

Organic certification schemes: managerial skills and associated costs



Along the entire production, post-harvest and processing chain of the produce, the project operator is responsible for ensuring the integrity of organic rice. Training and extension services, input supply services and careful supervision of handling and processing activities are some of the responsibilities carried out by the project. Figure 3 depicts the relationships in this scheme.

The two Indian case studies have a scheme similar to the Thailand case studies. In the first case study, the project operator, Sunstar, is the subsidiary of a rice export company that supports the group organization and holds the certification licence. In order to access markets in different EU countries, the ICS formed by the company and the group of farmers applied for various certification licences from European certification bodies. The second Indian case study is a government support scheme to help farmers gain market access of certified organic products in local and national markets. The Government provides technical assistance in ICS implementation and monitoring. Young farmers are trained/hired as organic inspectors to assist with the internal inspection of individual farms. An external certification body inspects compliance of the ICS with the organic requirements. Inspection fees are paid by the Government.

5.3 PARTICIPATORY CERTIFICATION OR THE PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM (PGS)¹⁸

The PGS is analysed as an alternative scheme. It basically targets local or national markets and involves small farmers and agro-processors, traders and consumers in the certification process. Quality assurance relies on social conformity supported by participatory norms, procedures and conventions. Procedures and standards are usually based on IFOAM, Codex Alimentarius (FAO, 1999) or national regulations. As opposed to the previous schemes, decision-making on the status of certified producers is decentralized.

There is a diversity of schemes and methodologies in the participatory certification worldwide, notably the Community-Supported Agricultural Scheme (CSA) in the United States, the Taikei System in Japan, Keystone in India, and the Ecovida Network in Brazil. Despite this diversity, common values and principles have been identified, such as food sovereignty, appropriateness to small-scale producers, targeting of local markets, flexibility, the trust-building approach and co-responsibility (IFOAM, 2006).¹⁹ Such common principles were identified during the first workshop on participatory certification schemes held in Brazil on April 2004 and promoted by IFOAM, the Agroecological Movement for Latin America and the Caribbean (MAELA), and the Ecovida Network. The participation of representatives from 14 different countries indicates the importance of this alternative. The example of Ecovida, a Brazilian network of grassroots organizations²⁰ and member of MAELA, illustrates this scheme, as seen below.

18 After the first workshop on participatory certification held in Brazil on April 2004, this scheme has been referred to as Participatory Guarantee System (PGS).

19 See www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs.html.

20 Ecovida Network is formed by people and organizations involved in the production, distribution and consumption of certified produce.