

Empowerment as an effect of participation in Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS): A case study in Argentina

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INTRODUCTION & AIM OF THE STUDY

IFOAM (2008): "**Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)** are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange."

Empowerment...

- is highlighted as one of the main benefits of participation in PGS (IFOAM, 2018)
- ...but there is little literature specifically addressing empowerment in PGS and a lack of comprehensive, theoretically founded assessment.

The **aim** of this study was to gain a better understanding of the empowerment of producers through their participation in PGS by categorising and analysing it among the following dimensions:

Power To The ability to make effective decisions and pursue goals by gaining skills, access to resources and autonomy without limiting the possibilities of others (Rowlands, 1995)

Power with A collaborative form of power where people work together, form alliances and support each other to achieve common goals and solve problems (Rowlands, 1995)

Power within Inner strength, self-confidence and awareness that lead to a sense of meaningfulness, motivation and agency to influence decisions (Rowlands, 1995)

STUDY LOCATION

Argentina, provinces of Buenos Aires and Corrientes

- The importance of PGS has increased significantly in recent years (Cendón et al., 2023; Fernandez, 2023)
- Organic third-party certification is almost exclusively export-oriented resulting in an underdeveloped domestic organic market (Marcos et al., 2021; Santos and Domingues, 2020)

CONCLUSION

I. PGS can promote empowerment processes among producers by changing their 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within'. These processes are context-specific, individual and dynamic.

II. Empowerment as an effect of participation in PGS can manifest itself at individual and collective levels, in social, economic and political dimensions, such as increased income and knowledge, improved access to markets and machinery through cooperation, increased self-confidence and options for collective action.

III. New PGS participants expect to be empowered primarily in the 'power to' dimension while improvements in the areas of 'power within' and 'power with' often occur in the early stages of PGS engagement.

IV. Further research to validate and complement the findings is needed to build a comprehensive understanding of participation in PGS and its impact on the lives of producers.

RESULTS

Producer empowerment as an effect of participation in PGS (sample = producer survey (n=21))



Power to

- Increased Knowledge (F=19)
- Improved marketing opportunities (F=9)/ Expected improved marketing opportunities (F=10)
- Improved access to financial resources (F=6)/ Expected improved access to financial resources (F=4)
- Improved access to material resources (e.g. machinery) (F=6)/ Expected improved access to material resources (F=3)



Power with

- Extended Social Network (F=18)
- Increased Social Cohesion (F=17)
- Increased Options for Collective action (F=17)



Power within

- Increased Self-Confidence (F=15)
- Greater sense of recognition and appreciation (F=15)

Examples of producer experiences & perceptions

- '(...) when we visit other producers, everyone gains knowledge over time, over the years, with what happens on the farm or with the inconveniences that arise, the solutions that are found' [S20],
- '(...) the PGS provides the framework for the legal issue (...) to be able to sell cheese, milk and meat (...) ' [S19/18].
- '(...) when they [consumers] find out how it is produced, it is much easier to sell (...) ' [S19]
- 'It [income] has increased from 2014; I would tell you 300% and it's not going down' [S19]
- '(...) they [living conditions] have improved a lot because my income is different. My income has increased' [S18].
- 'With the colleagues we bought, for example, a multipurpose machine to make corn flour or to grind sugar cane (...) ' [S18].
- 'For our part, at the family level, we were able to get machines such as a tractor, which helped us a lot in terms of reducing the time needed to do the work (...) ' [S21].

- 'We have more power or can negotiate better with the municipality about energy, electricity and the possibility of analysing water quality' [S19/18].
- 'When we get together as a group, we more or less try to make sure that all the prices at the table are the same (...) we set the prices so that they are below the supermarket prices so that everyone can have access to the products. We do not want competition among ourselves' [S18].

- 'I have more self-confidence; I feel more confident when I sell my products, and I have much more support' [S18].
- 'since I have been part of this agroecological market my product is valued much more and as a producer I also value my work more (...) It makes you feel identified with the production you are doing' [S18].

(S= Survey; SI= Semi-structured interview; I= Interview partner)

METHODOLOGY

Phase I

- Literature review
- Conceptual framework for participation in PGS extended based on empowerment theories
- Empowerment indicators identified (adapted after Phase II)

Phase II

- 2 semi-structured interviews (SI) with representatives of an NGO and an institution
- 3 PGS initiatives selected for in-depth study following an **exploratory, inductive case study design**

Phase III

- 7 semi-structured interviews (SI) with stakeholders from 3 PGS initiatives
- Document analysis (internal documents and videos) (n=6)

Phase IV

- 4 test surveys with producers from two different PGS initiatives
- 17 surveys of producers participating in the 3 PGS initiatives
- Surveys analysed (n=21) include the test surveys
- Participant observation (n=4)

Analysis: Descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis, including frequency of codes, co-occurrence of codes and visualisation of thematic relationships.

