



“Nadie Sabe Todo, Todxs Sabemos Algo”

Popular Education Tools to Support Cooperative Decision Making about Agroecological Diversification

Small coffee farmers in the Americas confront seasonal hunger due to the volatility of international markets, increasing climate chaos and the historical displacement of traditional practices for growing, harvesting and preparing foods. Agroecological diversification of coffee forests and other production systems can strengthen food security, resilience to climate change, gender equity and livelihood sustainability. However, when external actors approach coffee cooperatives with generalized recommendations and economic investments focused on diversifying food systems, these proposals may not be grounded in local ecological and cultural realities. Coffee cooperatives have experienced the frustration of incorporating diversification strategies that do not achieve expected results or produce unintended consequences, such as the failed introduction of small livestock or overburdening women’s workloads.

The Community Agroecology Network (CAN), in collaboration with Campesinos Ecológicos de la Sierra Madre de Chiapas (CESMACH) in México and Promotora de Desarrollo Cooperativa de las Segovias (PRODECOOP) in Nicaragua, and four universities—Universidad Nacional Agraria (UNA), El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), Santa Clara University (SCU) and the University of Vermont (UVM), evaluated the impact of diversification activities on small coffee farmers and their families from 2017 through 2021. When we established this multi-institutional collaboration, we all agreed that our research would generate tools to support decision-making about agroecological diversification for cooperatives and their members.

We used an approach focused on the co-creation of knowledge where farmers, cooperative leaders, practitioners, professors and students shared across different ways of knowing. This led to building our capacities and creatively incorporating methods to include multiple voices in the design, collection and analysis of data, as well as the sharing out of collective reflections and learnings. “Nadie sabe todo, todxs saben algo (No one knows everything, everyone knows something,” a phrase created by a team of community facilitators at CESMACH, reflects the spirit that guided our collective reflections, dialogues, farmer experiments, workshops and cross-country knowledge exchanges.

Our collaboration expanded our knowledge about bee keeping, animal husbandry, milpa (diversified corn production), and fruit tree production (find research [results here!](#)). We built capacity with community





facilitators and promoters, many of whom are coffee farmers themselves or daughter and sons of coffee farmers, to engage coffee cooperative families in reflections from mapping agroecological practices involving farmer's use of space and time for varying productive activities to reconnecting and valorization of traditional foods to address food insecurity. Together we catalogued key processes, outcomes of workshops and emergent knowledge generated from the sharing back of research results by producing the following popular education materials:



"Caminando Hacia la Agroecología en la Sierra Madre de Chiapas (Walking towards Agroecology in the Sierra Madre of Chiapas)" is a facilitators' guide and cooperative resource to generate dialogue and collective reflection with farmer families. This 43-page document highlights four social methodologies our team implemented to focus conversations on combinations of diversified strategies and their related impacts on climate adaptation, economic sustainability, gender equity, and nutrition.

The guide helps facilitators working with small farm families and producers' cooperatives to explore 1.) participatory action research, 2.) farmers' decision-making regarding diversification activities, 3.) the availability of traditional foods and their nutritional properties with a Good Food Plate, and 4.) annual planning with Agricultural Calendars that details the cycle of bee keeping, coffee production and sales, and corn cultivation.





COMMUNITY AGROECOLOGY NETWORK



CaN

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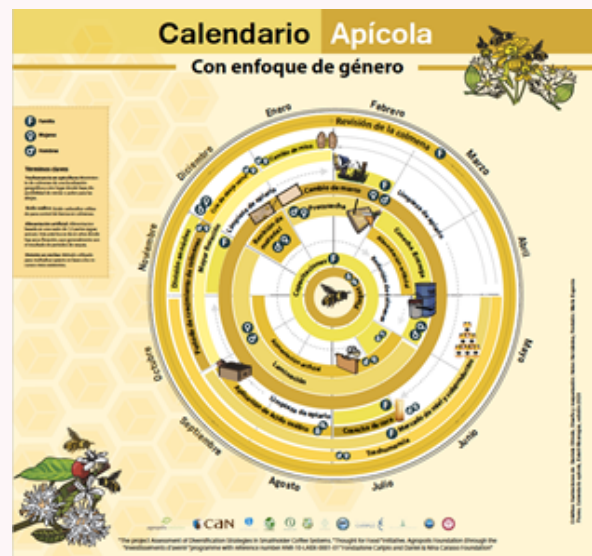
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831.459.3619 | PO BOX 7653, Santa Cruz, CA

95061-7653

In a similar way our Nicaraguan team co-created workshops and exchanges that resulted in georeferenced maps of coffee forests, an Agricultural Calendar documenting the bee keeping cycle and which activities are carried out by women and/or men, and customized farmer packets that include recommendations based on farmer-specific resilience indicators, agricultural calendars, forest and species inventories and soil analyses (coming soon!).

These popular education tools recognize and document the power of collective reflection for transforming food systems. They support cooperatives and their members as they evaluate the opportunities and limitations of introducing a new diversification activity into their production systems. Furthermore, they contribute important data for research, support capacity building of facilitators and technical teams, and recuperate campesinx knowledge about diversification. Each of these outcomes support community food sovereignty and cooperative decision-making to leverage and propel agroecological diversification as a strategic direction.



We encourage you to view and adapt these materials, accessible through our digital platform, an online resource portal in both Spanish and English. It contains project research questions, methodology and findings; publications; data results sharing activities; capacity development workshops; research tools; and images from major research activities with narratives, audiovisual content, interviews, and press coverage publications!

<https://en.cafediversificacioniap.org/>

