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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Resilience and Vulnerability of Agroecology Peasant Schools in Post-Conflict Colombia

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Abstract

Agroecology peasant schools emerge often in face of insufficient state support in rural areas in Colombia, as grass-root initiatives that utilise agroecological education as the main instrument of social transformation for promoting alternative approaches to sustainable territorial development. The diverse actors involved in the school activities engage in a constant network of interactions and knowledge exchange, which enables them to build a pool of collective skills to help reconstitute the shattered social capital base and mitigate the hazards left behind by conflict. Peasant schools in Colombia have not been broadly studied and there remains a need to systematize the experiences for abstracting the lessons learned in each school. This research aims to argue that peasant schools can play an important role in promoting sustainable practices in resource management, and in strengthening organisational aspects at farm level that harmonise efforts and increase inter-agency collaboration. Analyzing through a lens of resilience and vulnerability, this study investigates the factors that strengthen or weaken these organisations and analyses the current volatile policy setting that might determine whether they prevail or disappear in a complex post-conflict context. For these purposes, a three-month field work was carried out in different regions of the Colombian Andes by visiting multiple initiatives working in rural education with an agroecological focus. This study applied an ethnographic mixed methodology in form of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with different target groups. Preliminary results include the development of a typology outlining the main characteristics, functionality and structure of each school and the a description of the historical and geographical contexts in which they emerge and operate. Further, the study derives attributes and indicators in a participatory manner to assess the resilience and vulnerability of schools in the current economic, sociopolitical and environmental settings. The first policy analysis reveals that the policies instated after the peace agreements continue on favouring agroindustrial development over small farms, putting pressure on peasant groups in terms of land access, security, autonomy and reduced state support.

Keywords: Agroecology, campesino, Colombia, peasant, post-conflict, rural education, school