

THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMOD GAMES WITH COLOMBIAN SMALLHOLDERS

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Introduction

During February 2018, the OPAL team Colombia had the opportunity of participating in a Commodity games workshop lead by Claude Garcia from ETH Zurich. Among several explanations it was a particular one on how to build scenarios. The explanation was presented in a triangle where each of its angles shows specific conditions: realism, precision and generality. The first scenario is represented between realism and precision, this scenario does not consider the externalities that can change results. The second scenario is related to Precision and generality which is more theoretical and lacks reality. The third one, corresponds to the methodology used in the OPAL project - Realism and generality - where the games developed under this scenario reflect externalities, many of them but not in detail. Games under this third option, create awareness when playing and it might become a tool to expose strategies since it allows for a better understanding of the system exploring evidenced relationships between social behaviors and ecosystems.



Claude Garcia Illustration during the training

Nes Naturaleza and the game definition

The ETH training was the starting point for the development of a game model from NES NATURALEZA. Since then, NES NATURALEZA has been testing the new structure of the Commodity game and fine-tuning it to build up a tool that could allow sustainable dialogues among the stakeholders of an oil palm territory. This, based on not only NES



NATURALEZA but palm oil producers main research question: *“Are Colombian smallholders prepared for going to and achieve certification?”* .

NES NATURALEZA did three pilot games before the design of the final one and its test on the ground.

The three pilot games allowed NES NATURALEZA to create different scenarios within an overall of 10 sessions per game with close to 10 or 12 players who personified not only growers but also mills, environmental agency and NGOs. The players had different backgrounds such as agronomist, environmental and agroindustry engineers, ecologists, political science, among others

During the two first pilots, NES NATURALEZA was testing the metabolism of mills and farmers as well as the disease function developed. The game was also shown the reaction of growers to droughts and floods. The third game was played by guests who were also part of the previous games and who were active during the debriefings. In fact, their suggestions were very important for enhancing the value of the game for shaping dialogues over a sustainable territory



Commod game on the ground

During the period of February March 2018 to February 2019, 3 pilot games and 4 on- ground games were played. Nes Naturaleza engaged 3 mills – La Hacienda la Cabaña, Extractora Sur del Casanare and Agropecuaria Santa Maria jointly with some of their independent smallholders to play the commod games on the field. Hacienda La Cabaña is the only one which has played it twice. However, the other two, were asking for the possibility to play it once again with different small producers since they found the game very useful to create sustainability awareness.

Most of the games had 10 rounds and along them, producers were able to take different decisions on their farms according to the situation facing during the round such as droughts and floods, diseases or market constraints, among others. The game was split into parts – morning and afternoon, each of close to 3 hours game. From each game NES NATURALEZA did its own video and took photos of the activities

- **Hacienda La Cabaña**

During the first game, the producers experienced a simulation of their daily life in palm plantations facing common issues and taking normal decisions that most of the time, they don't know how they



could affect the overall landscape. They were very satisfied because the game was very close to real life, so they were able to understand why some of the decisions they took on their plantations were not taken with completed information and so, the results in real life were not as expected. Something important to take in to account was that cattle ranching was a diversification option that many growers decide to invest in. This, to secure some income when difficult times in palm. No crop diversification was allowed in the game.

In the same line, the producers decided to create alliances that favor the results of the game where in economic terms, everybody was better than the beginning of the game.

During the second game and since, some persons of the mill staff knew the game from before, they were trying to anticipate the rounds. However, during the first part of the game the results of land use change shows an interruption of some biological corridors and therefore, loss of biodiversity. Players were very concerned and devastated when they noticed that with their individual decisions were responsible for the damage to the ecosystem. During the second part of the game, the players based their decisions on a more sustainable thinking, making changes in coverage that would allow recovering the biological corridors lost, always supported by NGO's programs.

At this stage, the participants brought spontaneously the need for a sustainability certification and they were eager to understand and find ways to comply with the sustainable requirements, but also worried because some of them needs the support of the government in terms of efficient social health, licenses, land titles, among others. Cattle ranching was not important for the players during the second game in Hacienda La Cabaña.

- **Extractor Sur del Casanare**

During the game, NES NATURALEZA was more specific with instructions since some of the smallholders were demanding a clear explanation of the game, therefore the first round was longer than in previous games. During the first part of the game the producers were focused on the expansion of palm oil, so during the fourth year or 4th round an FFB oversupply forced to lose production.

During this game the common rule was the individual decisions, since no alliance among producers were created or promoted. The fact that the producers were not working together in the field had consequently an increase of palm oil diseases affecting several farms.

Something to highlight is the fact that one producer was tackling in the game a similar situation than the one he was actually facing due to bad decisions. During the game he took same choices than he did in real life creating same constrains and challenges. This creates an important moment of reflection from his part, understanding much better the implications of the decisions he took and where he could be wrong.

During debriefing NES NATURALIEZA show the affectation of the corridors mainly in savannas which in a great percentage were switched to palm oil, with an important impact against biodiversity in savannas that were transformed to palm plantations.

During the second half of the game, the players continue focused on the development of their farm, individually. As a result, at the end of the game some producers where having very good gains while others where just, as the beginning. The success of the game was that the participants realized the importance of doing responsible practices not only in plantation process but also taking care of the ecosystem and the environment.



- **Extractora Agropecuaria SantaMaria**

This was a very challenging and interesting game since 27 persons arrived at the game, twofold more than expected. All of them wanting to have a role and play. This allow us to create a unique scenario with all the actors of the palm oil sector such as Mill, producers, traders, financial institutions, agrochemicals distributors, consultants, NGOs, RSPO representatives, government representatives, among others.

As expected, this group presented greater dynamism than previous occasions and since all the roles began to intervene from the initial rounds, the game develop faster and generating awareness on good practices within the farms.

Smallholders from the first round created dialogues with mills in order not only to know about the purchase prices but to create relationships that will be an advantage for the future. The active role of NGOs jointly with the environmental authority promote the talk about



sustainable practices along the supply chain. In the same line the RSPO representative gave advices to those smallholders asking for it. Different smallholder's characteristics were present in the game,



those who were very committed to the environment, other very focused on the economics of their farms, others looking for business integration and other with social concern supporting their communities. Even some complains were presented to local authorities against some actors that were playing "unfair" during the game.

Intermediaries also saw an opportunity as it happens in real world. The intermediary figure that spontaneously appeared in this game, had not been presented in any other.

The participant who took this role was a farmer with no palm, so she decided to collect FFB from others, not before having made an agreement with the mill.

The participant who took this role was a

On the other hand, the mills had important expansion together with the smallholders and they decided to offer technical assistance to suppliers in order to secure the sustainable market that starts to be present very early in the game. At the end of first part of the game and after NES NATURALEZA show the result of biodiversity lost, the participants disagreed claiming that palm plantations also bring other species in to the landscape.

During the last part of the game, NES NATURALEZA decided to do a new movement that consisted in changing the previous roles of participants. Although at the beginning of the game a cooperative behavior was evident; during the last rounds, decisions were more individualist. This led to lose certification from those farms who achieved it before ending the morning session.

Discussion

During the four games all producers and participants show diverse behaviors with their own farms as well as communicating and interacting with other players. This creates different results at the end of each game ranging from very individual good results but a failure in the collective one to others with fair enough good results individually but also collectively. Despite of the results, Leaders of the sustainability programs of the mills were very engaged with the game since according to them it changes the mental model of the player, influence his performance in certain actions and change practices that lead to the sustainable goal.

By the evolution of the game, smallholders realized immediately the consequences of their decisions and their actions when in real world can take a year or even more. It helps to anticipate results and



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to create awareness in the way of how the producer is managing its plantation. The game helps them to have another view of what is going on and how this, affects their own business.

All participants agree on the similitude of the game with real life. However, something that still needs to be fine-tuning is that according to the smallholders a mill never stops buying their FFB since their capacity is good enough even in peak periods. They could delay the reception, but they will always buy the fruit. This is the only difference with the game where in an excess of FFB supply the smallholder will lose his Fruit.

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