

SAFE-World Project/Initiative Summary

Country: Columbia

Project/Initiative Title: Participatory Research Approaches, Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, CIAT
1990

Scale: Regional –
International

Nos. farmers: 4000

Hectares: 4000

Agro-Ecological Zone: III

Improvement types

1	2	3x	4	5x	6x	7x	8x	9
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A. Key Impacts

A1 – Productivity

	Before/Without	After/With	% change
Maize (year 1)	820 kg/ha	1400 kg/ha	71
Maize (year 2)	820 kg/ha	2-3000 kg/ha	

A2 – Impacts on natural capital

This work contributes indirectly to improved agroecosystem productivity and health; and extends the capacity of poor communities to solve agricultural problems, enhance biodiversity, take advantage of economic opportunities, and monitor natural resources

A3 – Impacts on local community (social capital)

?? Many LAC countries have reduced investments in agricultural research and extension services. Consequently, it was critical to decentralize research and to prepare farmers to assume major responsibility for local technology development. The CIAL committees are constituted by four or more farmer-researchers elected by their local community to conduct experiments for improvement of local farming. These farmer groups decide upon research topics and conduct experiments, with technical supervision from technicians ("*Ingeniero Agronomos*") and agricultural scientists. Feedback is given to the community with respect to the outcome. Region groupings of CIALs hold annual meetings in order to share experiences, and there is a great deal of farmer-to-farmer interaction regarding their experiences. As the CIALs progress, so does the community. In one case, the CIAL made a donation to the community store so that it could increase its stock of goods; in others, purchases of basic milling equipment have reduced labor requirements. In other cases the community has been able to exert pressure on entities to provide specialized services (e.g., assistance in developing a feed concentrate). An exciting spinoff is the opportunity to help farmers diversify with low credit costs. One CIAL contributes the equivalent of US\$0.20 for every kilo of maize seed sold to a rotating fund for local farmer members who can borrow at a lower rate of interest (20% vs the commercial rate of 35% or much higher for loans outside the formal sector).

?? Improved food security - Communities with CIALS 30% households suffer food shortages in August to September whereas 50-65% households suffer food shortages in communities without CIALS

- ?? Increased local capacity in formal research methods
- ?? Improved local planning, management and organisational skills
- ?? Improved access to credit
- ?? Establishment of small enterprises
- ?? Improved access to formal research services and products

A4 – Impacts on households and individuals (human capital)

- ?? Farmer-researchers have developed capacity for the design, implementation and evaluation of experiments using formal scientific methods. During Phase I of the Kellogg project, 225 farmers were trained as members of CIALs. Four CIAL-members (farmers) from the region have been trained as facilitators to provide further training and technical follow-up. A few CIALs (e.g., 4% of those formed in Cauca) are formed by women's groups seeking to improve the quality of life of their families. A case study of this project has been written and will be going to press soon (Ashby *et al* 1999. Investing in Farmers as Researches: Experience in Latin America. CIAT, Cali Colombia). The more mature CIALs have shown that the local research process can stimulate rapid growth in production, and the community representatives gain valuable skills, not only for conducting research but also for interacting with institutions. This enhances their self-respect as well. Members of the CIALs talk about being "awakened," about their continuous learning process, and about losing their fear of speaking out in public. Many farmers have not had an opportunity for more than a few years of formal schooling. As one CIAL leader from Honduras pointed out, the CIAL is their "school of agriculture." Not only do CIAL members benefit from their experimental findings (improved food security and income), but they also acquire increased status in the eyes of the community.
- ?? Access to land has improved for some CIALs. One CIAL joined forces with other farmers in the community and petitioned the land reform agency for land. Given their proven track record, they were allocated 40 ha, which are now being used for seed production. Landless laborers from a nearby village are now launching a similar application. This CIAL is an example of its members' commitment. In an area of steep hillsides prone to erosion and declining soil fertility, good land is scarce. The members have to walk 3 hours to reach fields they had leased in more productive, lower lying areas. The CIAL's work has resulted in radical changes in land use as a result of improved maize varieties, higher sowing densities and fertilizer. Regardless of whether they own the land or not, they now enjoy a maize surplus and many are able to keep chickens, an ideal enterprise for households with little land.
- ?? More benefits for the poorest
- ?? Increased social status of women and other marginalised groups

A5 – Key changes in farm / regional system

- ?? Impacts on productivity have occurred in communities with mature agricultural research committees (CIALs). Farmers adopting recommendations of their CIALs have benefited from the standpoint of increased income and improved family nutrition. Those who chose to research maize, for example, increased yields from 820 to 1400 kg/ha or more through improved varieties and crop management (e.g., increasing sowing densities and applying chicken manure). Many groups are conducting trials to evaluate new varieties, and several CIALs have begun to produce their own seed for sale to farmers in the region. New crops are being grown for specialized markets such as organically produced brown sugar patties (*panela*). Some CIALs in Colombia and Ecuador are evaluating breeds of guinea pigs, an important source of protein in their

diets. An Indian community high in the mountains of Colombia had suspended the cultivation of wheat some 20 years earlier as the result of fungal diseases. CIMMYT, an international center for maize and wheat research, provided the CIAL with 14 disease-resistant varieties. Plans are to restore the community's abandoned flour mill as well so they can consume better quality bread, available locally.

- ?? *Examples of changes in input use include:* Use of organic fertilizers, integrated pest management in potatoes, live barriers
- ?? *Change in local/regional food security:* Enhanced capacity to produce feed grains for chickens, greater productivity of staple crops such as maize, cassava, common beans and potatoes.
- ?? 57% of households reported innovations had increased agricultural production
- ?? Substantial improvement in food security
- ?? Greater availability of improved seed
- ?? Higher biodiversity in cropping systems
- ?? More experimentation with soil conservation practices
- ?? More local experimentation
- ?? Higher crop yields

B. Types of Sustainable Agriculture Improvements

- Type 1: Better use of available renewable natural capital
- Type 2: Intensification of single sub-component of farm system
- Type 3: Diversify by adding new productive natural capital and regenerative components
- Type 4: Better use of non-renewable inputs and technologies
- Type 5: Social and participatory processes leading to group action for making better use of natural capital
- Type 6: Human capital building through training-learning programmes
- Type 7: Access to Finance
- Type 8: Add value by processing to reduce losses and increase returns
- Type 9: Add value by direct or organised marketing of produce to consumers

	Yes/No	Narrative
Type 1		
Type 2		
Type 3	x	IPM in potatoes
Type 4		
Type 5	x	Formation of CIALS -(249 in 8 countries)
Type 6	x	In the case of the CIALs, the focus has been on participatory methods for strengthening scientist/extension staff interactions with farmer-researcher groups. The CIALs follow an iterative, horizontal process of local research beginning with a participatory diagnosis of needs/setting of priorities and ending with the evaluation of the experiments and feedback to the community. In the case of CIPASLA, emphasis has been on working with representatives from the different villages in the watershed (named by the Community Action Boards), strengthening their leadership skills and capacity to design sound agro-silvo-pastoral systems. These representatives have formed a legally recognized association of watershed users (ASOBESURCA), with which the

		different institutional members of CIPASLA interact and to whom they are accountable. Areas of conflict such as burning the land to prepare it for planting are dealt with in a public forum to find solutions that will have a more favorable impact on the environment.
Type 7	x	<p>The motivation to engage in more sustainable practices is enhanced by the existence of the donor-created "Green Fund," for funding projects that seek to conserve water, create protected areas, reforest, etc. CIPASLA supervises the use of the funds, but decisions are made by the representatives to ASOBESURCA. In the case of the CIALs, small rotating funds have been established to cover the costs of experimentation and the risks inherent in it</p> <p>In Ecuador, for example, "<i>11 de Noviembre</i>" a CIAL from a small community high in the Andes, was awarded a prize by the Ministry of Social Welfare as the best-organized farmers' group in the country. Government officials were impressed by <i>11 de Noviembre</i>'s research process and positive interaction with the community. The community decided to invest the prize money (US\$1000) towards a small diesel-powered mill, a labor-saving piece of equipment long needed by the community. Originally dependent upon external support, the CIAL now sustains itself by selling seed of potato varieties it has tested and providing milling services for barley and other crops.</p> <p>Each CIAL receives a research fund whose purpose is to reduce the risk associated with research. The fund varies between US\$50 and 150, depending on the research topic chosen by the community. The fund is provided once only as seed money, and it is the responsibility of the CIAL and the community to maintain, and hopefully increase the size of the fund in order to be able to support a permanent research service in the community.</p>
Type 8	x	Initially, most groups have focused on productivity; however, the more mature CIALs are beginning to engage in activities such as producing seed for sale (e.g., one group has been officially recognized by the national research program as "farmer-improved seed." Others are milling maize and other grains. Another group supported by CIPASLA is processing dairy products from the milk they produce.
Type 9		

C. Key Lessons: Success, Spread and Constraints

C1 – Key Lessons Learned

- ?? The CIAL Approach has the potential to increase the efficiency of the public sector and NGO adaptive-research programs at a low cost. The institutional cost of establishing a farmer-research committee strongly depends on characteristics of the facilitating organization. In the case of CORPOICA, Colombia's national agricultural research program, the cost of supporting a CIAL during its first year of activity include US\$500 for training of the facilitator, and \$2,500 in personnel costs and operational expenses, based on an average of 24 facilitator visits to the CIAL. The CIAL research fund varies between \$50 and 150, depending on the research topic chosen by the community. This fund is provided only once as seed money, and it is the responsibility of the CIAL and the community to maintain and hopefully increase the fund in order to be able to support a permanent research function in the community.
- ?? Special interest groups such as the landless laborers and poor women may require their own research committees in order to articulate their special needs . These often involve focusing more on postharvest processing and adding value to crops that others grow in the region. In mixed groups women form the minority, often participating as secretary because of their higher educational levels and literacy skills. In decision-making they are often ignored. One women's CIAL formed as a consequence of discussions held at the community kitchen while their husbands participated in a CIAL. After lengthy discussions they decided to research blackberries, ideal for processing at home and a good income generator. They soon broke off from the men's group because they were never given the promised funds. Although their results have been modest because of a disease, the women feel that their research activities have had a profound effect on their family life and status in the community. There has been a shift towards a more equitable sharing of household tasks.
- ?? The quality of leadership in teaching and applying the CIAL approach is highly critical and depends on an understanding of the principles of authentic participation, where there is genuine empowerment of the resource-poor rural community. Many professionals are acculturated to paternalistic attitudes to farmers and feel that technical knowledge and research skills should remain their exclusive domain. Training is critical in sensitizing professionals and in developing new attitudes and appropriate communication and facilitation skills. In addition to receiving high quality support as they learn to become self-sufficient in the CIAL process, CIALs also require good technical input.
- ?? The sustainability of the CIAL process depends, to a great extent, on their capacity for self-management and the ability to overcome dependency on external support. CIALs can fail if timely, quality support is not consistently available during the early stages of formation. About 20% of CIALs have become inactive at some stage for the following reasons or combinations thereof:
- ?? lack of continuity as a result of changes in policies that leave institutions without financial support for this type of activity;
 - ?? lack of job stability of professionals working with CIALs;
 - ?? institutional paternalism where material benefits are exchanged for passive participation in on-farm research;
 - ?? difficulties of maintaining continuity in the CIAL processes in communities that are too small or too disperse;
 - ?? conditions of insecurity that do not permit facilitators to travel in the region;

- ?? adverse climatic conditions (e.g., the Niño phenomenon in 1994 and 1997);
- ?? overcommitment of CIAL members due to excessive institutional presence in the area;
- ?? conflicts among families in the community that affect the continuity of participation of CIAL members.
- ?? Failure of supporting organizations to respect the essential principles underpinning the CIAL approach (see principles below)

- ?? Being a CIAL member is not for everyone. After the initial rush of enthusiasm, it takes a lot of hard work, and not everyone has the time or the commitment. Women may find it difficult to fulfill their commitment to the CIAL because of their other duties. Sometimes the communities are skeptical and give CIALs little support until the first results come through.

- ?? There is a learning-curve for the CIAL process: The farmer-researchers learn the rudiments of systematic research quickly and are able to articulate the objectives of their research, describe the experimental design and explain the need for controls/replications. Mature CIALs with experiments at the production stage understand these processes more fully. Their capacity for self-management is generally encouraging although many of them still have problems in administering their fund competently. Replenishment of the fund remains the greatest management challenge: only 20% of the CIALs have added to their fund. By the production stage many CIALs report positive changes in the R&D professionals interacting with them. About half of the mature CIALs report at least one example of the information or products resulting from their research being used by R&D organizations. About 80% of these CIALs cite major changes in their communities.

- ?? Perhaps the most viable institutional option for accessing and channeling support is forming a well-endowed second order organization with strong links to the national agricultural research entities and extension organizations. The CORFOCIAL approach is one possible way of doing this. Other options include local fund-raising schemes or donations from individuals or communities would be asked to "adopt" a CIAL.

- ?? Several essential principles have been identified (Ashby et al. 1999. Investing in Farmers as Researchers: Experience in Latin America. CIAT, Cali, Colombia):

- ?? Knowledge is generated by building on experience and learning by doing.
- ?? Mutual respect, accountability and shared decision-making are the foundation of the relationships among the CIAL, the community and external actors.
- ?? Partners in the research process share risks.
- ?? Research products are public goods.
- ?? Generation of technologies is accomplished through participatory and systematic comparison of alternatives.

C2 – Aspects of local/national context contributing to success

Openness to the concept of farmer participation; willingness of local/regional entities to work together towards a common agenda. Interinstitutional collaboration has greatly facilitated the work at the watershed level (*Community Management of Hillside Resources*) and the coordination of activities in a more integrated fashion. It also permits more coherent strategies if all entities are in accord. CIAT's mandate is to develop and test the approaches, tools, etc. but not to work at the community level outside its pilot/focus sites. The expansion of the CIAL and CIPASLA approaches is made possible by work with partner organizations in Central America and the Andean region.

C3 – Limitations preventing spread

The high levels of violence and social insecurity in the regions where CIAT works in Colombia. Difficulties of small farmers entering local markets and competing with larger growers/suppliers; availability and cost of inputs; deficient infrastructure with respect to all-weather roads, electricity, aqueducts and sanitation facilities, public transportation. Difficulties faced by farmers and farmer organizations in obtaining venture capital to finance scaling up from a successful experiment to commercial production.

C4 – Policy issues

- ?? Latin America opened up its borders to free trade with disastrous economic consequences for small farmers; attractiveness of illicit crops in more remote areas; non-availability of credit at reasonable interest rates with insurance to cover risks.
- ?? The governments' low capacity for providing institutional support and the costs of staff deployment to work with local groups; in general, the instability and fragility of the institutional environment in Latin America in both the public and NGO sectors, which means massive turnover, job insecurity, lack of motivation.
- ?? In some national agricultural research programs the structure is rigid and organized around the principle of supply- rather than demand-driven research. This means that they will be able to work only with CIALs that have prioritized the commodity or research theme to which they are dedicated.

C5 – Scaling-up

- ?? More opportunities for farmer-to-farmer interaction to share benefits from others' experimentation and be more motivated.
- ?? Greater continuity of the trained professionals working with the CIALs.
- ?? Appropriate policy environment for facilitating legalization of second-order farmer associations. Currently the formation of these is limited by complex management policies and regulations of public-sector institutions and difficulty in obtaining funds for creating the rotating funds for the community's research. Farmer groups that are not legally constituted as a cooperative, for example, cannot receive public monies in any form other than operational costs, which must be spent annually.

D. Contact Point for Project/Initiative

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E. Project Narrative

Colombia: Comité de Investigación Agrícola Local (CIAL) – in Colombia and seven other countries of Latin America

Many Latin American countries have reduced investments in agricultural research and extension, and so it is increasingly critical that research is decentralised and devolved to farmers themselves. The CIALs (or local agricultural research committees) are social and institutional mechanisms promoted by CIAT to develop and expand participatory and adaptive approaches to agricultural research, and to fill the gap left by the retreating state. Some 249 CIALs have been formed in eight countries: in Colombia, the CIAL programme has worked with 4000 farmers in about 50 communities. The aim is to improve agroecosystem productivity and health, extend the capacity of poor communities to solve agricultural problems, and take advantage of new economic opportunities.

All CIALs develop their own research topics, and so there is no common impact. The social learning and institutional process is, however, similar. CIALs incorporate four or more farmer researchers elected by their community to conduct experiments for the benefit of the all local farmers. Technical supervision is given by external technicians and agricultural scientists. Regional groupings of CIALs hold annual meetings to share findings, and increase cross-community interaction. As CIALs mature, so does the generalised social capital in communities at large. Many CIALs invest in wider community activities, such as basic milling equipment, or in rotating credit funds. There have been many improvements to yields – maize typically up from 820 kg/ha to 1400 kg/ha following adoption of agroecological approaches.

In communities with CIALs, some 30% of households suffer food shortages during August-September, whereas 50-65% are insecure in communities without CIALs. The greatest benefits appear to be for the poorest households. A wide range of different technologies have been developed, including rearing of guinea pigs, reintroduction of wheat cultivation, live barriers, IPM in potatoes, organically-produced sugar patties, agroforestry, use of green manures, mulches, and the establishment of small food enterprises. There are many important challenges, not least in finding ways to ensure that groups are able to mature and develop, rather than fall away after initial successes.

Source: Ann Braun; Braun, 2000

A3. Impacts on environment (natural capital):

CIAT's focus is on sustainable agriculture on hillsides, in forest margins and savannas of Latin America. *Participatory Research Approaches* collaborates with GOs, NGOs, farmer organizations in the first two agroecosystems. Research at reference sites focuses on the development, application, dissemination and institutionalization of participatory methods, analytical tools and principles of organizational design that result in demand-driven responses among R&D stakeholders. This work contributes indirectly to improved agroecosystem productivity and health; and extends the capacity of poor communities to

solve agricultural problems, enhance biodiversity, take advantage of economic opportunities, and monitor natural resources.

Community Management of Hillside Resources addresses environmental issues at watershed level through community management of these areas. At the initial pilot site in southwestern Colombia (Cauca State), a consortium of institutions (known as CIPASLA) have often together to do research on the sustainable management of this zone, which is located in one of the poorest states of the country and plagued by deteriorating agricultural production. There are some 20 small communities participating in the decision-making with respect to protection and conservation of the natural resources. These have formed an association known as ASOBESURCA. The Association received a one-off donation to set up a "green" fund for promoting sustainable agricultural practices in conjunction with activities designed to control soil erosion, water contamination, and deforestation. ASOBESURCA meets monthly to discuss issues affecting the watershed; plan activities with CIPASLA; approve projects to be financed for villages, groups or individual farmers (evaluated for their contribution to natural resource conservation); and provide a general forum where communities can work jointly towards recovery and maintenance of the landscape. CIAT plays a role in both research and in facilitation of community capacity to organize and experiment for the common good.

Key successes

The project has demonstrated that the CIAL is a viable community-based research service that can exert demand on the formal R&D system. Farmer-researchers can successfully conduct formal research using scientific methods and can manage small capital donations, which are replaced by self-generated funds for which CIAL members are held publicly accountable. This is one way of empowering farmers as researchers and of institutionalizing the decision-making power at the local level.

Since 1990, more than 250 CIALs have been established in 8 countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia). In addition to the original pilot project site, other focus sites have been developed by multiple institutions, demonstrating the potential of the CIAL method to increase the impact of the public sector and NGO adaptive-research programs:

Three years ago Luis Humberto Fierro, a regional coordinator of technology transfer with the Colombian Corporation for Agricultural Research (CORPOICA), learned of the CIALs and decided to try them out in the departments of Boyacá and Cundinamarca. "This first experiment gave good results," recalls Fierro. So good that there are now 25 CIALs in Colombia's central region, and CORPOICA has incorporated the CIAL into its work plans at the national level. In support of this effort, CIAT organized two workshops for CORPOICA personnel. The most recent, carried out last year, was attended by 30 technicians, including several from Colombia's National Training Service (SENA). Participants in the workshop have since established 26 new CIALs in northeastern Colombia. Some see the spread of this participatory method as an important step forward on the road to peace in Colombia, where armed conflict has forced hundreds of thousands of rural people to flee their homes in recent years. "We believe participatory methods will better enable farmers to develop appropriate technology with their own resources and will create new sources of employment," says Manuel Arévalo, a researcher in CORPOICA's technology transfer program. "And since the conflict is rooted in a lack of opportunities for rural people, this should help reduce the violence in Colombia. We plan to apply the CIAL method in marginal areas of the country

where small farmers are potential victims of violence." One such experiment is now under way with refugees in the department of Guajira, a semidesert region in the far north of Colombia. About 60 families displaced by the fighting were relocated on a hacienda provided to them by the Colombian Institute of Land Reform (INCORA). Farmer researchers have already established their first experiments with papaya and maize. "These people have had to start from scratch," says Manuel Romero, the CORPOICA agronomist who helped them form a CIAL. "But they're hopeful that the new participatory approach will bring them important benefits as a community. "Technological innovations are being adopted by farmers and are spreading quickly in communities where CIALs operate," says Arévalo. "The committees have also had a positive effect on the attitudes of technicians working with farmers," adds Fierro. "Before we used to teach farmers. Now we're learning alongside them."

Participatory Research Approaches has trained more than 300 professionals from over 50 institutions in the CIAL methodology. Training involves a two-week course work and one year of practical field experience coupled with regular follow-up. A small group of these professionals are being trained as facilitators (trainers) in the methodology so that they may carry on with the work being done by the IPRA team, providing valuable training capacity in their respective countries.

The project is also training farmers as trainers in the CIAL approach. In the Cauca pilot area of Colombia four farmers are running the second-order organization known as CORFOCIAL. These farmers have been providing training to Colombian municipal-level extension agents. Thus far they have trained 25 individuals from 8 municipalities, thereby generating income for CORFOCIAL, which pays their wages for supporting and training the 50 plus CIALs in their region.

- ?? As a member of the CGIAR¹ System, CIAT has a mandate for certain research themes and agroecological areas. The CIAT project, *Participatory Research Approaches*, develops approaches and tools for participatory research in priority agroecosystems in Latin America. The current emphasis of our project is in hillsides with some activity in forest margin areas. Once approaches and tools have been amply tested in agroecosystem reference sites, they are disseminated beyond benchmark areas in Latin America and to Africa and Asia.
- ?? The project objectives are at a more global/regional level -- our focus is on developing participatory approaches/tools/methodologies for enhancing institutional capacity and developing/strengthening linkages between scientists and extension staff and farmer-researchers within the framework of improved natural resource management (*Participatory Research Approaches*). A sister project, *Community Management of Hillside Resources*, focuses on improving production systems within the framework of more sustainable landscapes (at the watershed level), as well as providing decision-makers with information, tools and methodologies to support their planning and monitoring.
- ?? Impacts on productivity have occurred in communities with mature agricultural research committees (CIALs). Farmers adopting recommendations of their CIALs have benefited from the standpoint of increased income and improved family nutrition. Those who chose to research maize, for example, increased yields from 820 to 1400 kg/ha or more through improved varieties and crop management (e.g., increasing sowing densities and applying chicken manure). Many groups are conducting trials to

¹ Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research

evaluate new varieties, and several CIAs have begun to produce their own seed for sale to farmers in the region. New crops are being grown for specialized markets such as organically produced brown sugar patties (*panela*). Some CIAs in Colombia and Ecuador are evaluating breeds of guinea pigs, an important source of protein in their diets. An Indian community high in the mountains of Colombia had suspended the cultivation of wheat some 20 years earlier as the result of fungal diseases. CIMMYT, an international center for maize and wheat research, provided the CIA with 14 disease-resistant varieties. Plans are to restore the community's abandoned flour mill as well so they can consume better quality bread, available locally.

- ?? Most CIAs are providing an effective research service in their communities
- ?? Most CIAs report their results to their communities and cite widespread testing of these by local farmers
- ?? In some communities where farmers are applying CIA recommendations, yields of staple crops have almost doubled
- ?? Food security can be greatly improved in CIA communities. The poorest groups benefit the most from the increased availability of food during lean times of the year
- ?? More farmers in CIA communities are experimenting with soil conservation practices than in communities without
- ?? Farmers in communities with CIAs conduct experiments with a much greater diversity of varieties and crops than communities without
- ?? Innovations identified by the CIAs reach local farmers more rapidly than others and also spread to other communities both with and without CIAs
- ?? CIAs report positive changes in the attitudes of the R and D professionals working with them
- ?? Women and marginal groups gain social status and respect in their communities as a result of belonging to a CIA