



# TerraViva

## Using Participatory Approaches to Design a Common Territorial Agenda.

### Landscape:

Planadas Municipality, Tolima Department, Colombia

### Organizations involved:

Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), Fundación Natura, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and the Alliance Bioversity International-CIAT

### Funder:

Defra, Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate (GCBC)



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## 1. Introduction

Colombia produces more washed Arabica coffee than any other country in the world. From April 2022-March 2023, it produced more than eleven million 60-kg bags of green coffee, down 8% from over twelve million bags the same time the previous year.<sup>1</sup> Colombia's coffee industry is driven by thousands of small-scale coffee-growing families, many of whom farm less than 1 hectare of planted coffee each. Around 25% of rural households in Colombia depend on coffee as their main source of income.<sup>2</sup> The importance of coffee to the country's economy and cultural identity cannot be overstated. It pervades all aspects of rural life with around 875,000 hectares planted with coffee across 590 municipalities and fourteen coffee-growing regions.<sup>3</sup>

### What are Integrated Landscape Approaches?

Integrated landscape approaches have emerged as a spatial unit for holistically managing various land uses and stakeholder needs within a region. It is a governance strategy that acknowledges the interdependencies of human and natural systems and seeks to optimize synergies and minimize trade-offs to harmonize wellbeing of rural communities with their environment. However, landscape governance is a complex topic that needs further research and development (R&D), especially if we start from the premise that any landscape is a social construct.

As climate change intensifies and the global demand for coffee increases – it is set to triple by 2050 according to some estimates – the migration of Arabica coffee to higher altitudes could trigger a wave of forest clearance and/or degradation. In the coming decades, we will no doubt see dramatic changes that affect the ability of farmers to continue growing high quality coffee on their farm resulting in the deterioration of both landscapes and livelihoods, which will make the challenge of meeting the SDGs more complex. Coffee plantations with trees represent an important system for carbon sequestration and a strategy to help coffee farming communities fight climate change and decrease atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>e levels. Shaded coffee areas can also work as biological corridors, increasing the buffer areas around natural reserves and improving value of preservation of forests, as well as soil and water conservation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://federaciondecafeteros.org/wp/listado-noticias/colombian-coffee-production-falls-in-march/?lang=en>

<sup>2</sup> Suárez et al. Dimensions of social and political capital in interventions to improve household well-being: Implications for coffee-growing areas in southern Colombia. *Plos One*, 2021

<sup>3</sup> <https://coffeegeography.com/colombian-coffee-regions/#:~:text=Colombia%20has%20around%20875%2C000%20hectares,cent%20of%20the%20agricultural%20GDP.>

TerraViva is an emerging landscape management initiative that supports the creation of a holistic plan with embedded platforms of good governance, wellbeing, livelihoods, and traditional leadership to support small scale producers and their communities adapt to climate change and live in harmony with nature. Given that the coffee sector in Colombia includes cooperatives and farmer associations that have been working together for years, it provides an enabling environment in which to enhance the cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders that could lead to building a long-term development vision or Common Territorial Agenda (CTA). The foundation of TerraViva is a CTA, built in a participatory manner from the perspective of local stakeholders in a defined territory, which ensures equitable and sustainable use of land, while strengthening measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change, enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services.

## **2. Building A Common Territorial Agenda**

With initial funding from Defra Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate (GCBC), SAN along with its consortium of national and international partners sought to 1) systematize a process to collect and exchange perspectives on different land uses, ecosystems, land covers and the human dimension (governance structures, communities, socioeconomic status) that interact with each other, and 2) field test a bottom up approach in which information could be democratized with local stakeholders to achieve a shared understanding of the landscape conditions, challenges, and opportunities to advance sustainable development and livelihoods. At the end of the 9-month study period, the project team hoped to have a better understanding of:

- What are the key factors contributing to the success of community-led development visions, such as the Common Territorial Agenda (CTA)?
- How can the lessons learned from the first phase of TerraViva be applied to other regions or contexts to promote sustainable development and secure local livelihoods?

Four coffee-producing villages in the Gaitania area, which belong to the Planadas Municipality, Tolima Department, Colombia, were targeted for the 9-month study. The four villages are renowned for their specialty coffee production and represent a post-conflict territory, where

farming communities have a deep connection with their landscape, intertwining their livelihoods, history, and social identity. In the four study villages, coffee cultivation provides farmers with sources of livelihood and food security for households. In fact, the coffee sector depends to a significant extent on the family labour force, contributing significantly to the rural economy, thus being considered an engine of economic development in the regions where it is conducted.

### A. Bottom-up Approach

Typically, intervening organizations have used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to identify and rank community problems and needs without critically looking at existing opportunities within the community itself. While PRA is a valid approach, SAN is committed to using tools that encourages communities to focus on the human and natural resources they already possess and how these can be used to benefit the community. These approaches include Appreciative Inquiry and Community Capitals Framework (CCF).

Figure 1.  
Appreciative inquiry  
and the Community  
Capitals  
Framework (CCF).



During the 9-month study, participatory development tools and approaches were field tested and used to collect and convey data analysis and insights and empower individuals and community groups to participate in decisions affecting local land-use planning and management.

*"The TerraViva project showed us the potential we have and how we can manage ourselves to find solutions."* Martha Lucia Quimbayo - President of Asoprosam (Association of Women Victims of the Conflict).

## B. Fieldwork

Fieldwork with community groups occurred in two stages. The first stage involved extensive data collection and analysis that culminated in a Situational and Stakeholder Engagement report. The second stage of fieldwork involved the use of appreciative inquiry and CCF techniques to assist local stakeholders draw insights from the collected data to develop a group vision built on the collective strengths and aspirations of the community. A communities' assets revolve around seven community capitals that include natural, human, social, cultural, built, financial, and political capitals.

### 1. Data Collection and Analysis

Focus group discussions and key stakeholder interviews were used to collect data and accommodate the perspective of women, civil society, policy makers, and others in the territory on the health of ecosystems, the economies, and social well-being in a prescribed area where agriculture production threatens rural livelihoods and the sustainability of the region. Activities were used to collect and analyse data related to assessing the sustainability of the landscape, including:

- **Stakeholder engagement and participation.** The team identified and engaged with key stakeholder groups early on to understand stakeholders' interests, challenges, influence, power, vulnerabilities and needs, and their relationship with the local natural resources.
- **Primary data collection and Community Capital Framework (CCF).** The team used a CCF to focus on the assets of a community rather than on community deficits. The CCF allowed the community to understand the interaction among the seven capitals and the ensuing impacts across them in the prescribed territory.
- **Secondary data collection.** Extensive desk research from government reports, aided the team in understanding the socio-economic conditions in the prescribed territory.
- **Mapping of the coffee value chain and conducting a bio-based business market analysis.** The team identified actors, bottlenecks, and opportunities for productive diversification; and,



- **Gender analysis** to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, and the constraints they face relative to each other.

Finally, the territory was mapped using GIS, and climatic analysis was conducted to understand current and historic land uses within the study area.

## 2. Data Democratization

In total, sixty-four community members from four villages participated in the initial community workshop conducted to share the data and information collected from the study team. With valuable insight, the community contributed a total of 150 solutions to holistically manage various land uses and stakeholder aspirations within the territory. Using participatory development tools, the community condensed the 150 solutions into thirty-one actionable strategies that could advance the community towards a common vision of productive, social, and environmental well-being. Table 1 highlights the how the community was able to use data and information about the territory to engage in needs-based planning.

**Table 1. Main community reactions to democratization of data**

<b>Cartography and land uses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use cover maps highlight the importance of sustainable land management in primary production.</li> <li>• The low forest cover emphasizes the need to reduce forest degradation and deforestation.</li> <li>• Visualizing predicted higher temperatures in the region demonstrates the need to implement adaptation practices such as agroforestry and silvopastoral systems.</li> <li>• Maps with projected rainfall patterns stress the urgency of soil conservation measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender and youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants recognize the need to address intrafamily violence.</li> <li>• Lack of innovation and limited educational resources pose challenges to the future opportunities for young people.</li> <li>• Low income from coffee production discourages youths from engaging in agricultural activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Value chains and bio-business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers acknowledge the importance of training in improving coffee quality, productivity, and profitability.</li> <li>• Producers are willing to adopt waste and water treatment practices for coffee processing to promote a cleaner environment.</li> <li>• The significant contribution of coffee products and by-products to the income of farming families is widely recognized.</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental sustainability and production:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers can utilize native species and local knowledge to promote soil restoration.</li> <li>• Ensuring transparency in defining the mechanisms of payment for ecosystem services is crucial for fostering goodwill and long-term agreements.</li> <li>• Producers need to strengthen their farm management practices through training and shared experiences to qualify for participation in a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) program.</li> </ul>

Subsequently, a total of eleven delegates were elected from the four communities to participate in multistakeholder forums to rank and prioritize the thirty-one strategies using a traffic-light ranking system. An appreciative inquiry approach was used to guide the delegates to analyze the various community capitals and how they could be leveraged to strengthen or generate more assets for the community. The CCF emphasizes the interconnected and interdependent nature of the different capitals and the importance of considering all of them when working to build and support a community. The CCF approach allowed the delegates to view the various elements, resources, and relationships within a community from a systems perspective.

Figure 2. The CTA and the “spiral of growth”



### 3. Results

At the end of the 9-month study, the team gathered valuable insights into the key factors contributing to the success of community-led development visions and their potential for fostering sustainability and resilience in agriculture-dominated landscapes.

The multistakeholder forum resulted in a diverse set of actionable strategies that provide the basis for co-developing a CTA that addresses for example, climate change adaptation, conservation, soil restoration, watershed management, and reforestation. The highest-ranking strategies identified include supporting youth-led monitoring and evaluation teams through capacity strengthening and technology, providing project formulation and management training, implementing a payment for ecosystem services mechanism for biodiversity, soil and water conservation and restoration, offering leadership schools to enhance participation in decision-making processes, providing psychosocial support to prevent intrafamily violence, recognizing

social innovations and technology appropriation at the farm level, and improving community roads to enable access to markets.

The approach generated great enthusiasm and cooperation in developing a group vision built on the collective strengths and aspirations of the communities involved. It also produced actionable strategies by which the local stakeholders could turn their dreams into reality. Feedback from the field indicated that most community groups have never been asked to review their strengths, nor have they had an opportunity to articulate and draw their visions. As such, community members can readily differentiate between the use of appreciative inquiry and CCF and other process that were used before it.

*"TerraViva has been the only project that has cared about getting to know the territory and leaving something valuable in the community, not just things." Audenago Mayorga - Altozano Community Action Board President.*

While the work to develop a CTA is still in its formative stages, we feel confident in the process and the use of the CCF and appreciative inquiry because of the evident and immediate effect it has on people. It presents exciting potential as a tool to engage local stakeholders to promote sustainable development and secure livelihoods at the local level.

The methodology developed during this project embraces an inclusive, democratic, and collaborative approach that leverages community assets for sustainable improvement and growth and serves as a roadmap for a landscape governance model that promotes sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation, while empowering small-scale producers and their communities. Steps contributing to a CTA include:

1. Stakeholder mapping and engagement plan that considered the most effective way to reach various stakeholders and their influence levels within the landscape.
2. Situational analysis of the landscape using GIS mapping, CCF and focus group discussions, field observations, and interviews with key stakeholders.



3. Democratizing data with stakeholders engaged using an appreciative inquiry approach, leading to actionable strategies and the establishment of a CTA aligned with the main goals of TerraViva: climate mitigation, enhanced biodiversity, and improved livelihoods.

As funding allows subsequent steps to support community-led development include:

4. Building the capacity of the governance structure to manage funds and identify investments in the landscape for long-term sustainability.
5. Engage local partners to provide technical assistance and coaching to support communities implement actionable strategies, and,
6. Establish a community-based monitoring system to ensure effective tracking and evaluation of progress.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The results of the research project provided new insights into how NGOs, governments, and international development organizations could better support communities design and undertake activities that reinforce their strengths and are consistent with their priorities for transformational changes at the scale and speed needed. It was designed to be replicable in any productive landscape and trialled in a complex region like Gaitania precisely to guarantee its replicability. As landscapes are social constructs, meaningfulness and potential hinge on the local capacities and a sturdy base of governance as important assets for strengthening ecosystem services in a targeted landscape. Building trust with the targeted community is pivotal to ensure continued and active community engagement and requires local presence, constant communication with community leaders, transparency during the process and communicating results.

Understanding the local context is also a critical factor for project success. The historical complexities of a landscape like Gaitania demand social awareness and sensitivity from the field staff. This requirement goes beyond technical aspects of project implementation. Productive and respectful engagement with the community hinges on the field staff's understanding of the social dynamics and their ability to navigate them effectively.

Key lessons learned from this project underscore the significance of needs-based planning and a bottom-up approach in establishing resilient landscapes. A thorough understanding of the community's connection to the landscape necessitates knowledge-building about their territories and historical context. Local organizations and traditional leaders play a vital role as trusted governance bodies in collaborating with the community. Solutions and strategies should be tailored to the specific territorial reality, considering environmental, financial, legal, and social conditions.

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