Appendix IV: ACCI/MICI v.s Agroecological Ideal

The Transition towards an ACCI/MICI approach to farming contradicts/conflicts with many agroecological ideals.

ACCI/MICI does not place the same emphasis on crop diversification as other agroecological approaches to farming. While ANEC mentions the benefits of diversifying crops as a means of promoting ecological equilibrium and diversifying livelihoods in its ACCI/MICI workshops, it is not a priority-area. Most of ANEC’s farmers grow 2-3 crops commercially and have not yet been convinced of the benefits of diversifying production. Some model farmer’s still practice milpa agriculture, planting corn, beans and squash together. When this intercropping occurs, it is usually for household consumption. Currently, it is difficult for farmers using agroecological techniques to compete in a conventional market. Since ANEC was founded as an organization that helped farmers commercialize their harvest in a conventional agricultural system, ANEC will likely have to continue to make adjustments to its organizational and productive model to foster diversification of crops. Continuing advocacy efforts that promote fair food systems, that acknowledge the multiple social and ecological benefits of investing in small-scale farmers, could help.

The localization and regionalization of food systems is another area ANEC could dedicate more time to. Selling locally, and cultivating stronger local and regional economies, is something ANEC talks about but has not been able to make much progress on. This may be because it requires state and municipal engagement and there is not much buy-in from Mexican local and regional governments.

ACCI/MICI is a member of a national campaign, called Valor al Campesino, which brings together other farmer organizations, civil society and researchers to advocate for policies and programs that support small farmers. As part of this initiative, ANEC has participated in discussions about fostering Community Supported Agriculture, linking urban communities to rural communities, and providing a reliable market for diverse, sustainably produced crops. Without a significant shift in Mexico’s national agricultural policy, though, ANEC and allies efforts will take more time.

Food security, and measuring the impact of ACCI/MICI on local food security, is something that ANEC has not explored. This is possibly because since all of ANEC’s members are commercial farmers, there is not much discussion about how much of the food produced is eaten. It is clear that many farmers to save some of their harvest for household consumption, however. ANEC implemented a pilot project, in partnership with Oxfam Mexico, which promoted diverse back-yard gardens as a means of increasing food security and engaging women in their organizational work. The pilot program had some success but it was never scaled-up beyond Chiapas. It would be useful to collect baseline information about ANEC’s member’s food security and to measure how adopting ACCI/MICI might affect household food security.

One of ANEC’s biggest challenges in the next five years will be the inclusion of youth and women into their organizational structure. Rural communities everywhere are struggling to find ways to encourage youth to stay and practice farming. Integrating youth and women into decision-making processes, and giving them the opportunity to learn about ACCI/MICI, is key. One of the reasons ANEC has lower participation of women and youth is because women and youth are not typically land-owners. While ANEC has
addressed the need for agrarian reform in its political advocacy, internally it has no explicit strategies to include non-landholders. ANEC’s experience promoting ACCI/MICI has resulted in some promising cases where jornaleros, the day laborers that do much of the agricultural labor in rural communities, have been inspired and encouraged to rent their own parcels and apply ACCI/MICI. In both Michoacán and Guerrero there are cases of farmer organizations supporting jornaleros (usually young men) by giving them access to microorganisms or worm compost on credit. “We have seen how ACCI/MICI approaches work and result in higher yields at lower costs by managing other farmer’s land. It made us this that we could actually make a profit using ACCI/MICI on rented land and we did.” (Jornalero interviewed in Michoacán)

There are numerous exciting initiatives and examples of inclusion that could help ANEC develop more comprehensive strategies for engaging youth and women. However, ANEC needs to invest time and energy identifying and systematizing these initiatives if it is effectively going to address gender equity and youth exclusion. Currently, women represent only 20% of membership overall. Only 16% of ANEC’s farmers participating in ACCI/MICI are women. ANEC has some promising initiatives, like it favors the recruitment of women hires and all the new technical hires in the last year have been young women. ANEC has also piloted a number of programs to involve women (member’s wives) in the ACCI/MICI approach. For example, women members were supposed to be trained in running the biofabricas. In one of the ECCs in Nayarit, women are in charge of producing microorganisms and managing the worm compost production. While there are various cases of women in leadership roles or women participating in the ACCI/MICI transition, women and youth inclusion is not systemic and no initiatives to include women and youth have been scaled-out through regional or local organizations.

ANEC’s central leadership recognizes that inclusion of youth, women and non-landholders is a problem. “We were founded by mostly older male campesinos and ejidatorios1 we haven’t yet been able to find the right entry-point or pathway for engaging our membership on the issue of gender equality…it’s important to us but we don’t know how or what to do.” (Victor) It could be fruitful for ANEC to partner with other civil society organizations that have more experience with youth inclusion and gender mainstreaming. Strategic partnerships could help ANEC identify obstacles to inclusion and potential entry-points for engaging women in decision-making and productive processes. An initial diagnostic, analyzing how women and youth currently contribute to agricultural production, would be key. Unfortunately, little is known about women’s role in agricultural systems in Mexico and more studies are necessary. It is likely that women and youth possess unique knowledge about local agroecosystems that could enhance the ACCI/MICI approach.

There are various aspects of ANEC’s model that fall-short agroecological ideals however, when put into context, the strides ANEC has made is laudable. Mexico’s small farmers face numerous political, economic and ecological obstacles to sustainable rural development. For the last 22 years ANEC has been at the frontlines, advocating for political transformation while simultaneously helping farmers survive the dismantling of agricultural support systems, and piece-together an approach to sustainable farming that is adapted to their needs and capacities.

1 Ejidatarios are farmers who received or inherited land through Mexico collective ejido land tenure system.