

Session 7
Effective Adoption of Agroecological Principles

Speaker: Rose Cohen

- Community Action Network (CAN)
 - International organization committed to sustaining worldwide resilient environments through collaborative research, agroecological capacity building, and locally-formed development strategies
 - Network of affiliated researchers, local partners (universities, farmer organizations), and youth leaders
 - Active in 8 regions of Mexico and Central America
- Markets without household resilience increase vulnerability
 - Agroecology ensures food security
 - CAN's research network allows farmers to identify their own solutions fit
 - There is no prescriptive list to follow
 - 4 food security sovereignty projects: 2 in Mexico and 2 in Nicaragua
 - Most the farmers CAN works with are smallholder coffee farmers
 - Linking farmers to markets can increase income but...
 - As farmers become too dependent on one cash crop, they are more exposed to price shocks
 - Coffee farmers who don't grow food for their own households are food insecure when coffee prices drop
 - Coffee crisis of 1994 – 2004
 - Prices hit extreme lows and coffee farmers starved
 - Researchers looked at farmers who received a guaranteed price to see if their livelihoods were better than those farmers selling at the market rate
 - While there were some benefits, overall farmers with guaranteed price still faced considerable vulnerability
 - Even as prices have improved, coffee farmers still face seasonal hunger
 - In Nicaragua, this season lasts 4 months a year
 - Income from coffee harvest runs out in May
 - Grain harvest doesn't start until August/September
 - Grain prices are skyrocket during these times of high demands
 - Same time that farmers have least amount of income
 - Agroecology a way to build resiliency within the coffee farming community
 - Decrease/eliminate seasonal hunger
 - In CAN's projects, the levels of Agroecological Transformation from Steve Gliessman's talk were not linear, but happened simultaneously
- Agroecological approach of CAN:

- Build healthy communities where children have improved nutrition and gain pride in rural livelihood
- Where women and youth play a stronger role in off-farm livelihood opportunities
- Where farming system leads to improved soil fertility
- Where people regain control over their food system
- CAN uses Participatory Action Research (PAR) to implement their agroecology approach
 - Mutual learning process
 - Observing and learning from farmers
 - Most effective methods of communication: farmer-to-farmer exchange and farmer experimentation
 - Democratized knowledge production that works for the farmers
 - Researchers and non-research partners collaborate on research and action plans
 - There is a network of youth across a program's region for knowledge sharing and capacity building
- Participatory Action Research plan:
 - Step 1: Work with partner organizations to identify needs, develop questions, and a participatory approach to address seasonal hunger
 - Step 2: Train youth leaders to conduct data collection
 - Empowered as agents of change in their own communities
 - Step 3: Analyze data and develop an action plan
 - Step 4: Share results with community and incorporate feedback
 - Step 5: Implement the action plan
 - Workshops on promising practices
 - Step 6: Repeat
 - Every year CAN adapts to what they've observed in the field
- Results of CAN programs
 - Youth seeing that there is a future in rural livelihood; they don't have to migrate to cities for job opportunities
 - Home gardens have improved household nutrition
 - When originally implemented, beneficiaries didn't know how to cook the vegetables, so they fed vegetables to pigs
 - CAN set up nutrition workshops and helped develop cookbook with twists on traditional recipes that included the new garden vegetables
 - Seed banks were established to encourage growing vegetables
 - Creation of farmers' markets for vegetables
 - "Women's café" that buys produce from home gardens and serves local tourism economy
 - An alternative market for coffee that has brought the consumer and producer closer together
 - In price negotiations, roasters and retailer are at table along with farmer representatives
 - "AgroEco" coffee seal has guaranteed farmers a higher price than Fair Trade

- With higher return to farmers, 5% is able to go towards a Sustainable Agriculture Fund and 4% to a Women's Unpaid Labor Fund
- Women's Unpaid Labor recognizes all the work that women do in the field and at home
- Sustainable Ag Fund goes towards soil fertility workshops and projects
 - When soil improvement projects were initially proposed, male farmers were very risk-averse and resistant to changing their practices
 - Women in the community invested their money from the Unpaid Women's Labor Fund to support agroecological training
 - Community now much more interested in agroecological approach
 - Female farmers now involved in artisanal fertilizer production (cost a tenth of synthetic fertilizers)
 - In the 3rd year of Nicaragua program, La roya hit the area's farms. Farmers said that the impact would have been worse if home gardens hadn't been in place