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Agroecology Peasant Schools as a Social Learning Approach for Post-conflict Reconstruction on the Colombian Andes

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Abstract

In Colombia, nearly six decades of war have devastated the countryside and induced land-related issues that perpetuate marginalisation of rural populations. Although the Peace Agreement and the Integral Rural Reform enacted in 2016 offer new prospects for resolving legacies of conflict, the reconstruction of the countryside requires augmented participation of farmer communities. Social movements advance agroecology in their propositional work as a framework for guiding intentional collective processes of socio-ecological transformation and contributing to the needed reconstruction of rural areas. Agroecology proposes an integrated approach for sustainable territorial management that applies contextualized ecological farming practices and recognises the potential of traditional agricultural forms to confront current post-accord and socio-environmental challenges. Agroecology peasant schools (ECAs) are farmer-led formative initiatives that emerge as a response to the hazards induced through conflict and operate as systems of solidarity and community support conformed by groups of farmers organised around productive, market and political processes of agroecological transformation. This study investigates the potentialities of ECAs as a grassroots strategy to confronting current post-conflict challenges through the development of new knowledge and learning systems. Through a systematisation of experiences, this qualitative study analyses the contexts in which ECAs emerge, their contributions to rural reconstruction and their pedagogical proposals. Results evidence that, although their approaches are locally-developed and thus context-specific, ECAs provide vital assistance to rural communities as they advance community-led territorial development projects and natural resource management schemes, thereby providing pertinent farmer education alternatives in rural areas. By visibilising social learning initiatives at a grassroots level, we argue that the pedagogical proposals of ECAs go hand in hand with the post-accord peace-building goals and advance agroecology education as a pertinent approach for pursuing the needed reconstruction of rural territories.

Keywords: Extension, family farming, popular education, rural reconstruction