

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 47



**MUTUAL
NURTURING**

In Catachilla and Rancho Nuevo, two communities in the municipality of Santivañez, Cochabamba - Bolivia, a group of people have managed to adapt to the climate crisis, particularly to extreme water stress, through their family agro-ecoforestry gardens. As a collective, they mark a route of mutual nurturing, based on "learning by teaching and teaching by learning"; recovering from their socio-environmental relationship common goods such as water, soil, biodiversity and seeds, as well as food culture. Everything begins as an initiative, induced from different projects, gradually achieving a full emancipation from these external supports. The group is constituted as "Ecohuertos Agroecological Producers" and "Eco-Huertos Agroecological Fair" and, perhaps most importantly, they have taken ownership of their process. This transfer of protagonism, from the project to the self-determined and autonomous process of the community fabric, is a common path that many projects seek to achieve but seldom achieve. To the question: why was it possible to achieve what is so difficult to achieve? Usually, there is no possibility to adapt the project to changing and changed realities, thus ending the project in a failed attempt to accommodate reality to the logic of the project...it seems that here the opposite happened.

BETWEEN MULTI-RESIDENCE AND TERROIR

Don Javier Soto, a member of the Eco-Huertos (eco-gardens) group, while proudly showing off his garden, recalls: "I have this land here in Catachilla, then I have a small piece of land in the Chapare, in the Cochabamba tropics, and another in Buenavista, in

the east. But since I started my agro-ecological garden here in Catachilla, I don't have time to be away much. The crops require almost daily care and people are already looking for me to buy my products". Several of the people, most of whom are women, make up the Eco-Huertos group, who due to prolonged droughts, with a loss of 80 percent of the crops, migrated to the city and many people lived for years as economic refugees in Spain.

They have in common that they perceive life in the countryside as something valuable, beyond the challenges, which is why they have returned. Lidce Vidal shares: "We lived as a family in the city but with our young children we decided to return because we found more quality of life here". The issue of farming has not ceased to be complex: the need to harvest water and collect rain, move towards drip irrigation, garden on a smaller scale and using semi-shade netting, diversify the varieties of the garden, rescue native seeds with greater resistance to droughts, assimilate ways and techniques to produce and apply organic and natural fertilizers and insecticides, to mention some of the issues. Roger Maldonado together with Tania Ricaldi from the Centro de Estudios Superiores Universitarios – CESU (Center of University Superior Studies) of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón de Cochabamba accompany the process: "This process did start with projects with the university but for some time now it has been going on its own, fully piloted by the members of Eco-Huertos".

AT THE BEGINNING, THE PLOT

The process began in 2015, with a CESU project, with funding from the Swiss Cooperation (COSUDE), seeking to support agro-ecosystemic capacities to increase resilience, both in the municipality of Santivañez and in other areas of the department of Cochabamba. The original project design foresaw entire plots of land as the scale of intervention. Given the climatic emergency situation with prolonged droughts, depletion of aquifers and other climatic events such as frosts and hailstorms, causing massive migration from the countryside to the city and even abroad, it was not possible to start from the hypothesis of the initial project. Under the coordination or direction of CESU and headed by Tania Ricaldi, it was able to twist the university administration's arm to negotiate with the sponsors a modification of the project's focus and the actions to support the producer families. The migration of the focus from the plot to the improved orchard, with semi-shade, drip irrigation and mesh fencing to

prevent domestic animals from invading the orchard crops, entailed the need to redesign the actions, the research processes and the budget, foreseeing the capacity to invest in these items. Asking Tania Ricaldi about the different moments and forms of readjustments: "From the beginning to this date I believe that we have been able to accommodate the different actions and strategies

of research and accompaniment to the families with a flexibility rarely seen to the changing challenges; from plots to gardens, incorporating rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation, as an initiative of the people the rescue of native seeds more resilient, the monthly organization of the agroecological fair in Catachilla, as another of the successes of the participating families; the Muju Wasi Seed



House has been another initiative of the group. As a last great adaptation, we have introduced the forestry and fruit tree component, for its benefits in terms of microclimate, foliage production for mulch, its contribution to the family economy and food diversity, to mention some of the many benefits of this approach".



When asked how it has been possible to accommodate the logical frameworks, the matrixes of goals and indicators, and the paths of effects and impacts, usually straitjackets of the projects, Tania, with an accomplice smile, explains that in her reading the permanent adaptation was easier due to the commitment and decision of the families,

the openness of the research team and the back and forth of different groups and sponsoring entities; The Climate Change and Justice Working Group, supported by Misereor in equipping the Muju Wasi, the University of Cordoba / Spain and support from the Italian Cooperation (CEVI) for rainwater harvesting tanks, etc. The list of allies who have supported at different times is long: under the leadership of the CESU of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS) and the financing of COSUDE, the Bolivian Catholic University (UCB) of Cochabamba, the Alerta Verde Foundation, the Abril Foundation and the Agrecol Andes Foundation, among others, have been part of the project. Currently there is specific support from the Faculty of Science and Technology through the Technology Transfer Unit, to design simple silos to help reduce the loss of stored crops and design greenhouses to cope with the aggressive frosts of recent years, which have affected crops. She concludes her brief analysis with a parenthesis: *"This process, for a long time now, has obeyed the dynamics of the people, beyond any passing project"*.



FROM PROJECT TO PROCESS

In a conversation with the people who make up the Eco-Huertos group, which is the main nucleus of those who have participated in the different projects from the beginning, it soon becomes clear to the visitor the gratitude that the people feel towards CESU; but in the same intensity it is perceived that those who are currently leading the process are the members of Eco-Huertos. Inquiring why, it seems that what in so many project texts can be read as one of its objectives has happened

here, although it is very rarely achieved, this transfer of full protagonism to the socio-territorial fabric, has happened. The answer is perhaps to be found in large part in the conceptual approach of mutual nurturing and participatory methodology, the basis of the process from the beginning, where one teaches by learning and learns by teaching. In practice, this means starting, testing, re-adapting, exchanging and understanding everything as a self-learning path. In this way, achievements and progress are perceived first and foremost as the fruit of one's own and the group's efforts rather than as an achievement attributed to outside interventions. The pronounced self-determination of the participants, which has increased throughout the process, supports this assessment. The list of these self-determined milestones within the process is long: the rescue of native seeds and the *Muju Wasi*, the formation of the Eco-Huertos association and the establishment of the local agroecological fair, the participation and empowerment of the gardeners in the participatory guarantee system 'Mi Llaqta', among others.

FROM REFUGE TO MEETING BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Doña Miguelina says *"the garden is my refuge from the adversities of life, nourishing body and spirit"*. Lidce Vidal, also with her garden, as well as participating as an evaluator in the process of qualification for the participatory guarantee system, to which almost all the people of Eco-Huertos have applied, and from which they have already obtained their certificate, says in reference to the garden *"we see the sacrifice and the love to produce something in the garden [but at the same time it is] a relaxation to be in the garden"*. For Doña Mariela Aguilar, the motivation to start her own garden was *"that we don't know how many chemicals they sell us in the market"*. Doña Casta Choque and her daughter Celia say: *"The garden unites several generations, grandmother, daughter and granddaughter"*. For many of the people from Eco-Huertos, the exchanges of experiences and mutual visits with gardeners from Sipe Sipe, Japo and Pasora-



pa have been crucial moments in advancing their garden process, reflecting collectively on their learning and their socio-natural relationship. The pandemic corroborated the benefits of the gardens. The exchanges constitute important parts of mutual nurturing and allow for highly motivating dynamics. For Don Javier, it is thanks to these exchanges *"that we managed to make the seed walk"*.

POSITIVE INFECTIONS

The Eco-Huertos group has awakened interest in their surroundings. Young people approached to join the group. The municipality of Santivañez has incorporated the agroforestry family gardens approach to its Territorial Plan for Integral Development, the educational unit Luis Guzmán Araujo has started to have a garden, incorporating it as a teaching tool. The Universidad Mayor de San Simón, inspired by the Eco-Huertos agroecological fair, has been organizing the Fair Trade and Healthy Food Fair on its campus every second Friday of the month for the past year. Both in Catachilla and on the university campus, in addition to fresh and healthy products, typical food is offered at these fairs, rescuing customs and values of the food culture. We are receiving groups of producers, consumers, students and researchers with whom we share our experiences, establishing a kind of barter of knowledge. In this way, learning routes have been born, a very valuable potential for

different forms of possible ecotourism.

The mutual nurturing of Lidce and Javier, of Miguelina and Nélide, of Nelly and Mariela, María and Casta, Francisca, Celia, Hilarión, of Sofía, Brayan and Betty has allowed for a considerable socio-environmental resilience, but above all it has allowed for the collective construction of knowledge as freely accessible public goods.



MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

Mutual Nurturing - path to self-empowerment and transformation

The moral of the experience: projects and planning are mere attempts to project good intentions into the future, with the great risk of ignoring future realities or worse: wanting reality to adapt... But different routes are possible.

The collage of paths of experience: building community, recovering and redefining common goods, infecting the other, learning route from one's own experience, acting and protagonism of one's own history, productive and food sovereignty as a political act, socio-environmental relationship and barter of knowledge for mutual enrichment.

Walking together, with detachment, complicity and reciprocity, allows tracing routes for the production and reproduction of culture and life.

Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations in Catachilla and Rancho Nuevo, by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo), accompanied by Ida Peñaranda and Juan Estrada, whom undertook the audiovisual documentation. A big thank you goes to the ECO - HUERTOS group and their Agroecological Fair, with Javier Soto Flores, Celia Cáceres Choque, Sofía Ferruffino, Hilarión Jaldín, Lidce Vidal Hinojosa, Betty Loza Hinojosa, Nelly García Herbas and María Loza; as well as Tania Ricaldi and Roger Maldonado from the Centro de Estudios Superiores Universitarios - CESU of the Universidad Mayor San Simón de Cochabamba - UMSS for their welcome and openness to the daring curiosity of the Almanaque del Futuro.

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