

## The challenge of the method



By **Laércio Meirelles**, Centro Ecológico (Brazil)  
*photo: Mariléia da Silva*

The Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) carried out a High Level Meeting on Family Farming between 5 and 7 February 2018. During this event Member States and participants from the civil society elaborated and signed the Lisbon Charter for Strengthening Family Farming. Under point five of this letter the following commitment is indicated: “to review or develop a proper regulatory framework for and to provide support to participatory guarantee systems of quality within CPLP in order to actively promote the improvement and recognition of the products from family farming.” Point 9 states the commitment to work for “Agroecology and other methods of sustainable agriculture”.

It is an important recognition that a meeting of this level has included participatory guarantee systems (PGS) in the agenda and discussed their priority for their member states. In many of these countries, family farming is significantly relevant, responsible for an important share of what is consumed in the domestic market, and is characterized by a low use of external inputs. I have been able to observe the growing interest for PGS in some of the CPLP member countries, having visited and conducted assignments in many regions of Brazil, Mozambique, Cape Verde and, more recently, São Tomé and Príncipe, as a consultant for IFOAM-Organics International. On all these occasions the topic of PGS has been addressed.

Even though the Lisbon Letter does not explicitly refer to the market, it is important to consider the risks of treating PGS simply as a tool for establishing local markets for certified organic products, especially in those contexts where the negative impacts deriving from the use of agrochemicals, highly soluble chemical fertilizers, or GMO seeds are not yet so visible. Of course, the subject of food quality must always be addressed together with the issue of access to quality products. Food security implies food quality. But to assume that access to organic food is a relevant issue only to those who can pay more for it is, at the very least, perverse.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves the question: what is the meaning of working with PGS in contexts where supporting a premium market for certified organic products might not be so useful

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

The challenge of the method

Improving urban agriculture practices  
in Cape Town

Continental News: What's New In...



Field visit during a PGS training

*photo: Mariléia da Silva*

or even inconvenient? My understanding is that in contexts where low incomes are a reality for the majority of the population, and where the agricultural production is still not so badly affected by the seducing promises of the so-called green revolution, PGS are surely better justified for their side effects than for their more immediate target. In other words, for most of CPLP member states, PGS initiatives represent not simply an opportunity to create a market with premium prices, but to maximize information exchange to promote best agricultural practices, creating knowledge networks, that rescue and strengthen traditional and locally adapted agricultural knowledge. These knowledge networks make it possible for organic agriculture to become a viable option due to its intrinsic agronomic and environmental merits, more than due to the existence of a specific, differentiated market. Such a market will emerge as a space for further disseminating information, for raising awareness and as an opportunity to invite the consumer to join forces in the efforts to support more sustainable agricultural practices.

Producers or extension officers should not see PGS and the creation of market access for PGS products simply as an opportunity for increased revenues due to premium prices for organic produce: it can be difficult to obtain such a benefit in the short term. Organizations and professionals with experience in countries where the organic sector is already well developed, working to stimulate organic agriculture

in contexts where the sector is still emerging or developing, should understand local specificities and adapt methods accordingly. This is important to avoid promoting organic consumption only to the elite.

Participatory certification<sup>1</sup> emerged as an explicit alternative to third party certification in the early 1990s, seeking an innovative way to ensure the organic quality of the foods and fibres offered with this adjective. At that moment, the fundamental motivation for developing this methodology was the need to recognize the right of the families producing organic foods to make organic claims. The rationale was that if a product complies with the standards for organic agriculture, then whoever produced has the right to make this explicit claim in their relationship with the market, without the need for a third party to be involved.

In most CPLP countries, as well as in dozens of others, agriculture is still largely based on traditional methods, and a significant part of the production is still without or with very little use of external inputs, suited to local context and resources. Thus, the challenge PGS face in these

1. Editor's note: In the early days of the organic movement in Europe, participatory approaches were used to ensure the organic quality of products based on the need for a guarantee system, even before other options, such as third party certification, were available. In Latin America, instead, participatory certification developed specifically as an alternative to third-party certification, better suited to local contexts and small, family farmers.

areas is twofold. First, to establish networks of knowledge and exchange of information about such methods, recovering practices and traditional cultures, aligned with the organic and agroecological principles. Secondly, to ensure the right of those who produce according to the standards for organic agriculture to have their production recognized as organic. All those involved in the organic agriculture movement should take

their share of the responsibility to ensure this right. I am convinced that PGS are capable of taking on this double challenge. This could be boosted by information technologies that facilitate and reduce the bureaucracy still needed to demonstrate that a product complies with organic agriculture standards. It is with this perception that I see the reference to PGS in the Letter of Lisbon of CPLP as an important opportunity.

## Improving urban agriculture practices in Cape Town

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By **Nicole Paganini**, Research Fellow at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Sub-Saharan Africa is the fastest urbanizing region in the world. Achieving food and nutrition security is not only a challenge for rural areas. Access to healthy, affordable and adequate food, both in terms of quality and quantity, is also a growing issue for cities. This is especially true in the informal settlements that are rapidly expanding around urban centres. Cape Town is no exception, in one of its biggest township, 89% of the households are food insecure, especially female-headed households.

The design and implementation of a sustainable urban food system plays a crucial part in the future management of cities and it is one of the biggest challenges that policy makers, civil society, city planners and, of course, urban farmers need to address.

Since March 2016, the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) has supported a project on Urban Agriculture in Cape Town and Maputo: „UFISAMO-Urban Agriculture for Food Security and Income Generation in South Africa and Mozambique“. The objectives of the project are to

research the contribution of urban agriculture to improving the food and nutrition security of the disadvantaged urban population and its impact on income through optimizing production, processing and marketing of agricultural and livestock products.

A participatory process was initiated by UFISAMO to develop a set of good agroecological practices for urban agriculture called UrbanGAP. In this context, Good Agroecological Practices (GAP) have been adapted to the urban context, using organic agriculture and agroecology as references. Even if this might sound confusing<sup>2</sup>, we decided to adopt a new definition of GAP stressing the agroecological dimension of the practices that will be promoted through this project. Chemical inputs and mineral fertilizer are not allowed and especially for seeds,

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<sup>2</sup> The acronym GAP, in agricultural context, usually stands for Good Agricultural Practices. This set of practices, are not equal to organic practices since they foresee several practices not allowed under organic production, such as use of synthetic inputs, nevertheless they are based on the principles of risk prevention by means of Integrated Pest Management and Integrated Crop Management.



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Urban farmers attending the three-day workshop in Cape Town

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crop rotation and soil building, UrbanGAP goes hand in hand with organic agriculture standards, adapting agricultural practices to city conditions and providing the knowledge to upscale agroecological production methods.

In March 2018 a three-day workshop brought together urban farmers, retailers, NGOs, the Department of Agriculture and others involved in the urban vegetable value chain in Cape Town, to discuss how good agricultural practices, as they are understood in the context of the project, can be locally adapted to Cape Town urban conditions, such as severe drought and water stewardship. A set of guidelines will be developed targeting urban farmers who want to improve their production and keep up the continuous quality of their produce. Among the involved farmers there is a group in the process of starting the Cape Town City PGS, a sub-group of the existing Western Cape PGS. The guidelines will serve as a standard for PGS certification and will include a monitoring and evaluation checklist for performing the peer review.

Cape Town's urban farmers avoid using chemical inputs; they have received training on organic

production techniques, but these unfortunately are not always implemented correctly. The reasons for non-compliance are mainly lack of expertise and difficult access to organic inputs coupled with lack of labor. Often there are no follow-up by trainers and the farmers depend on inputs distributed by NGOs and the Department of Agriculture, which include conventional and chemically treated seeds and manure. Further challenges for **smallholder** farmers are accessing the markets and keeping continuous and consistent quality and quantity to fulfill the demand, especially when the produce is sold to high-end markets. Many retailers have showed interest in supporting urban smallholder farmers as long as the farmers can fulfil certain quality standards. Thus, PGS could provide consumers the guaranty needed and help farmers to reach those markets.

Urban Agriculture is no new phenomenon and it is an important source of food and nutrients for farmers and urban population, especially in informal settlements where access to safe and healthy food remains a challenge. The example of Cape Town's UrbanGAP with its focus on organic agriculture and water stewardship, will be transferred to Maputo in July 2018 as next phase of the UFISAMO project.

# CONTINENTAL NEWS: WHAT'S NEW IN...

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## Africa

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**Sao Tome and Principe:** In the framework of the project OM4D, implemented by IFOAM – Organics International and Agro Eco Louis Bolk Institute, a training on PGS took place from 22 to 25 of May in Sao Tome. The training was conducted by Laércio Meirelles from Centro Ecológico (Brazil) and Flávia Moura e Castro from IFOAM – Organics International. The 27 participants were farmers, government representatives, researchers and members of the civil society, who have agreed to work together in order to establish a PGS in the country. For more information, please contact Flávia Moura e Castro at [f.castro@ifoam.bio](mailto:f.castro@ifoam.bio).

## Americas

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**Brazil:** The IV National Agroecology Meeting, organized by Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia–(ANA) took place between May 31 and June 2018 in Belo Horizonte. The gathering was attended by 2000 people from all over Brazil. During the event the Brazilian PGS Forum was organized and it discussed how to shape the strategy of the forum in the coming years. Read more [here](#).

**Colombia:** Under the terms of the “Strategic guidelines for public policy for peasant, family and community agriculture” (Resolution 464 of 2017), together with the Technical Committee on Family Agriculture and Rural Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has initiated a process to build a Public Policy for the promotion of Agroecology and the recognition of PGS in Colombia. The plan foresees more than 10 regional workshops to be held with the participation of social organizations, academia and, where possible, local governments. The first workshop was held on June 18 in Bogotá, the next ones will be on July

5 in Pereira and on July 19 in Caquetá. For more information, please contact Pedro Guzmán, from RENAF Colombia at [info@agriculturafamiliar.co](mailto:info@agriculturafamiliar.co).

## Asia

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**India:** In May 2018, State Government of Himachal Pradesh, India, announced its intention to become an organic state within the next five years. The State Government plans to adopt Organic and Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) System to be certified through PGS and third party assurance. We are observing with interest how the ZBNF will be included in the national organic verification scheme. Read the full article [here](#).

**Sri Lanka:** Good Market has a brand new section on its website to show how they ensure organic assurance within their initiative. Detailed information is available on crop and animal husbandry standards, farmer review evaluation templates in three different languages (English, Sinhalese and Tamil), a seed and planting material guide and much more. Good Market PGS obtained Official IFOAM PGS Recognition in 2016.

**Thailand:** The Learning Centre of Patthawi Community Economy also known as the Patthawi organic orchard group in Chanthaburi made a choice around 15 years ago to embrace organic farming. Its 700 farmers are now certified through PGS. They also started orchard tours where visitors can do self-harvesting. Read the article [here](#).

## Europe

**EU:** The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food) has launched the framing paper 'Towards a Common Food Policy for the EU' aimed at providing the basis for further deliberation and development of the Common Food Policy in the area. The paper refers to PGS as having "the potential to promote open knowledge-sharing and experimentation" and states that supporting these initiatives "must become a central plank of the transition to sustainable food systems". Read the full paper [here](#).

**Greece:** The 13th European IFSA Symposium, will take place between July 1 and 5 in Crete. The symposium is organised around 5 key themes: Learning and Knowledge Sharing, Agroecology, Integrated Approaches, Smart Technologies and Sustainable Agrifood Systems. In the framework of this last theme Robert Home (FiBL - Switzerland) will present the paper '*Participatory guarantee systems: organic certification to empower farmers and strengthen communities.*' The program also foresees that Antonieta Carolina Reyes Gómez will present the paper '*Participatory Guarantee Systems: social innovation within the agroecological transition.*' See full program [here](#).



## Imprint

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