

Participatory Guarantee Systems



Small producers gain credibility and improve their market access

Organic farmers can enhance their credibility and improve their market access through certification. However, international certification systems are often too costly for small farmers and producers in the global South. Both ENDS therefore promotes Participatory Guarantee Systems, which are a low-cost, local and inclusive alternative to third-party certification.

THE CHALLENGE: COSTLY AND COMPLICATED CERTIFICATION

Consumers today increasingly want to know that the products they buy were produced under acceptable environmental and social conditions. Third-party certification, which has become big business, is used to verify compliance with international quality and labour standards. Inspectors visit farms, plantations and processing industries and send the auditing results, often no more than a snapshot of the situation, to the certification organisation. However, small producers in remote rural areas find it difficult to embrace third-party certification due to the bureaucratic paper work involved and the high costs of auditing. Yet without an internationally recognised 'stamp of approval' these farmers cannot access organic markets.

THE APPROACH: LOCALLY OWNED QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

In response to the flaws of third-party certification, farmer associations and CSOs are seeking ways to control the certification process themselves. They have initiated their own standard setting, verification procedures and/or auditing based on local conditions and needs. These locally based quality assurance systems for organic (and other sustainable) produce are called Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). A vital element of PGS is that they are inclusive and participatory: local communities, small producers and labourers are actively involved and gain a sense of ownership and loyalty to the initiative. This is important because the PGS are built on trust relationships

between the participating producers who pledge to uphold the shared principles of the group and provide a joint assurance that the food they sell is organic or sustainable. Social control is maintained through the farmer's social networks and producer groups, with peer inspections of each other's farms. This informal model maintains accountability and credibility in a locally appropriate way. And because small producers often sell directly to consumers in local markets, there is also a close link between producers and consumers that involves trust.

Group audit in India / Photo by PGS Organic Council



Both ENDS promotes PGS

Both ENDS actively supports PGS initiatives around the world in cooperation with local partner organisations.

Our work includes:

- **Promotion.** We lobby for recognition of PGS systems with local and national governments, e.g. by facilitating presentations of our partner organisations at national and international fora, such as the 18th Organic World Congress in 2014.
- **Networking.** Both ENDS links up partners with experience in low-cost certification and organises international exchange visits, e.g. partners from India, Mexico and Peru taught PGS to analog forestry partners from Central America in 2013.
- **Capacity building.** We support workshops and trainings on participatory and innovative guarantee systems. E.g., our partner The Tree Project (<http://www.thetreeproject.ca/>) in Honduras set up PGS groups in La Union and established a local bazaar where consumers can meet producers of forest garden products.
- **Fund raising:** Rich Forests (www.richforests.org), a Both ENDS programme for match-making, international value chains and the sale of forest products seeks financial support for local PGS projects.

THE RESULT: PGS CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL PRODUCERS

In around 20 countries on all 5 continents, Participatory Guarantee Systems are operating. At least 10,000 smallholders are benefiting from this.

Certification of organic produce in Vietnam

In **Vietnam**, Both ENDS collaborated with the NGO VECO Vietnam¹ to set up a PGS with two organisations of vegetable farmers in the provinces Ha Nam and Hoa Binh. The organisations, which enjoy strong local support and have the potential for upscaling, expressed the need for a quality control system. Guidelines and procedures for PGS certification were formulated together with the farmers. Activities were organised to strengthen the trust relationships between the farmers and the relevant consumers, retailers and authorities:

- Visits and meetings were facilitated between the farmer organisations and private companies and retailers to raise awareness about PGS and to strengthen partnerships between them.

¹ <https://vietnam.veco-ngo.org/>

PGS certified wild honey with the Last Forest label / Photo by Keystone

- Consumer workshops and visits to farms were organised to increase awareness and build trust in the producers and the quality of their organic vegetables. This has led to a higher demand for organic vegetables.
- A database of vegetable stores selling organic produce was made with store locations indicated on a map. Consumers can more easily find the PGS certified products sold closest to them.
- Awareness raising workshops on PGS were organised for authorities at all levels to support the advocacy efforts undertaken for the official recognition of PGS. The Vietnamese government is in the process of adopting PGS in its national policies on agriculture and safe food.
- An international conference on PGS served as a platform for sharing and learning among practitioners, policy and decision-makers, donors, universities, NGOs, consumers and private sector actors. One outcome was a joint recommendation document on the relevance of PGS for family farms and especially smallholders.
- VECO and Both ENDS produced a video titled 'Participatory Guarantee System: A New Way Forward', which is used to promote PGS to the wider public and the government. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXsonhJbCMI>)

Certification of non-timber forest products

Participatory Guarantee Systems are also used for production and harvesting systems other than organic farming. In **Indonesia**, Both ENDS works together with NTFP-Indonesia (<http://www.ntfp.or.id/>) to establish rattan certification for the furniture market through PGS. The certification promotes sustainable resource management (rattan gardens) and increases benefits for rattan producers and community-based suppliers. PGS Rattan brings together different standards, incorporating fair

trade and sustainable resource management principles as well as rights issues (e.g. long-term sustainability depends on long-term tenure rights). In **India**, Both ENDS works with the NGO Keystone (<http://keystone-foundation.org/>) and their social business Last Forests to provide low-costs certification for non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Both ENDS supported Keystone to develop a PGS for the wild honey collected by indigenous tribes in the Nilgiris Blue



Mountains in Tamil Nadu. At least 60% of honey marketed in India is produced from wild honey, which is moreover an important ingredient for the ayurvedic medicine industry.



Rattan harvesting and processing in Sulawesi, Indonesia / Photo by Both ENDS
 Modern design rattan products for high-end markets in Asia / Photo by Borneo Chic.



The wild honey is collected by adivasis
 Photo by Keystone

Certification of forest garden products

PGS was combined with the certification of Forest Garden Products, a low-cost certification system developed by the International Analog Forestry Network headquartered in Costa Rica (www.analogforestrynetwork.org). The FGP standards are part of the IFOAM family of standards, which is the only standard developed in the regional South.² Forests produce an immense variety of goods, which is reflected in the range of products that have been certified under FGP. Farmers and tea plantations that work with this certification standard constantly try to increase biodiversity in their production areas or gardens. As a result they have been able to diversify their production to include fruits, herbs and spices for the national and international market.

² <http://www.ifoam.bio/en/ifoam-family-standards>

THE WAY FORWARD

PGS initiatives and pilots have proven to be viable for upscaling. Together with its partners locally, Both ENDS will continue to promote PGS in order to increase the number of farmers and producers that benefit from the system that gives them access to both local and international markets for organic and forest products.



International FGP label



Store in Sri Lanka selling certified forest garden products
 Photo by Both ENDS

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