



PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS (PGS) FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

A tool for transition towards sustainable agriculture, empowering farmers and local communities, increasing smallholder access to markets and making organic food available and accessible.

WHAT IS PGS?

According to IFOAM – Organics International “PGS is a low-cost, locally-based system of quality assurance with a strong emphasis on social control and knowledge building”. This system is based on the active participation of farmers, consumers, rural advisors, local authorities: they come together in order to make decisions, visit farms, support each other and check that farmers are producing according to an Organic Standard.¹

WHAT IS AN ORGANIC PRODUCT?

A product produced in line with the principles of organic agriculture² - Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care.

WHERE IS PGS FOUND?

Thousands of organic producers are verified through PGS in over 70 countries globally. In the region of Asia and the Pacific, PGS initiatives are found in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Philippines, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, Fiji and many others. For information about PGS groups around the world visit the PGS Map <https://pgs.ifoam.bio/>

WHAT MAKES PGS A SUITABLE CERTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS?

PGS, just like third-party certification systems, aims to provide a credible guarantee for consumers seeking organic produce. The difference is in approach: direct participation of farmers, consumers and other stakeholders in the verification process is not only encouraged in PGS, but required. Such involvement is realistic and achievable given that PGS often serves smallholder farmers and local markets. Costs of participation are low and mostly take the form of voluntary time involvement rather than financial expenses. Moreover, paperwork is reduced, making it more accessible to small operators.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PGS?

EMPOWERMENT, KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Active participation of stakeholders, as foreseen by PGS, results in greater empowerment and responsibility sharing. PGS places a high priority on knowledge and capacity building. Trainings and farmer interactions in

PGS help farmers to improve their practices and to exchange knowledge with each other. The capacity building does not only involve producers but extends to consumers as well, by empowering them to make informed purchasing decisions, whether buying directly from farmers, or in the retail chain. Because PGS is based on direct personal relationships, it helps consumers and producers to establish and favour direct or short-distance market relationships.

IMPROVEMENT OF LIVELIHOODS AND INNOVATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

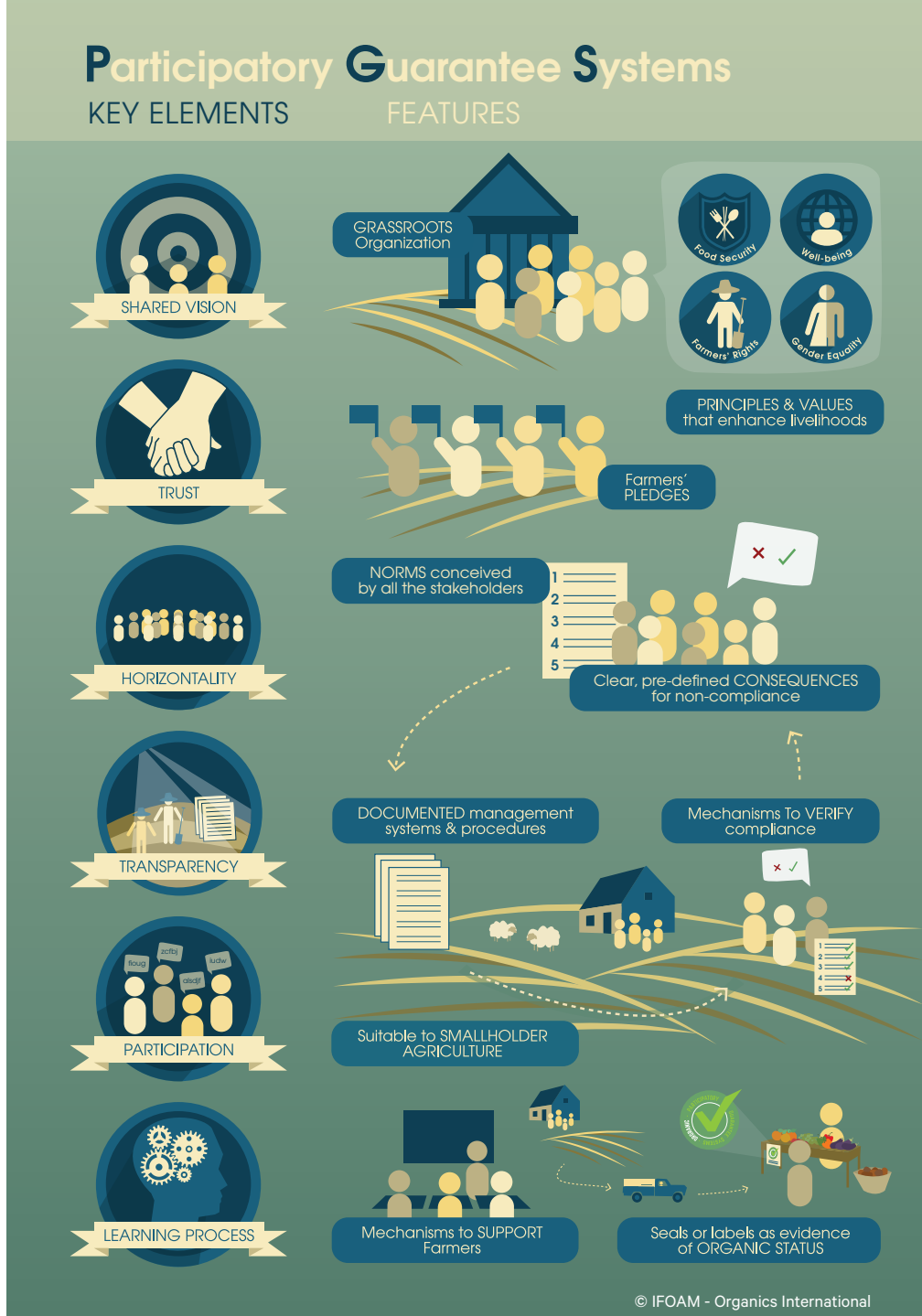
PGS has proven to be an effective tool to support smallholder farmers to access organic markets, since they get recognition for their organic production methods on a product level, leading to more stable, reliable and increased incomes. Consumers in both rural and urban communities also benefit from better access to



local, affordable, organic food. PGS also benefits those traders who want to attract a specific type of customer and therefore distinguish between different product categories to meet their needs for healthy organic foods. PGS is a good tool to incentivise innovation and support the development of sustainable food systems.³

FAO and IFOAM - Organics International promote PGS as an alternative guarantee system that is highly suitable for the development of sustainable local food systems leading to an improvement of the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in terms of income, health, nutrition and social recognition; as well as development of local organic markets for safe food and the empowerment of local communities.

- 1 The organic standards adopted may be specifically developed, based on local, national or international organic standards such as the IFOAM Standard.
- 2 According to IFOAM – Organics International: “Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.”
3. Smith, M. & Barrow, S. 2016. Namibian Organic Association’s Participatory Guarantee System. In Loconto, A., Poisot, A.S. & Santacoloma, P. (eds.). Innovative markets for sustainable agriculture – How innovations in market institutions encourage sustainable agriculture in developing countries. Joint publication FAO/INRA, pp. 39. Rome, Italy. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5907e.pdf>)



ABOUT FAO TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME (TCP)

- **Title: Small-scale Farmer Inclusion in Organic Agriculture Value Chain Developments through PGS**
- FAO project in 2 countries: Cambodia and Lao PDR
- Objective: Address certification and marketing issues through the promotion of PGS
- Implemented 2015-2017 together with the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (Cambodia) and the Ministry Agriculture and Forestry (Lao PDR)
- Key partners: IFOAM – Organics International, Asian Development Bank and Earth Net Foundation
- Facilitating organizations: Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Center for Organic Development, Cambodia (COD), Natural Agriculture Village, Cambodia (NAV), Caritas Cambodia, Groupe de Recherches et d’Echanges Technologiques, Lao PDR (GRET) Sustainable Agriculture and Environment Development Association, Lao PDR (SAEDA)