

## **Appendix V ACCI/MICI adapted to local contexts: Diverse Agroecological Transitions.**

Below the transition process of three different local organizations is examined. These mini-case studies highlight the different entry-points used to introduce ACCI/MICI principles and practices and the key actors involved in promoting ACCI/MICI.

When organizations are less collaborative and are more top-down or centralized in their decision-making processes, farmers are less empowered and have less ownership over the transition. The first case study examines one of these organizations, La Union de Ejidos Ex-Laguna in the state of Jalisco.

*“One of our organizations in Chiapas still negotiates for paquetes [technology packages delivered by government agencies that include free or subsidized commercial inputs]. We’ve had a number of conversations with them about this practice. We’ve said ‘look guys, you don’t need to do that. It doesn’t help our political objectives—to transform the current food system. Also, it makes it more difficult to promote ACCI/MICI among members if they’re getting free chemical inputs,’ but we have to understand that and respect that that’s where that organization is at in its evolution. Perhaps their local situation and context requires it. Perhaps their membership expect leaders to behave this way and it’s still what leaders need to do to respond to member’s needs. We have to respect their local autonomy. All ideas and initiatives have to be owned/appropriated by the local organization, otherwise, in the long-run, they don’t work” (Victor).”*

### **Jalisco- La Union de Ejidos Ex-Laguna:**

La Union de Ejidos was formed over 40 years ago. It is one of ANEC’s oldest member organizations and presents an interesting case of an organization that has successfully scaled certain agroecological practices but not managed to catalyze a holistic agroecological transition among member farmers. This seems to be a result of weak democratic governance and lack of buy-in from leadership.

Two extremely committed *tecnicos*, Inge Pancho and Inge Toño, are the key actors that have been largely responsible for the adoption of ACCI/MICI practices by members of the Union de Ejidos. These two *tecnicos* are both farmers and both have applied an ACCI/MICI approach to farming to their own land, using their own parcels as demonstration plots. Inge Pancho and Inge Toño have been limited in how they can introduce farmers to ACCI/MICI as organizational leadership is not supportive of ACCI/MICI and expects the *tecnicos* to provide traditional extension services. Instead of farmers participating in ANECs workshops and trainings, farmers rely solely on Inge Pancho and Toño for help. As a result, farmers do not have a deep understanding of the science behind the ACCI/MICI practices and “inputs” the *tecnicos* had prescribed. “The Inge gave me this product, what was it called? Microorganisms! Yes! And it worked great!” (Don Simon). The farmers interviewed referred to ACCI/MICI inputs (microorganisms and worm compost) as a different kind of *paquete*. While they understood that these alternate *paquetes* were cheaper and more sustainable

Replacing conventional technical packages with more sustainable alternatives is neither the objective of ACCI/MICI nor agroecology. Introducing sustainable inputs can mitigate the negative impacts of conventional agricultural practices, however, it does not compare to a farmer learning to read and respond to their unique agro-ecological system. While ANEC is not interested in replacing current industrial packages with more sustainable inputs, it recognizes that each local organization has to start somewhere.

ACCI/MICI is a process that intends to change farmers' approach agriculture. ANEC has to respect local organizations' approach to introducing ACCI/MICI and work with who and what is available. In cases like the Union de Ejidos, ANEC will need to continue looking for other entry-points, possibly waiting for a transition in leadership, and work to create opportunities where for exchange and dialogue, generating buy-in from the Union's member farmers and supporting the two tecnicos who are currently promoting ACCI/MICI.

Asking questions about why ANEC has not worked with the Union more closely to strengthen governance practices and foster ACCI/MICI revealed tensions and conflicts among staff, membership and leadership about the organization's affiliation with ANEC. Half of the membership would like to be more affiliated with ANEC but the Union's current leadership is affiliated with Mexico's ruling political party. Recently, the Union went through an economic crisis as a result of an untimely investment. The state government of Jalisco supposedly offered the Union financial support on the condition that the Union took some distance from ANEC. This is likely because of Victor Suarez's, ANEC's Executive Director's, known affiliation to an alternative political party.

ANEC, as an organization, does not have formal party-affiliations. However, Victor Suarez, has held political office and is a recognized figure in the Mexican political landscape. Victor's political affiliations do not implicate member farmers' affiliations. In numerous interviews, farmers listed the fact that ANEC is not linked to a political party as one of the reasons they choose to affiliate with ANEC as opposed to other Mexican peasant organizations. "ANEC has always helped us out and never asked us to show up to a certain politician's rally or to vote for anyone. All of us here [in this organization] are affiliated to different political parties. This has never been an issue." (Don Roberto, Chiapas.)

The transition towards ACCI/MICI will be slow until there is more buy-in from member farmers and leadership. ANEC works to support the key-actors currently promoting ACCI/MICI and depends on these actors to share information about progress and other potential entry-points for promoting better governance and production practices.

*"Organizations have to do what they have to do to survive, times are tough, we respect that. All we can do is maintain the dialogue that we have with them right now through ACCI/MICI and hope that there will be an opportunity to re-engage with the organization about democratic principles and practices at a later point." (Victor)*

## **Chiapas-Totikes and Red Chiapas**

There are two regional organizations in Chiapas that are involved in the ACCI/MICI transition. One of the organizations is a network of indigenous farming communities called Totikes. Totikes farmers have small parcels of land and practice more subsistence agriculture than the other organization, Red Chiapas. Red Chiapas is made up of commercial farmers who do not identify as indigenous. Totikes has been involved in the ACCI/MICI transition for longer, however the leader of the organization has been less supportive of ACCI/MICI in the past. The primary catalysts have been young *tecnicos* and a few model farmers. Juliana, one of the young *tecnicos* is a daughter of a farmer member and is emerging leader in ANEC. She, and two model farmers, are the key actors that attend the ACCI/MICI workshops and promote ACCI/MICI to member farmers

Red Chiapas is an interesting case because, unlike in other organizations where farmers were primarily motivated to integrate ACCI/MICI practices to reduce costs, farmers in Red Chiapas were drawn to ACCI/MICI because of collective health concerns over pesticide use. With RedChiapas, farmers reported little to no savings or increased yields. Rather, the impacts of ACCI/MICI were improved conditions for themselves and their families. Several farmers mentioned cases of intoxication from pesticide application. The majority of farmers had only applied ACCI/MICI techniques having to do with pest management. During the field visit, ANEC's national staff was leveraging the successful experience reducing pesticide use to encourage members to begin applying other ACCI/MICI approaches. Specifically, ANEC's staff was introducing the idea of producing and applying organic composts and worm fertilizer. RedChiapas famers were eager to experiment with a different ACCI/MICI practice because they had seen results using an ACCI/MICI approach to pest management.

The regional organizations in Chiapas have not invested in scaling vermiculture compost production to the same degree that other organizations have. This may be because the state government of Chiapas continues to distribute *paquetes* that include commercial fertilizer for free. It has been difficult to encourage farmers to invest labor and time into making their own compost when they receive free industrial fertilizer. Still, ANEC's *tecnicos* and staff have continued to engage members in discussions about the benefits of organic compost and the importance of soil fertility. This year, there was less fertilizer allocated through state programs, which offered ANEC an entry-point. Over the course of the visit to RedChiapas there were conversations about getting worm compost extract from ANEC's member organizations in Michoacán to test on a few parcels and explore the possibility RedChiapas investing in its own worm-composting infrastructure.

### **Nayarit- San Pedro Lagunillas, La Moderna and Tecuala**

There are three farmers' organizations in Nayarit that have worked together and been some of ANEC's pioneers in the development of the ACCI/MICI approach. They were the organizations that were testing organic practices in 2006, before ANEC decided to invest in developing an agroecological approach to farming and are by far the furthest along in the agroecological transition. The organizations— San Pedro Lagunillas, La Moderna and Tecuala—are small but have strong democratic practices and dedicated *tecnicos*. Of all of the organizations included in the study, the organizations in Nayarit had the most member

farmers using little if any agro-industrial inputs. Five members from every organization were interviewed and each had a deep knowledge of the ACCI/MICI approach and the science behind the techniques they were applying. Many had attended either local workshops or the ANEC organized workshops on ACCI/MICI. What was especially noteworthy was that, during the visit, there was no way of distinguishing the tecnicos from the farmers. During a visit of their collective demonstration plot-- where the three organizations were collaborating to test heirloom seeds against commercial hybrid seeds-- farmers and tecnicos alike were sharing information and discussing the results they were observing. This was the dialogue of knowledge in practice!

Each of the three organizations had self-sustaining *biofabricas* and produced enough microorganisms and organic fertilizer to meet members' needs. Two of the organizations were selling their fertilizer and microorganisms to farmers outside their organization and promoting ACCI/MICI among farmers that are not members of ANEC. The tone of farmer interviews was often giddy, members were excited to recount the traction ACCI/MICI is gaining in their community. Two farmers said that their neighbors were coming to them for advise instead of consulting the local government extension agents. " ACCI/MICI is about to be big, really big... it was slow at first but things are gaining momentum... the only thing that would make the transition to ACCI/MICI happen faster is if we could offer our fertilizer and micro-organisms on credit. I bet you that in a few years, most of the farmers around here will be using ACCI/MICI." (Don Gamboa)

### **Juayangarero, Michoacán:**

Juayangarero, a local organization in Michoacán, is one of ANEC's model ECCs. It is the organization that any visitor is taken to see and is likely the local organization that most closely approaches ANEC's ideal in terms of democratic practices and the engagement in the ACCI/MICI approach.

Juayangarero has a thriving commercial enterprise; they commercialize hundreds of tons of grain every year and are able to support over 15 staff members, including accountants, 2 tecnicos, a manager of the *biofabrica* and worm composting operations. They have developed some of the newest ACCI/MICI innovations, including natural pesticides that they have tested with member farmers.

The head of Juayangarero, Ing. Olga Alcaraz, is an important figure in ANEC and a tremendous advocate for ACCI/MICI. She is both the head of Juayangarero as well as a member of the regional organization's, REDCCAM, advisory board. Inge Olga has also been elected Secretary of ANEC's National Assembly on multiple occasions.

As a result of Inge Olga's leadership, Juanyagarero has developed a strong team of tecnicos, model-farmers, and model leadership that are promoting the ACCI/MICI approach among member farmers. Inge Olga has also helped promote ACCI/MICI among other regional organizations outside of Michoacan, drawing from Juayangarero's experience, and the experience of Michoacán's REDCCAM, to convince other farmer organizations of the benefits of the ACCI/MICI approach. REDCCAM frequently hosts workshops and meetings

on ACCI/MICI and regularly hosts demonstrations for local organizations and organizations from other states. REDCCAM has also established their own soil-testing operations and a laboratory that will serve all of ANEC's member organizations.

Juayangerero is an example of how effective an integral application of ANEC's model can be for community-led rural development. The combination of good governance practices combined with strong democratic leadership and a team of effective tecnicos and model farmers has accelerated a transition to agroecology and laid the foundation for scaling ACCI-MICI up and out to farmers all over the state.

In an ideal world- where ACCI/MICI approach was fully implemented - local organizations would all be like Juayangerero. They would be strong, autonomous, self-sustaining and democratic. They would be able to produce their own inputs, have their own *biofabrica* that produced all the microorganisms, composts and seeds they would need. They would also have equipment to do soil testing, a weather station that gave farmers up-to-date local information. Member farmers would be deeply knowledgeable about their land and their local agroecological systems and organizations would be able to pay for full-time tecnicos, that were also farmers in the local community, who could support members. This is an ideal, something to strive for but it is not, as of yet, a reality.