

Assessment of Diversification Strategies in Smallholder Coffee ABSYSs

OBJECTIFS

Analyze how different diversification strategies affect food security, climate change resilience, livelihood performance and gender equity at the household, community and regional scales, and how this relates to the sustainability of coffee-based agrifood systems.

Generate scientific evidence and build capacity for In order to better understand and guide our food systems towards a sustainable transformation, research also needs to revolutionize and transform. This process requires asking the right questions and a commitment to a deeper engagement with all relevant actors. Our focus on agroecology and participatory action research (PAR) is our response to this call. Our general objective was to analyze how different diversification strategies affect food security, climate change resilience, livelihoods and gender equity at the household, community and regional scales. In order to engage these communities in better understanding and transforming their coffee farming systems, we invited them to become active and, as much as possible, equal partners in the entirety of our research process.

ACTIONS

Approach. We used an agroecological framework to create and assess social and ecological indicators for analyzing sustainability at various food system levels. This follows an understanding that agroecology is a transdisciplinary action-oriented approach, useful for fostering food systems diversification, change, and transformation (Méndez et al. 2013). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an important element of this approach, as PAR encourages partners to engage in an iterative process of research, reflection, and action, usually with explicit objectives to find solutions or address issues relevant to non-researchers. In our project, both non-academic and academic partners participated in all phases of the research process – planning, implementation, and analysis – making sure that the research would yield results that were not only academically robust, but also responded to the needs to the smallholder coffee farmers and their organizations, including capacity building.

RESULTATS

On-farm diversification is an important strategy for smallholders to overcome food insecurity, climate change and coffee market instability. However, diversification should not be understood as simply increasing the number of agricultural activities. Rather, it is essential to situate it within social context, local ecological conditions, land access, labor and market dynamics. Maintaining agrobiodiversity, as an important diversification strategy, was key for household food security and climate change adaptation. As for income diversification, the sale of agricultural products (other than coffee) is generally sporadic and at a small scale. These sales, albeit small, allow farmers to purchase food and cover other basic expenses. However, markets for products other than coffee remain a challenge. While beekeeping has potential to generate income, fluctuating honey prices make it risky and less lucrative. Results from key-actor interviews with coffee value chain stakeholders and governance, showed that, in general, they do not see diversification interfering with coffee production or quality.

Solutions and recommendations in short term :

- Supporting diversified food production at the household level is a key strategy for food security and aligned with food sovereignty.
- Organic certification and stronger local markets for honey could help to reduce the price pressures and increase the sustainability of beekeeping.
- To take full advantage of the potential of diversification strategies, smallholder coffee farmers require support from a variety of actors from within and beyond the value chain, including researchers, roasters, nongovernmental agencies, and consumers.

PERSPECTIVES

Concluding Cross-Site Perspectives - Assessing Obstacles and Opportunities for Transformation :

Smallholder cooperatives in Latin America have traditionally focused on growing and exporting coffee, as a strategy to support the livelihoods of affiliated families. However, a combination of experiences, research and dialogue have promoted many cooperatives to recognize the limits of dependence on a single crop and many of these organizations are developing food security and farm diversification

programs. Our project sought to better understand (in order to improve), cooperatives' diversification strategies to overcome months of food insecurity and other vulnerabilities affecting member families.

PAR and agroecology:

Our use of agroecology and PAR was successful in getting cooperative leadership and youth involved, as well as resonating with smallholder families. A pervasive question with PAR and agroecology is its long term perspective, and