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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Facilitating food system innovation through inclusive co-creation: An assessment from caquetá, Colombia

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Abstract

The CGIAR Research Initiative on Low-Emissions Food Systems (MITIGATE+) supported processes in which local stakeholders lead food system innovation and define their goals, strategies, and methods. The initiative team thereby adopted and expanded the concept of living labs as social spaces where stakeholders co-develop socio-technical innovations to transform food systems towards low-emission pathways. MITIGATE+ intended to establish sustainable process governance structures which ensure impactful, inclusive co-creation processes. In the Department of Caquetá, within the Colombian Amazon, MITIGATE+ supported the development of a living lab called the ‘Participatory rural innovation lab: towards a sustainable territory’ (PRIL). This study assesses how participants and facilitators perceived the PRIL process in terms of inclusive co-creation. In August 2024, 15 PRIL participants were interviewed. In addition, between September and October 2024, eight facilitators completed a structured questionnaire. Findings show a high level of satisfaction among participants, who felt that they were able to influence the process and were motivated to share knowledge and learn. No significant imbalances in power or agency were reported, including those around gender. Notably, women more than men highlighted that participation itself was a strong motivation for them to join the PRIL. Even though there are no formal rules ensuring inclusive participation, the perception of the process being inclusive and fair with everybody having equal power to participate was strong. This indicates that normative Living labs principles were effectively embedded in practice. Participants and facilitators agreed that the PRIL could evolve into a permanent organisational structure, due to the role of a farmer association agreeing to host the PRIL. Participants, even more than facilitators, emphasised PRIL’s potential to support not only technical but also social innovations. Key challenges identified include armed conflicts and political instability and weak governance structures, as noted by participants, while facilitators more strongly emphasised the poor infrastructure as a key challenge.

Keywords: Climate change, Colombia, living labs, participatory innovation, power

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