



Junior Scientists Tandems

Final Report

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Title: The Dynamics of Citizen Juries on the Future of Food Systems in Caquetá, Colombia

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Introduction

In this report, I'm going to share my experience within the Alliance Bioversity & CIAT, Colombia as part of the CGIAR initiative in the Junior Scientists Program. My research stay took place in Bogotá where I stayed from September 2024 to January 2025.

In the program I made, I could combine collecting data for my Master's thesis with the internship while having the Career Exploration Scholarship from the ATSAF Academy. Initially, it was difficult for me to understand the interplay between the different organizations I was somehow part of, so I will now break it down in detail.

As part of the CGIAR Research Initiative on Low-Emission Food Systems (Mitigate+), a collaborative research project involving the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, the University of Marburg, and the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the research team from the University of Marburg shared a vacancy for writing a Master's thesis within the scope of their project. This opportunity also included the possibility of combining it with an internship at CIAT and Javeriana University in Bogotá. In practice, my internship took place at CIAT. However, since multiple organizations were involved in the different projects, I collaborated with various institutions throughout my work.

Why ATSAF- Academy Junior Scientists Tandem?

For some time, I am interested in the scientific career path and considered doing a PhD. In previous internships, I gained working experiences in different environments. In 2023, I did an exchange semester in the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, which was very enriching both, personally and academically, as the courses at the university had an explicit decolonial perspective. After this exchange, I was sure that I wanted to return to Bogotá.

From the research stay, I expected to gain insights into a research environment, understand the daily business of scientists and determine whether this career path would fit me. Further,

I expected to learn more about the Colombian context and how research is conducted here and whether it differs from my experiences at German universities.

Tasks and Responsibilities

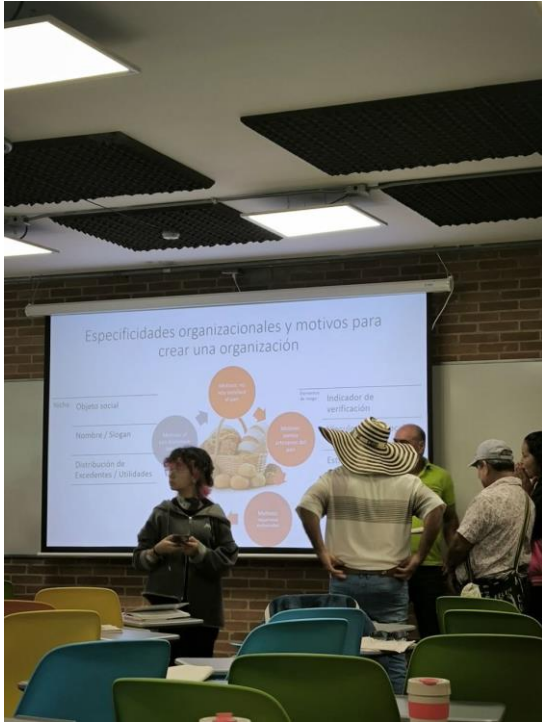
Before the start, I had an online meeting with the two other women who were doing the internship with me, and the two responsible persons, one professor from the Javeriana and one researcher from CIAT. They informed us about ongoing projects and their focus and asked us about our interests.

CIAT has its office in Cali, but the plan was that we were going to Bogotá and have our offices in the Javeriana, because the projects we were assigned to, were mainly in the responsibility of the university. During the internship, I had weekly online-meetings with our responsible supervisor at CGIAR, in which I gave her updates about my tasks and could ask her questions.



In our first week in Bogotá, we met the professor in person, she showed us the university and we met as well the two Colombian students, who were going to go to Germany as part of the ATSAF program. They were so called our Tandems.

In our second week was already one of the main events, a workshop conducted in the Javeriana with people from Caquetá. This is a department in Bogotá, where almost all the projects we were part of, were taking place and doing research. In this workshop, farmers from Caquetá came to Bogotá, to get information about sustainability, deforestation and climate change. This experience was very enriching as the participants were particularly interested in us and I was able to have interesting conversation with them.



Workshop with people from Caquetá



University Javerianer

In the following I will give a selection of my main projects:

Literature Review

For one project, I wrote a literature review, together with my tandem from Germany about women empowerment in agrifood value chains in Colombia. I found the exchange with my project partner particularly interesting, because I was able to recognize differences in our approaches, but we also worked very similarly on many things.

Coding Protocol

In another project, I was assigned to draft a coding protocol. In order to define the codes, I read and researched literature. After that, I started to code the qualitative data generated through interviews. Before, I had always used a program like MAXQDA or ATLAS.ti for that. The responsible professor wanted us to code in excel tables, which was new for me. With another intern, we coded the interviews separately and compared our results afterwards. That was a time consuming exercise which included a lot of discussion as well. However, it was interesting and enriching to exchange our perceptions and try to reach a consensus.

Field Work

The opportunity to do field research seemed particularly exciting to me and was a factor for deciding for the internship. However, after many discussions with the respective office and assessing the risks, the final decision was made—by the institution rather than myself—that I could not travel due to security concerns. Nevertheless, I was asked to design a workshop for Caquetá, which was then facilitated by someone else.

The designing part was particularly insightful for me and I learned a lot. As a feminist and with a decolonial approach, I designed the methods from survey to single-work and wanted to encourage different forms of knowledge, such as emotions, so participants could freely express their thoughts. During the introduction of the exercise, participants were encouraged to share their feelings, sketch something or write a single word.

This task was very exciting, even if the results were ultimately less recognisable than expected, as not so many people took part in the workshop. Nonetheless, I believe I have gained some important experience.

Theoretical and Practical Learnings

I also gained an insight into how cooperation between partners from the Global South and Global North can work. With a decolonial perspective, I have seen some power asymmetries in practice, that I had learned about in theory. I have also worked extensively with forms of knowledge beyond Western science, such as indigenous and nature-based knowledge. I found this particularly interesting and believe it is politically crucial to recognize these knowledge systems as at least equally valuable. In Colombia, I was able to get to know these perspectives far more than in Germany. I feel that this experience has significantly enriched my perspective on science and knowledge production.

Conclusion

Having previously completed several internships in more practice-oriented fields, I appreciated the opportunity to engage in a different kind of work. Moreover, I am grateful that I was able to share this experience with the two other interns. We supported each other, and it was very valuable not to have to navigate the organizational challenges alone. Receiving the scholarship was an incredible privilege, as it covered my flight and the majority of my expenses.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to ATSAF e.V. and CIAT for making this enriching experience possible.



Páramo outside of Bogotá



Typical local food stand