert on producers. The label fulfils two functions: informing consumers and ensuring inward and outward transparency. However, for consumers who are not familiar with the average percentage of the price that supermarkets pay to farmers, it might be pointless

or confusing. Nevertheless, the label can help educate consumers and make other farmers aware of what options are available, reminding them of what a sustainable price for their produce should and could be.



Cheese and double label with the cooperative's and the associated trade union's logos

This sharing of knowledge and data for transformation contrasts with the way that large processors and retailers treat their own data: with confidentiality and as a way of competing in the race to lower prices rather than as a strategy to provide fair livelihoods for producers.

However, there are barriers to transforming the long-established practices of the dominant productionist paradigm:

“We have a problem to resolve alongside producers and that is that we have opposing interests, because they want to produce kilos of fodder and we say to them you have to produce kilos of quality; if they produce kilos of quality, they are going to reduce the total weight, a lot, and currently they don’t want to enter a pricing formula based on quality” (Esnetik member).

These interesting reflections on internal discussions on potential pricing based on quality were shared thanks to offering participants space to discuss their own worries and concerns rather than asking how they are dealing with challenges identified in the literature. This approach opens up new debates, enriching our knowledge of challenges facing initiatives such as Esnetik in its efforts to transform food systems.

27.5 A final note: how enabling the experience of multiple food identities and collective consumption can foster positive transformation

This research aimed to give a space for producers' views, as their voices are often unheard, silenced by market economies in which consumers rule. It sought the participation of citizens wearing different hats. Esnetik members are farmers, workers, activists, volunteers and consumers; most individual Esnetik members fall into two or three of these categories at once. Type-casting participants in research projects is very common, and the process of this research served as an important reminder of the richness that is lost when there is an oversimplification of the multiple identities of food system actors (Ajates Gonzalez 2017). Closely knitted to this aspect of multi-identity is the realisation of the collective transformative capacity inherent in individuals when they are perceived as being at the nexus of broader movements (e.g. feminism, food sovereignty, solidarity economy, fair trade, agroecology, etc.). Knowledge, resources, strategies and visions are increasingly shared across these movements as they grow aware of how the challenges facing them are the same: concentration of both power and resources in a few hands. Action research can aim to foster bridges and knowledge across movements.

The knowledge mobilised by this research focused on collating a series of strategies conceived by groups of citizens who aim not only to reinvent their food systems, but to do so in a way that cannot be co-opted. Esnetik was one of several case studies in a larger research project and the results will be presented and discussed in a paper that will be shared with participants.

The findings raise a question for researchers to reflect on: how willing is academia to relinquish control of knowledge production processes and to accept and value other knowledges and their holders without incorporating them into predetermined and constrained categories that hinder positive transformations in food systems?

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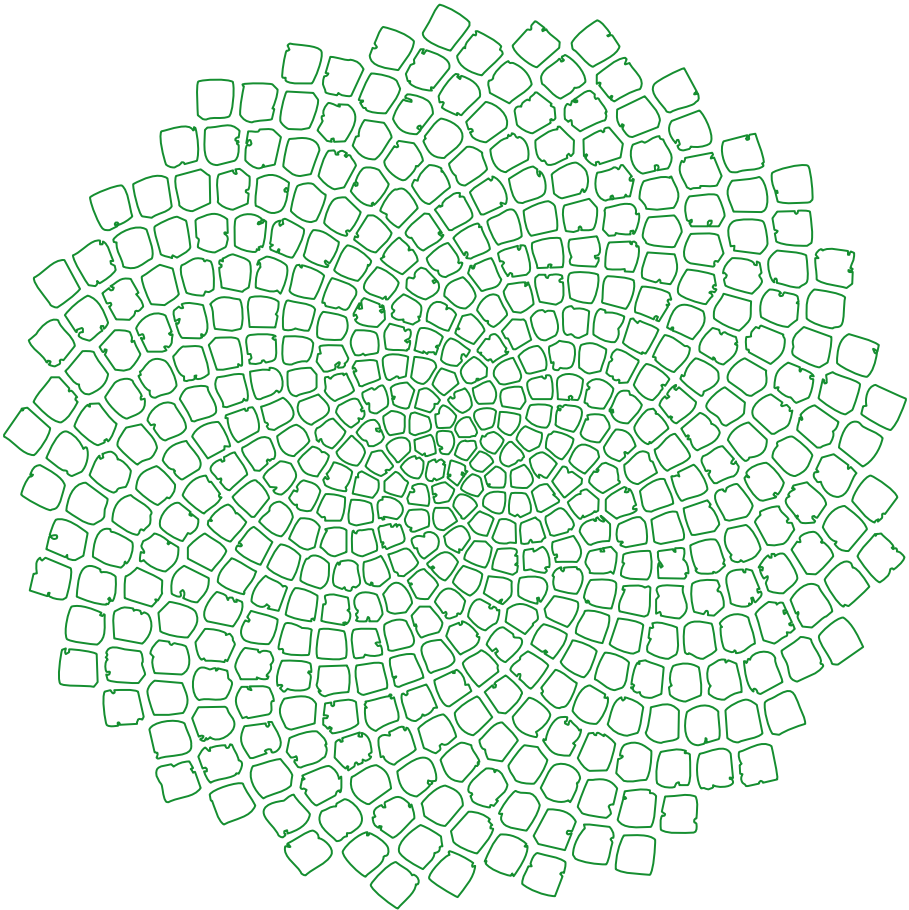
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28



From the Grassroots or by the State? Strategies for fostering urban agriculture in Brazil

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Geographical location: Brazil

Chapter highlights: Certain experiences provide valuable lessons for practitioners and policymakers seeking to develop alternatives to the current model of food production-distribution-consumption.

In order for these initiatives to flourish, a broad, strong alliance is always desirable. In most cases, the involvement of governments is a fundamental element of success, and grassroots movements should make an effort to approach policymakers and politicians.

Governments must, however, learn how to work with grassroots movements, communities, and farmers. This is challenging, but is central to a successful transformative strategy.

Keywords: urban agriculture, agroecology, participation, grassroots movements, public policies, Brazil.

28.1 Introduction

Urban and periurban agriculture is not a new phenomenon in Brazil. It has, however, gained some recent attention: researchers seem to have rediscovered the issue and several actors — policymakers, social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — are increasingly involved in negotiating the agenda around it.

This chapter discusses two different models that have been directing the course of urban and periurban agriculture experiences in Brazil. The first is a traditional state-

driven and usually top-down approach that generates public policies at the local level. The second follows the convergence of practices organised from the grassroots and is often connected to social movements engaged in struggles for land ownership. The discussion is based on our perspective as academics involved in social research and university extension using interdisciplinary approaches that emphasise the role and knowledge of non-academics. As we understand it, extension is a means through which universities may connect to society in general, and the surrounding communities in particular. Through knowledge exchange, extension allows real, concrete problems to permeate research agendas, it brings new concepts and approaches to teaching, management and research, and it improves the overall institutional image.

As professionals involved with such practices (or as 'researchers-extensionists' of sorts), we feel that the ideas we present over the next few pages provide a helpful illustration of participation as an important aspect that shapes alliances, policies and outcomes. On a personal note, we can say that these experiences — which in contrast to more traditional approaches to research, demanded a more engaged attitude and a different relationship to research itself — were responsible for making us more sensitive to other models and means of conducting our tasks as researchers. Thus, as we later point out, what we present here is not only two different case studies, but a subtle tale of how we, ourselves, have changed as researchers. In this sense, we feel that it is relevant to introduce ourselves to the readers. The three of us are professors at a major Brazilian public university, the University of Campinas (Unicamp), where professors are committed to teaching, research and (in a far less demanding way) extension. Over the next few pages, we share a very brief version of our research trajectories, and at the end of this chapter we present some comments on how more direct involvement with social actors had an impact on our activities at the university.

But first, let us go back to the two experiences we describe. Each of the aforementioned models is shaped by different rationales and involves different actors in heterogeneous alliances. They face specific challenges and generate distinctive results. We propose an analysis of these two models based on two significant and representative experiences of urban agriculture in Brazil: an award-winning public program developed in the city of Maringá; and the set of grassroots initiatives being developed at the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment in Limeira. We discuss the potential and limits of these two experiences, drawing lessons that might be useful in shaping new strategies for promoting urban and periurban agriculture.

We also consider that experiences such as these raise relevant questions related to public policies. Brazil has historically forged a paternalistic and technocratic approach to state intervention. Policies are generally formulated and implemented with virtually no participation from representatives of social movements and organised civil society. They are also frequently evaluated based on traditional criteria of efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness, disregarding fundamental aspects such as learning, cultural exchange, increase in social cohesion, and empowerment and autonomy of communities.

28.2 The hegemony of agribusiness and alternatives for food production in Brazil

In many places, growing crops and producing food is thought of as a strictly rural activity. In Brazil, the word 'agriculture' would probably lead one to imagine either a very large property in which machines dutifully circulate among homogenous crops (probably soybeans or sugarcane), or a small property in which a family and maybe a few helping hands are able to grow different types of fruits and vegetables, in what is often a complex palette influenced by local climate, culture and economic conditions.

Both these images are accurate enough, even if they contain a certain pinch of poetic licence. They represent worlds in motion and models of production that are constantly clashing with one another, rather than mere stylised, stable patterns.

The world of agribusiness is frequently surrounded by a positive social imaginary (Weid 2004, Santos 2009) associated with technological development and increasing productivity, while the irrefutable negative externalities associated with it — loss of crop diversity, destruction of traditional forms of production, unemployment resulting from mechanisation, extreme market concentration etc. — are seen as a fair price to be paid, since agribusiness, its advocates claim, is the only form of production that could generate enough food to put an end to world famine.

This is a very simplistic approach to an old problem: it completely suppresses the politics underpinning the system through which we produce, distribute and consume food in late industrial societies. This optimistic narrative has become something more than one possible interpretation of reality. It has served as the ideological backbone of food politics and policies in Brazil for many decades now, and partially explains the steady advance of agribusiness in the country.

There is some resistance to the imposition of this model. There are many in the country who question the alleged inevitability of agribusiness, notably some organised social movements such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), whose actions have been decisive in pressing governments to act in support of family farm production and land reform, and in building awareness of the historical problems related to land concentration in Brazil.

Other grassroots movements and NGOs have challenged the current sociotechnical order that dictates how resources are allocated and how food is produced, processed and consumed. In this context, urban and periurban agriculture is slowly becoming a reality in some Brazilian cities, as happened previously in other parts of the world (Smit *et al*, 1996, Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999). This could be seen as an emerging approach that, if properly nourished, could bring about transformative processes towards a more sustainable system.

It is important to take a closer look at some of these experiences in order to identify the key elements that could lead to this desired transformation. In order

to understand some of the complexity surrounding these initiatives, we will briefly describe two Brazilian experiences that, although differently shaped, have had some interesting results.

28.3 The city of Maringá's public programme

Over the course of the past few years, the Brazilian Federal Government has committed to promoting urban and periurban agriculture under a programme managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MDS). Although still very modest in terms of funding, this programme creates an important space on a rather impervious policy agenda and shows that the fostering of alternative food systems is being recognised as an important strategy by politically relevant actors. Thus, the lack of interest by the state, one of the main hindrances to the development of urban and periurban agriculture in Brazil (Rosa 2011), is slowly being overcome.

However, most public policies for urban and periurban agriculture in Brazil have actually sprouted from local administrations. In this section we will briefly discuss one of them, developed in the city of Maringá and recognised as one of the most innovative 'social technologies' by the Banco do Brasil Foundation in 2011. The data underpinning the following ideas was collected through interviews with technicians and community members, as well as visits to two farms during a short visit of four days. This was done using a traditional approach, at a time when we were still fairly unfamiliar with participatory research concepts and methods.

Maringá is a fairly wealthy city in southern Brazil. With roughly 400,000 inhabitants, it is a middle-sized city by Brazilian standards. It is also a typical agribusiness hub, in which soybeans account for most of the planted area around the city.

The programme implemented by the local administration was inspired mainly by public health concerns and was influenced by a World Health Organisation (WHO) report, in which a set of strategies for fighting and reducing the risks of lingering conditions and diseases were presented (WHO 2005), including the need to encourage people to exercise regularly and eat fruits and vegetables on a daily basis.

The WHO report had a strong influence on the local administration, which promptly set up a programme called *Maringá Saudável* (Healthy Maringá), comprised of a wide set of actions. Fitness equipment aimed especially at senior citizens was made available in public spaces. The local administration enforced a smoking ban, and promoted community farming in urban spaces.

The city's early efforts to promote community farming were boosted by a grant of 3.2 million reais from MDS (equivalent to some US\$2 million at the time). In partnership with Maringá State University (UEM), the local administration secured funding to build three small farms. This 'pilot' phase allowed policymakers, academics and the community to strengthen collaboration, build trust and acquire managerial and technical know-how, contributing to the programme's later success.

The building of Maringá's community farms takes place in unused public spaces. Technicians design the layout of the farms and hand the management to families in the surrounding area that choose to participate. These community members then work on the farms and grow vegetables of their choosing (mostly lettuce, tomatoes, kale, spinach, cabbage, garlic, radish, sugar beets and carrots), relying on technical assistance from the local administration whenever it is needed. Whatever is produced is generally consumed by the families. Eventually, a small proportion of the produce may be sold on stalls.

Recent estimates show that over 600 families benefit directly from the programme, which now has more than twenty functioning farms in the city, ranging from 600 to 1000 square metres. People using the farms are required by the city administration to observe agroecological principles, and this can prove to be somewhat challenging. As one of the people involved with the programme stated, some people working on the community farms have previous experience in industrial-scale farming and tend to bring with them old habits such as the indiscriminate use of chemicals.

There are four phases that lead to the establishment of new farms. The process begins with a request for a community farm which must be submitted to the local administration. This is normally done by the head of a neighbourhood association. If the request is considered reasonable, members of the community are called to participate in the programme.

Phase two begins when around thirty families have declared an interest in taking part. In this phase, a series of meetings take place in which members of the community get to know more about the programme, agree guidelines and elect a steering committee to manage the new farm. During this period, technicians work on the farm and its layout and prepare the soil. Lastly, the fields are distributed among participating families on a random basis.

Phase three consists of workshops offered by technicians and researchers from the local universities and from CERAUP, a Reference Centre in Urban and Periurban Agriculture. The local administration and universities offer seeds, organic fertilisers, machines and tools to aid in the preparation of the farm.

The last step, phase four, involves the actual start-up of the farm, after which monthly meetings take place to discuss the general management of the farm. The total cost of this process is around US\$8,000. Maintenance costs are very low, since water — which accounts for most of the total expenses in such farms — is generally offered free of charge by a local shop owner.

The programme's positive results are celebrated by policymakers, academics and the families that take part. They stress the importance of being able to grow their own food and the increase in the variety of vegetables they eat. Children help out on the farms and develop an emotional connection with the produce they grow, leading them to eat better. Adults put their bodies in motion while caring for the fields, which

serves as regular physical activity. The community develops bonds of cooperation and solidarity. Some of the food produced may be sold to neighbours, resulting in a small additional income and reducing some of the financial pressure on families. This, however, is viewed as a positive externality of sorts: to the local government, the main objective of the programme is to promote health and wellbeing, not work and income.

The farms also change the landscape. Where once there were neglected spaces covered in grass and rubbish, now there are growing crops on well-kept fields. This leads to increased self-esteem and happiness, which are seldom taken into account when measuring the success of public interventions, but are vital results nevertheless. These results are what Mougeot (2000) argues are key outcomes of urban agriculture practices: the potential to redefine the way people interact with each other and with the city around them.

The Maringá experience is clearly successful in terms of accomplishing its objectives. Its main challenge is how to build a stronger, more enduring alliance between the actors involved. As we stated above, water, which is crucial for the farms, is supplied by nearby shop owners out of goodwill. If, for some reason (such as a rise in the cost of water) they revoke this arrangement in the future, a huge problem could arise. Additionally, without the involvement of other actors in the programme design, there may be problems of continuity, since it is not uncommon in Brazil for a new administration to end initiatives started by the previous administration, regardless of their success.

28.4 Grassroots initiatives at the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment

The Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment is located in Limeira, a city in the state of São Paulo with around 300,000 inhabitants. The local economy is diversified, but as in Maringá, agribusiness is among the most important activities in the city. Citrus (especially oranges) and sugarcane are the main produce (Limeira 2015).

The Encampment was established in 2007, following the occupation of an idle area of 125 hectares by 250 families linked to MST (the Landless Workers' Movement). This led to a dispute with the local administration, which was planning to establish an industrial zone on the land (Taufic 2014). The dispute escalated to a bloody conflict in November 2007 when farmers clashed with police forces, leaving more than twenty people injured.

After this turbulent beginning, ongoing resistance by the MST with the support of the National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) led to an uneasy truce with the local administration. Although a definitive settlement is still pending, the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment gained legitimacy and now enjoys more respectful treatment by the city administration, which has acknowledged it as vulnerable land settled by families and requiring attention, rather than just a space to be occupied by eager companies.

Despite a context of adversity and scarcity, the families living in the Encampment have been able to create some of the conditions for a decent living. Through much effort, they have succeeded in growing crops, but also in developing a sense of community. Agroecological practices are frequently adopted, as favoured by MST as a form of political resistance and promoted by the many students drawn to the Encampment through extension projects run by the nearby universities. The Encampment presents an interesting contrast to the Maringá experience.

The ideas we present below were developed based on information collected through two different channels: an extension project developed at the School of Applied Sciences of the State University of Campinas, Limeira Campus, and the systematic monitoring carried out by the City's Food and Nutrition Security Council (COMSEA). Both of these experiences allowed regular interaction with families settled at the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment in activities which blended research and intervention. Thus, while the evidence we collected about the Maringá experience was basically the result of distant observation, our involvement with the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment is much more direct and somewhat more personal.

The extension project involved organising family agriculture markets on the University campus. The aims included bringing together farmers and faculty, staff and students; drawing attention to local produce; improving the Encampment's image (which, regrettably, is still looked upon with prejudice); and aiding a collective of women farmers from the Encampment in generating income. There were also broader aims to encourage reflection on the need for land reform, the structure of food systems and the importance of farmers. This led to the creation of a space for discussions about food and eating, especially concerning knowledge about edible plants (whether labelled as 'food' or not) and agrobiodiversity.

The markets themselves were successful. Many undergraduates (mainly students on the nutrition course) were present at these events, seeking to explore new varieties of produce, such as 'ice-cream-beans' found in inga fruits (*Inga edulis*), or pigeon peas (*Cajanus cajan*). This visible interest was well received by the women farmers. One of them was very happy after presenting what many students claimed to be "the largest pumpkin they had ever seen". She was glad to be the mediator of a small food discovery.

Following the success of the first markets and the increasing interest of local policymakers, the University was invited to nominate a representative to COMSEA. This was one of the opportunities provided by COMSEA for interaction and involvement of the University and farmers from the Encampment. Composed of representatives from farmers' associations, NGOs committed to social assistance, businesspeople, policy makers, technicians and academics, COMSEA is responsible for the social control and monitoring of local nutritional and food security policies. Farmers receive COMSEA advice on some matters but retain their independence.

COMSEA also held a conference in Limeira, in which a set of priorities for food and nutrition security was defined through a participatory process and presented to the local administration. This conference was attended by representatives of the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment, including some of the women that took part in the markets at the University campus.

The main interface between COMSEA and the Encampment, however, is through monitoring actions under the Food Acquisition Programme (PAA), which allows public institutions such as schools, hospitals and day-care centres to purchase produce from family farmers, with special attention given to produce from encampments and land reform settlements. A representative from COMSEA is charged with visiting the Encampment and checking the distribution, logistics, packaging, accountability and other aspects of the process through which Maranata, the Elizabeth Teixeira farmers' cooperative, sells its produce. Beyond contributing to strengthen Maranata's link with the city administration, the university and other local actors, this has been an important channel through which the cooperative has been in touch with regulation and norms, enabling it to take important steps towards complying with regulatory aspects concerning labour organisation, health and sanitary guidelines, to name just a few.

Thus, we observe that some bonds are slowly being created between the Encampment and the public sector and the city around it. A flourishing alliance involving farmers, academics and some local policy makers is slowly being shaped. Furthermore — and unlike the Maringá experience — the kind of setting that we see in the Encampment is built upon necessity, but above all, it is inspired by resistance through alternative forms of food production and distribution. Elizabeth Teixeira is definitely the product of grassroots action, being a result of MST's engagement to promoting transformative land reform in Brazil, and it has the potential to inspire actions that change the current dependency of agribusiness we discussed before, by showing that alternative, sustainable models of production are viable.

28.5 Closing remarks: from the grassroots or by the state?

Both the experiences we presented on the previous pages serve as illustrations of possible routes that might lead to the creation of spaces for urban and periurban agriculture. From these rich stories, only briefly described here, we draw some elements that may help us to better understand at least some of these possibilities.

The Maringá experience is clearly successful. It has achieved national recognition and the programme's results are evidence of its effectiveness. However, despite promoting some level of community engagement, it is based on a top-down approach, in which technicians, legitimised by the technical knowledge they hold, act alone on the design of the fields and farms, later offering a set package to be operated by the community. Although the policy makers behind the programme recognise the importance of empowering communities, it falls on the technicians alone to decide

how the fields will be drawn, who will supply the seeds, what are the proper tools and processes, etc. There are cases in which farmers request specific changes, such as an adaptation of water collection devices, but these are not common. Should the community be called to take part in the 'technical' decisions related to the programme there would probably be more empowerment, since people would be able to put some of their perspective into what the farms should be about. They are, after all, the people using them.

The experience from the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment is a story of endurance and overcoming hardships. Even though there is a broadening network of support for the Encampment's subsistence, which now includes a significant part of the local administration, there are also still some obstacles related to the relationship between the farmers and the public sector.

One such difficulty comes from the fact that there is an imbalance in the supply and demand of fruits and vegetables acquired through the Food Acquisition Programme. Cassava, for example, is produced in large amounts by farmers since it is easy and inexpensive to grow. However, the entities benefitting from the programme on the demand side sometimes cannot handle all the cassava the Encampment is able to produce.

Everyday management is also problematic since some conditions are still absent in the Encampment. The lack of electricity constrains the use of computers that could aid logistics and financial control. Furthermore, most farmers lack formal education, which tends to hinder their ability to properly manage a business and to deal with the legal aspects surrounding the relationship with the public sector.

What we may derive from both these stories is that, successful and inspirational as they may sound, there are still many obstacles ahead of them. The lack of specific channels for funding, the Brazilian state's conservative approach to policymaking and evaluation, and the difficulty of bringing together different actors (farmers, policymakers, academics) with different cultures and practices are still challenging issues. It is often tempting to salute top-down public policies as proper solutions to certain problems, but maybe we need to remember that most times the process matters just as much as the outcomes. By doing something differently, policymakers may achieve very interesting results.

It is just as tempting to dismiss the state and to think that certain structures may endure on their own. Frequently in Brazil the state will act against the interests of social movements, but not always. The Food Acquisition Programme, for instance, is a promising approach that could help to promote urban and periurban agriculture with social inclusion. But it would need to be redesigned, since it is not always aligned to the conditions and needs of farmers. Other actors, especially those engaged in developing knowledge for family farmers should be called to an enduring alliance.

To think of state and society as separate entities is misleading. They are both part of the same seamless web. True enough, public policies for urban and periurban agriculture in Brazil should be encouraged and improved. And who better than the ones practising it to aid in this process? By enabling grassroots movements to participate more actively in the decision-making some of these deficiencies would probably be corrected.

Experiences such as these two provide important elements that could be drawn on to contribute to building a positive research agenda to support sustainable, inclusive food production systems. We would stress the importance of approaches and methods that defy the traditional hierarchical relationship — still very strong in Brazil and many other countries — between those who supposedly hold more knowledge (the academics) than others (practitioners, policy makers, farmers). Participatory action research could certainly be a tool for generating knowledge and tools that would allow experiences such as these to flourish (and agroecology is arguably one of the themes that have most benefited from this kind of approach in Brazil).

By exploring different models of intervention, through which alternative links between state and society are built and strengthened, we believe that some interesting questions may be raised, aiding 'policy makers' and 'policy researchers' to challenge traditional models of state intervention. Participation is a big challenge: although the state has a crucial role to play, conditions must be created so that social movements, organised consumers, community members, NGOs, academics and others may equally take part in decisions and actions. Alternative strategies, tools for participation, evaluation methods and many other elements are necessary. After all, it seems unlikely that we will be able to build a democratic, sustainable, inclusive society relying on the same means that shaped the one we are currently living in.

By being in direct contact with actors — in our case, farmers and producers — we not only managed to gain a better understanding of the political subtleties that would probably escape a more traditional empirical analysis, but we were also challenged to rethink our very roles as academics.

This, undoubtedly, has had an impact on our personal trajectories. But this change in perception also contributed to institutional changes oriented towards more engaged teaching research and extension practices. Supported by our experiences in the projects mentioned above and other similar ones, we have founded an incubator for workers' cooperatives, ITPC, at the university campus in Limeira. The limits of traditional research and the possibility of overcoming them through more engaged research-extension approaches led us to shape practices that allow us to interact dialogically with communities, workers and farmers in order to produce pertinent knowledge that may contribute to local development. In this sense, ITCP seeks to support workers from different sectors — farming, recycling, crafting, etc. — in creating sustainable, self-managed cooperatives, drawing elements from the works of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) particularly with regard to the role of knowledge as a political tool

for social change. Through ITCP we have continued the intervention at the Elizabeth Teixeira Encampment, and also in other spaces such as CooperL (a cooperative for recycling aluminium, plastic and paper waste) and Vila Dignidade (a housing project for senior citizens, where we are organising craft workshops and fairs). This is a relevant institutional project made possible by the sensibility we developed through the kind of research we conducted earlier and in which we use action research tools.

In conclusion, we would like to point out that over the last couple of years we have sought to bring action research principles to our activities at ITCP, and we believe we are obtaining some interesting results. One of them is related to our own practices: by systematically reflecting on our research practices in connection with social actors, we can undoubtedly improve their effectivity and impact. Although apparently rather obvious, that is something that is easy to miss when we do 'traditional research', but is something of which we are constantly reminded when we are dealing with other actors through open, respecting, non-hierarchical approaches. Action research may be a tool for social change, but it is also a way through which we, as researchers, transform ourselves.

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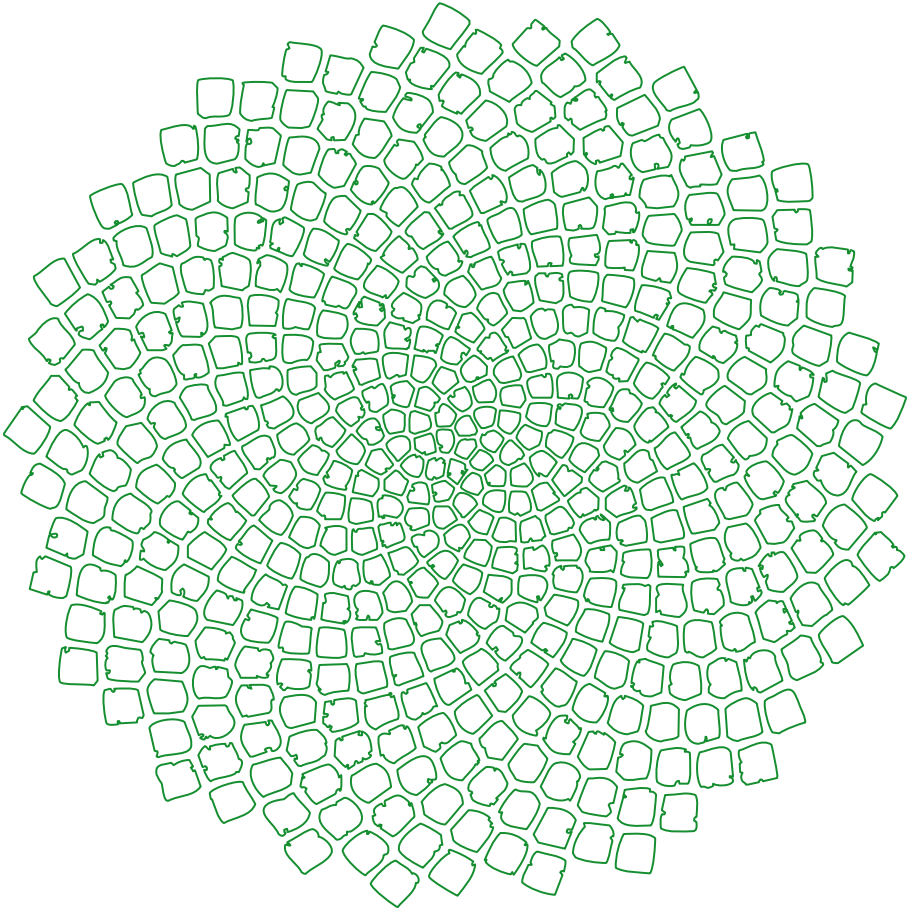
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28.7 Further learning

Brazilian Landless Movement & Agroecology (video): https://youtu.be/DV_LruM9irY

Brazil's Social Technology Database (website, in Portuguese): <https://www.fbb.org.br/tecnologiasocial/>

Interview with Josue de Castro (video, in French): <http://www.rts.ch/archives/tv/divers/3435019-scandale-de-la-faim.html>



Epilogue: Learnings and questions that remain

We have undertaken the editing of this book using, as much as possible, the principles of participatory research. We aimed for an inclusive process that would support practitioners to reflect on and share their work. Our aim was to draw together people who generally aligned themselves with action-oriented research towards the realisation of a more just food system.

By allowing authors to be relatively flexible in how they defined such practices we aimed to open up the opportunity for critical self-analysis to a wide range of voices and perspectives. The contributors came together through relationships formed by each of the five co-editors with people in their networks. Each of us came to the project with our own distinctive position on many of the issues covered in the book. The different backgrounds, positions, privileges and life circumstances of authors and editors has generated what we have found to be a rewarding process and a diverse and dynamic book. However, opting for such an inclusive and diverse project has forced us to grapple with a number of challenges and tensions.

First, although we came to the project with an assumption that there would be relatively shared meaning of participatory and action research, this began to unravel as the project progressed. Differences existed amongst the editors and there are clear differences between the chapters. Yet, rather than taking a hard-line on what was included as action research and what was not, we ended up negotiating these differences and, in the end, taking an approach that prioritised inclusivity over too many rigid definitions imposed in a top-down manner.

In embracing a diversity of perspectives, the editing process has created some contradictions, for example on what constitutes 'participation'. Some authors insisted that all stages of action research in particular geographical communities must be carried out by people of those communities, rather than professional researchers from outside of those communities. Other chapters describe processes in which

professionally-trained researchers from academic institutions undertake the majority of the knowledge and meaning-generating activities, including the setting of the research goals, planning, question-formation, data collection, analysis and follow-up.

In our view, and although not possible in all circumstances, we feel that approaches where grassroots communities and social movements have full control in all stages of knowledge production are most able to contribute towards cognitive justice. Professional researchers can play an important role by accompanying and supporting these processes, however, in these cases it is essential to ensure the locus of power and knowledge remains with communities. In this way, the traditions of participatory action research and popular education provide important ways of working and thinking that can guide researchers both within and beyond the academy.

There were also differences in what constitutes 'action' in action research. As editors of a publication dealing with food justice, action research should involve knowledge that is generated through, and leads to further, action that contributes to the material realisation of food justice. Furthermore, this action should be directly tied to the achievement of the political objectives of grassroots social movements.

In some cases, notably some chapters that were not included in the final version of the book, authors appeared to assume that the use of the term action research for their work only requires them to generate evidence and outcomes that might be actionable by un-named social movements in the future. While this approach may indeed be useful for some purposes, even for social movements in some circumstances, to us, this was not sufficient to merit the term action research. In our experience, there is a practical drawback to approaches that are exclusively led by professionally-trained researchers. Such a top-down process of knowledge generation alienates social movements from their own knowledge-generating process. Such movements are far less likely to find meaning and purpose in knowledge that they have not had a role in producing.

Regardless of the approach that authors brought to the table, we asked participants to be critically reflective on their research process through a consideration of the following five sets of questions:

1. What kind of research is being undertaken and how does it fit into an agenda to transform food systems and transform society? How does it link to broader movements to transform food systems, such as food justice, food sovereignty and agroecology?
2. What impact did the research have or could have? How is this linked to the processes, methods and approaches chosen by the researchers?
3. Who did the research and to what extent does it involve the participation of citizens?
4. Whose voice have been amplified by the research and whose have not?

5. Where do you as the researcher(s) stand in respect to others involved, including other authors? What is your reflection on your own position in relation to the power you held in the research you describe, especially in terms of race, class and gender? How might your position of relative privilege (or lack of it) and power (or powerlessness) in the research process have affected it? Could it enrich your chapter to talk about your experiences in the first-person?

It was clear that these kinds of critical reflections on the process of knowledge production came more easily for some - perhaps those most aligned with a participatory action research approach - than for others who had a difficult time making the link between approach, theory and action.

Thus, while we asked practitioners of participatory and action research to include critical self-reflection of their own processes and of the organisations and initiatives they are a part of, this was not always as straightforward as we anticipated. While some chapters noticeably embraced this challenge, others did not. This absence was evident both amongst the professionally-trained researchers and those whose expertise comes from their life experiences.

While we are aware that reflecting on one's own practice is a skill that has to be learned, we believe some authors did not want to engage in the risks that self-critique posed. Professionally-trained researchers using participatory approaches or those in social movements have one thing in common - they are both pursuing agendas that work against the grain. Consequently, they are subject to additional scrutiny by mainstream and reactionary forces. Thus, both professionally-trained researchers and participatory workers within social movements engaged in such efforts are in an uphill battle for legitimacy. This struggle is hard enough without the added risk of being self-critical in public. Opening up the processes of community work, participatory research or social movement-building to critical analysis can risk undermining the credibility of this work. There is an aversion to "airing dirty linen" in public. Critical self-reflection is a practice which the individual must be ready to engage with fully. It is also a process of self-transformation. Researchers are accustomed to producing sanitized products geared towards problem solving or generating theory and that erase their own positioning and complex influence over the research process. This is often less messy and less risky and is ultimately what is rewarded, certainly in the academy.

Yet, the success and the improvement of participatory and action research approaches depends on a critical reflexivity and a self-analysis of power. A reflexive approach would critically examine a number of features of participatory processes, such as who leads, who facilitates, how does this reflect dimensions of class, race, age, culture, language and able-bodiedness. It would also analyse the implications of the resulting power dynamic for the process and the benefits/risks that arise from these action-oriented and participatory research approaches.

Exploring these sensitive issues of power and voice in a publication may be a risky endeavour, raising questions about the appropriateness of the (public) written form as a space in which honest self-reflection can take place. It also raises questions as to the kind of institutional and social spaces where critical reflection is possible, and for whom. There appear to be few, if any, published critiques of how either professionally-trained or social movement-based researchers working food justice have paused to reflect on their own contradictions. As people who have used an edited book as our approach we believe it is urgent for those of us working in this area to learn from other movements, such as those formed by the women's, anti-racist, people living with HIV and disability movements, to find out what kinds of processes and spaces might be created that would enable honest and constructive dialogue on problems, failures and exclusions that arise in participatory and action research. Participatory researchers working in social movements often work with very few resources. This often also applies to those working within universities. Both are already marginalised and often subject to criticism by those affiliated to dominant systems of research. It is important, therefore, that whatever form such processes of critique take, that they strengthen movements for social justice, rather than merely exposing the mistakes they may have made.

Those who are involved in daily struggles with the authorities for their land and livelihoods and who might fear for their personal safety are unlikely to have the capacity or security to share critical reflections. Those of us not in such positions of oppression, particularly people who are white and middle class - especially if they are male - should recognise the privilege of our position and be careful when offering criticisms of those who are.

We were fortunate to be able to provide small stipends for authors who were outside of academia and were not in salaried positions that allowed them to spend time on this type of intellectual labor. However, it was clear that the onerous process of reflecting, writing, receiving reviews and negotiating revisions with the editors was a laborious process that was difficult to prioritise for some authors - some of whom were in precarious livelihoods. As an editorial collective we have ourselves reflected on the different relative positions of economic security. While some of us held permanent positions at universities, one of us was a student and another an activist and participatory worker in a family with an income that is uncertain from month-to-month. These material realities form the basis of uneven power dynamics within projects that needs to be acknowledged and reconciled if there is any hope of such projects in achieving cognitive justice. Finding resources, both material and relational, that can work to flatten out these hierarchies is necessary. This includes finding financial support, paying conscious attention to who speaks and who holds power to make decisions and also making efforts to respect different ways of knowing and representation.

The editing of this book has strengthened our view that, while elite research institutions sometimes have a role to play, positive change in our food system - as with so much

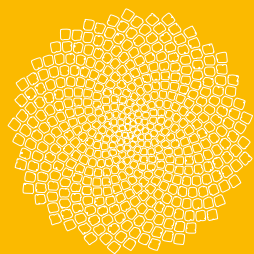
else - can only happen if it is driven from the bottom-up. We pay tribute to all those in grassroots organisations who are working within the dominant globalised industrial model of food and those in research institutions who take risks and are open to learn how to work with them on an equal footing. We hope this book can play some role in strengthening these alliances and in building an alternative based on principles of social and ecological justice.

Everyday Experts explains how knowledge built up through first-hand experience can help solve the crisis in the food system. It brings together fifty-seven activists, farmers, practitioners, researchers and community organisers from around the world to take a critical look at attempts to improve the dialogue between people whose knowledge has been marginalised in the past and others who are recognised as professional experts.

Using a combination of stories, poems, photos and videos, the contributors demonstrate how people's knowledge can transform the food system towards greater social and environmental justice. Many of the chapters also explore the challenges of using action and participatory approaches to research.

The chapters share new insights, analysis and stories that can expand our imagination of a future that encompasses:

- making dialogue among people with different ways of understanding the world central to all decision-making
- the re-affirmation of Indigenous, local, traditional and other knowledge systems
- a blurring of the divide between professional expertise and expertise that is derived from experience
- transformed relationships amongst ourselves and with the Earth to confront inequality and the environmental crisis



The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* seeks to encourage debate outside mainstream policy and conceptual frameworks on the future of food, farming, land use and human well-being. The opportunities and constraints to regenerating local food systems and economies based on social and ecological diversity, justice, human rights, inclusive democracy, and active forms of citizenship are explored in this Series. Contributors to the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* are encouraged to reflect deeply on their ways of working and outcomes of their research, highlighting implications for policy, knowledge, organisations, and practice.

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* was published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) between 2006 and 2013. The Series is now published by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, at Coventry University.

To read any of the 28 chapters in this book
freely available to download, please visit:

www.coventry.ac.uk/everyday-experts

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