



ATSAF Academy
Academy for International Agricultural Research for Development

Junior Scientists Tandems

Final Report

Name of student: Juliana Buitrago Rueda

German Research Institution (GRI): Philipps-Universität Marburg

Supervisor at German Research Institution (IARC): Björn Vollan

National University (Country): Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia)

Supervisor at National University: Luz Ángela Rodríguez

International Agricultural Research Center (Country): Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT

Supervisor at IARC: Louis Verchot

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Title: Mechanisms to empower communities: Citizen Juries bridging urban proposals with real needs in Caquetá, Colombia

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I started this journey on September 23rd, 2024. This experience has been transformative, offering me significant personal development and a new perspective on academic and professional life. While professional growth was not as extensive as I initially anticipated, getting to know a different academic culture, social system, and work environment has been very valuable.

During my time at the University of Marburg, I had the opportunity to be part of the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources research group at the School of Business and Economics, which provided an initial excitement about engaging with different perspectives and methodologies. However, my direct involvement with the research project was limited. Despite my willingness to contribute, my knowledge and expertise were not fully used within the group. While this was unexpected, it offered me insights into different academic work cultures and the varying levels of integration and collaboration within research teams.

One of the challenges I faced was the limited presence of people in the office, which made it difficult to establish strong professional connections. Communication with my supervisors and colleagues was sporadic, and I often felt that there were few opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the research project. Nevertheless, this experience highlighted the importance of proactive engagement and adaptability in diverse work environments.

As part of my research during this period, I developed two policy briefs based on my initial research proposal. My research was centered around the question: "How can we effectively integrate proposals from Citizen Juries with the needs, expectations, and challenges of food systems' producers in Caquetá to propose more suitable public policies?" The main objective was to integrate Citizen Juries' proposals with the needs and challenges of food system producers in Caquetá, considering Colombia's existing public policies related to the environment and food systems to enhance policy coherence and effectiveness.

Based on this, I developed two policy briefs:

1. The first policy brief was built from insights from the Citizen Juries alongside existing public policies to evaluate their relevance in the local context and their applicability. It aimed to identify which policies were already being implemented and which are necessary to support the transition towards sustainable agri-food systems. Beyond emphasizing the importance of these proposed policies, the key objective was to compile them into a policy brief that effectively communicates these insights to stakeholders beyond academia.
 2. The second policy brief compiled lessons learned from over two years of work with the MITIGATE+ project. It aimed to clearly and concisely identify the present challenges for the development of sustainable agri-food systems, supported by the urban perspective of the Citizen Juries.
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My research identified several key areas for policy improvement:

- Supporting sustainability transitions in livestock farming through research and investment in sustainable practices.
- Addressing specific challenges in transitioning toward silvopastoral systems, such as irrigation systems and genetic improvements.
- Enhancing local empowerment and capacity-building through education and training in sustainable farming and climate adaptation.
- Strengthening market-oriented interventions to ensure fair pricing and improved commercialization of products.
- Improving access to credit for producers to promote financial stability and long-term resilience.
- Encouraging multi-stakeholder collaboration to create coordinated efforts between producers, governments, and private institutions.
- Promoting gender and youth inclusion to ensure equitable participation in agricultural initiatives.

These findings provide valuable recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to improve food systems' sustainability and equity in Colombia. They as well contributed to my understanding of public policy formulation and the interaction between participatory approaches and existing legal frameworks and provided insights into how citizen participation can influence and shape policy decisions in sustainable food systems.

Despite the limited professional engagement, I gained valuable insights into the German academic system. I was able to observe the structured nature of academic research in Germany, where long-term planning and stability allow researchers to focus on their objectives without the uncertainty that often exists in other contexts. This was a interesting contrast to my experience in Colombia, where unpredictability shapes professional trajectories differently.

Beyond academia, this experience also broadened my understanding of different social and economic structures. I became more aware of the privileges and challenges associated with different systems, particularly in terms of access to education and social security. Living in Germany made me reflect on the differences between my home country and my host country, particularly regarding job security and quality of life.

Additionally, I took the opportunity to further my learning by enrolling in a German A1.1 language course, which helped me navigate daily interactions more easily. I also attended a Gender Studies course at the university, which provided important



knowledge from the gender perspectives and social structures, enriching my academic experience beyond my research project.

Living in Germany presented important cultural and linguistic challenges. The language barrier, although manageable for daily tasks, often made deeper social interactions difficult. This highlighted the importance of language not only for professional advancement but also for social integration. Also, the cultural differences in communication and social interactions required me to adapt my expectations and understanding of workplace dynamics.

An aspect that stood out during my stay was the sense of security and efficiency in daily life. The ability to walk around safely at any hour and rely on well-functioning public services was an eye-opening experience. However, there were also aspects of life in Germany that were challenging to adjust to, such as the bureaucratic processes involved in housing and banking, which required considerable time and patience. Or understanding and getting used to social norms and a drastically different culture.

Overall, my career exploration stay at the University of Marburg was a period of immense personal and professional learning. While my professional involvement in the research project was less than expected my work on policy briefs allowed me to contribute meaningfully to discussions on food systems and sustainability in Colombia. The research findings emphasize the importance of integrating local perspectives, creating spaces for multi-stakeholder collaboration, and addressing the specific needs of producers to enhance policy coherence and effectiveness.

Additionally, this experience provided me with a broader perspective on academic work cultures and the structure of research institutions in Germany. I gained a deeper understanding of my own adaptability, resilience, and ability to navigate new environments.

This experience has reinforced my commitment to academic and professional growth while highlighting areas where research institutions can enhance engagement with international scholars. Moving forward, I will carry these insights with me as I continue my career, with a different appreciation for both the challenges and opportunities that come with working in different academic and cultural settings.

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