Everyday Experts: How people’s knowledge can transform the food system

The People’s Knowledge Editorial Collective
*Everyday Experts* explains how knowledge built up through first-hand experience can help solve the crisis in the food system. It brings together fifty-seven activists, farmers, practitioners, researchers and community organisers from around the world to take a critical look at attempts to improve the dialogue between people whose knowledge has been marginalised in the past and others who are recognised as professional experts.

Using a combination of stories, poems, photos and videos, the contributors demonstrate how people’s knowledge can transform the food system towards greater social and environmental justice. Many of the chapters also explore the challenges of using action and participatory approaches to research.

The chapters share new insights, analysis and stories that can expand our imagination of a future that encompasses:

- making dialogue among people with different ways of understanding the world central to all decision-making
- the re-affirmation of Indigenous, local, traditional and other knowledge systems
- a blurring of the divide between professional expertise and expertise that is derived from experience
- transformed relationships amongst ourselves and with the Earth to confront inequality and the environmental crisis

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship* Series seeks to encourage debate outside mainstream policy and conceptual frameworks on the future of food, farming, land use and human well-being. The opportunities and constraints to regenerating local food systems and economies based on social and ecological diversity, justice, human rights, inclusive democracy, and active forms of citizenship are explored in this Series. Contributors to the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship* Series are encouraged to reflect deeply on their ways of working and outcomes of their research, highlighting implications for policy, knowledge, organisations, and practice.

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship* Series was published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) between 2006 and 2013. The Series is now published by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, at Coventry University. 

To read any of the 28 chapters in this book freely available to download, please visit: [www.coventry.ac.uk/everyday-experts](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/everyday-experts)

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Cover photos:

(left): Field teaching by Farmer Research Team members about planting methods, Lobi area. Photo taken by C. Hickey, December 2014. Used with the permission of project participants.

(right): The Coventry Men's Shed participatory video project exploring “What’s Eating Coventry' and unpacks social justice issues related to food in the city of Coventry. More information at www.peoplesknowledge.org
Everyday Experts: How people’s knowledge can transform the food system

The People’s Knowledge Editorial Collective*:
Colin Anderson
Christabel Buchanan
Marina Chang
Javier Sanchez Rodriguez
Tom Wakeford

*Listed in alphabetical order. This book was a collective endeavour and work and responsibility was shared evenly amongst the editorial team. All chapters have been peer reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers and revised accordingly as a part of a non-blind open peer review process.
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The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) is driving innovative, transdisciplinary research on the understanding and development of socially just and resilient food and water systems internationally. Unique to this University Research Centre is the incorporation of citizen-generated knowledge - the participation of farmers, water users and other citizens in transdisciplinary research, using holistic approaches which cross many disciplinary boundaries among the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences.

The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR)
Coventry University
Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane
Coventry, CV8 3LG
United Kingdom

E-mail: CAWROffice@coventry.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0) 2477 651 601
Web: http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/agroecology-water-resilience/

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Professor Michel Pimbert is the coordinator and editor in chief of the Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series.

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Everyday Experts: How people’s knowledge can transform the food system
CAIS Maloka: Researching our Campesino reality through critical reflection, participation, action and learning

Javier Sanchez Rodriguez and Maria Pastora de la Pava Cataño

Geographical location: Dagua, Colombia

Chapter highlights: Collective critical analysis helps us to understand our realities.

Participatory action research processes should go at the pace of the people.

Knowledge is power.

Critical education is essential for social change.

Collective learning assists collective farming.

Keywords: Critical learning, realities, collectivism, traditional farming, social change, participatory action research.

4.1 Introduction

*We therefore declare that the common people deserve to know more about their own life conditions in order to defend their interests, than do other social classes which monopolize knowledge, resources, techniques and power; in fact we should pay attention to knowledge production, just as much as the usual insistence on material production, thus tilting the scales towards justice for the under privileged.*

*(Fals Borda 2001: 29)*
We, the authors of this chapter, are small farmers, change instigators and the founders of Centro de Acción e Investigación Social (CAIS) Maloka, a centre for action and social change in rural Colombia. Writing this it quickly became evident to us that to talk about food and food systems, and our efforts towards collective planting of chemical-free food, we must talk about people – the people who break their backs every day, all around the world, producing food for everyone else on the planet, often in enslaving conditions. How can this be challenged?

In this chapter, we set out to give you a glimpse of our journey, of how we have learned to access and use radical, critical bodies of knowledge to bring Campesino people together, to generate authentic dialogue and to critically reflect and act upon their world with others.

We start with a scrutiny of the word and notion of ‘we’ – who are we? A short description of our project, CAIS Maloka, leads us to outline some of the early influences that led us to start the project. We then offer a glimpse of Los Alpes – the place where CAIS Maloka is based, and we follow that with reflections on our early months, recognising our need for connection with others who share our dreams, and thus introducing you to the International School for Bottom Up Organising (ISBO). We then go on to focus on our attempts to work with local people to develop a collective, organic vegetable farm. Later, this collective became known as Colectivo Organisativo Comunitario Los Alpes (COCA). Reflections on the first phase of this project lead us to share how we began to use collective, critical reading to support the people to re-engaging the collective and reviving the gardening project. Our conclusions are ongoing.

4.2 Who is the ‘we’? Building a ‘we’

Before proceeding, it seems important to talk a little about who is the ‘we’? For much of the paper, ‘we’ refers to the authors. We are two Colombians who lived in London and made a conscious decision to move to a rural community to begin a process of critical learning about the causes of poverty. This puts us in an interesting position. We, Maria, Javier (and our daughter Chia), must recognise the privileges we have. Although we are both from humble backgrounds, we were educated in London, speak English and Spanish, have seen the world outside Colombia, have a network of people that support us by facilitating resources through donations, and can travel to take up job offers in England that enable us to continue the work of CAIS Maloka.

However, as you will find in this chapter, ‘we’ also refers to our emerging collective of people from Los Alpes. These past eight years in CAIS Maloka have seen a process of creating a ‘we’ beyond the two of us. Our emerging collective activity can involve as many as 60 local people in Los Alpes, and numerous participants from other communities of Colombia who come to stay and work at CAIS Maloka. There is also ongoing involvement with groups in Jamaica and London, so an important question is always who is the ‘we’?
In October 2007, we left the United Kingdom to return to our country of origin (Colombia), to live on a farm that we had bought three years earlier. The farm is in Los Alpes – a geographically isolated place within a peasant community right in the middle of the southwest cordillera of the Andes.
In returning to live and work in Colombia, we had finally set out to realise our dreams of creating a project that would work towards social change for ‘us’ – the 98% who experience this world as one of inequality and injustice.

For reasons that will become clear, we named our project the Centro de Acción é Investigación Social Maloka – known as CAIS Maloka, with a mission to combat poverty in Colombia to prevent the negative experiences of migration to cities, and to other countries, by inspiring and supporting people to work together to understand the causes of poverty in their lives, to believe that change can happen, and to take actions to bring about changes, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Since then, through ongoing processes of reflecting, strategising and taking action, we have learned that to support and generate meaningful, authentic change locally, nationally and globally, we must live and work with people towards the following interconnected aims:

- To learn to reflect, think critically, explore and talk together
- To work the land together, both ethically and for mutual benefit
- To act together to challenge institutional and politically motivated wrongdoing
- To celebrate life together, living our culture, growing our creativity and meeting our needs for joyful expression and play

In addition, we have learned the value and importance of interconnectedness with communities in other parts of Colombia and other parts of the world – to find, reach out to, work alongside and learn with communities who also feel the necessity of creating a world from the bottom up, led by the most oppressed, those with the darkest hue, especially women.

### 4.4 Early influences

We first met in London, young adults in our early twenties, participating in a Latin American experimental community arts project called New Generation. This project helped us make sense of the world we had been thrown into, researching our lives and expressing ourselves through visual arts, music, dance and theatre. In the process we were often fired up by philosophical and political discussions, discovering Augusto Boal and his ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’; Bertolt Brecht, the magical realist; Gabriel García Márquez; Laura Esquivel; and Milan Kundera among others. Our performances were deeply influenced by these thinkers. In the process we began to be introduced to the work of a range of critical theorists, discovering Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, Galeano, Neruda and other great influential minds concerning Latin American contemporary libertarian movements.

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1 Malokas (maloca), are the long houses of the Tukano people– one of Colombia’s first inhabitants who live in the south-eastern part of the country. Malokas are community dwellings where many hunter-gatherers live, eat and engage in rituals together.
In 2003 we joined a newly formed organisation called Refugee Youth where we were introduced to the concept of popular education and the work of Paulo Freire, and to some of the principles of participatory action research (Hall and Kidd 1978). It became clear to us that the way we worked in New Generation was very similar to the participatory action research processes proposed by Fals Borda (2001).

One of the most powerful experiences we had with Refugee Youth was the ‘residential’, when we spent several different periods of time in the British countryside with young adults from all over the world. Living and eating together and sharing our stories brought us closer, creating deep empathy and a powerful potential to work together. Like us, many participants were young adults running their own African or Latin American community groups, and so our learning was taken back to our collectives – we inspired one another.

While in Refugee Youth, we were introduced to Myles Horton’s Highlander Folk School (Horton et al. 1998) and hence the history of the United States civil rights movement. We were spellbound by Horton’s work in developing a place in the countryside, in the US racist south, where black and white people could be together regardless of segregation laws and defy racist society to learn, strategise and take action to bring about social change. It encouraged us to dream and we dreamed of developing our farm in Colombia into something like the Highlander Folk School. This would be a place where people could join together and engage in the collective discovery of our reality and our world, plan action to bring about positive change in our communities, and challenge injustice, inequality and oppression. It would be a centre for action.

4.5 Dagua, Los Alpes: our new home

Our farm in Los Alpes produces coffee, banana and plantain, among other crops. Los Alpes – a handful of hamlets – also breeds cattle and, very importantly, manages its own water source via an aqueduct.

![Smurfit Kappa pine plantation](image)
However, the land around Los Alpes is used mainly to produce raw material for paper and cardboard for Smurfit Kappa (Carton de Colombia), an Irish multinational. There are large areas of pine and eucalyptus plantations planted on the highlands of Dagua (and many other parts of Colombia) under the guise of ‘reforestation’. It is the most recent colonisation of the Andes by a multinational corporation in the name of development and foreign investment. This so-called reforestation has the potential to cause a major impact on the water sources, and thus on the lives of the people of Dagua.

Over the years, the community of Los Alpes has also been subjected to the oppression of warring factions from paramilitaries, guerrillas and state forces. When we arrived, it seemed that social ties were in tatters, with high levels of distrust and resentment among people who were forced to support one group or the other, even leading to some deaths.

However, despite deeply complex feelings and unresolved issues among the community, people continued to rely on each other to meet the most basic need of the community – the need for water – by managing the aqueduct.

When we arrived, the Aqueduct Commission (Junta de Acueducto) and the Community Action Committee (Junta de Accion Communal) were established and functioning to a degree. The action committee is officially registered with the authorities and legitimises the commission. These bodies are encouraged by the national government in areas that lack state presence. While this arrangement gives communities so-called autonomy and responsibility for managing and providing services, we soon realised that local people are expected to manage these organisations with no training or support from the government.

4.6 Reflections in the early months: connecting with others

Interactions between our own personal histories and the different realities of the people and communities with whom we were meeting and working were beginning to paint a picture of disconnected realities for us.

Our worlds intertwined with history and struggle against colonialism, and the now neo-colonial powers. How was it that three sets of realities - the Campesinos (mestizo/mixed peasants), Indigenous and the African Colombians - all with similar experience of oppression, were disconnected? All three communities live in different areas, segregated since colonial times. Watching Colombian television, we began to understand how this segregation is maintained. News presenters tend to be white, soap operas are full of white actors and, when there is a black or Indigenous actor, they play the maid, the poor person or the baddie. The government is made up of white males and we (mestizos, mixed) are told at school that we are white. The social system is symbolically and literally telling us that dark skin is strange, ugly and something to distance ourselves from.

Early on we became involved with the International School for Bottom Up Organising.
During an international meeting in Caracas we were introduced to organising methodologies developed in the civil rights movement. These included such as the ‘people’s circle’: a democratic way to conduct meetings and an indispensable tool for encouraging participation that gives people equal voice and time; and consensus decision-making, which enables dialogue and responsibility for communal decisions. Our general agreement in that meeting was that, “our projects aim at building self-sufficient, egalitarian prototypes in communities of the most oppressed. Ours is an international struggle led by the poorest and darkest, among them women”.

Involvement with ISBO gave us new tools and knowledge about our history. An in-depth study of the civil rights movement, conducted by elders who had been directly involved and taught by Ella Baker, opened our eyes. It grounded and positioned us in a struggle that was not new and that had a history, heroines and heroes that looked like us and were like us. ISBO provided us with a really valuable lens to analyse critically our social reality as Colombians and as humans. When we use the word ‘critical’ we align our thoughts with Stephen Brookfield’s explanation of the concept:

> When I talk of critically and critical theory in this book, it is the ideology critique tradition I am chiefly invoking. As a learning process, ideology critique describes the ways in which people learnt to recognise how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. As an educational activity, ideology critique focuses on helping people come to an awareness of how capitalism shapes social relations and imposes often without our knowledge – belief systems and assumptions (that is, ideologies) that justify and maintain economical and political inequity. (Brookfield, 2005: 13).

*Figure 4.4. Children’s celebration*
Our collective critical reflections have led to a wide range of projects in CAIS Maloka, primarily with young people, women and children. Community engagement has included collective farming, arts and theatre projects, and community celebrations such as International Women's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, football tournaments and fundraisers (see further information).

Among the change initiatives we have seen is the development of the collective Junta de Accion Communal for Los Alpes. We have also seen campaigns; for example, the fight for the rights of children to be transported safely to school and raising awareness...
of the depletion of water. We have also visited and been visited by radical communities from other regions of Colombia. Finally, we have consistently participated in and hosted international ISBO organising schools, and regularly engaged, through Skype, with fellow ISBO members in Jamaica. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on our collective attempts to develop an organic vegetable farming initiative.

4.7 Collective learning for collective farming

In 2011, inspired by a collective chicken enterprise being implemented by the organising collective in Jamaica, 15 community members from Los Alpes (young and old, men and women) met to discuss starting an organic vegetable farming project. It was a warm gathering with laughter, excitement, a delicious meal and guarapo (a homemade fermented sugarcane drink). The children were running and playing while dinner was served. We sat around the table full and satisfied with such a feast. We began a discussion around how we each visualised the project and how we would work together.

We agreed to collect money each week for seeds and tools, and that our workday would be Monday. Our first concerns were how to work together equally, and how to reach agreement and make decisions as a collective. One of the youngest members said he thought we should make decisions by consensus and discuss things we did not agree on within the collective instead of mentioning them outside of the group. We decided to keep working on building principles that could continue to shape the way we work, building on the trust that existed amongst us, to keep nourishing the collective by talking with honesty and openness in the knowledge that we did not have all the answers.
The vegetable farming collective became very focused on the production project. We began to read Restrepo-Rivera’s (2005) study: *The Moon: The nocturnal sun in the tropics and its influence on agriculture*. It was fascinating to read about the way we traditionally plant food by observing the moon phases. Now we understood why Campesinos always planted certain crops according to certain moon phases. Research helped us come across the concept of allelopathy, where certain plants attract insects whilst others repel them. We learned of plants in our immediate environment that could be used in biological control against plagues, and weeds that could be used for making fertilisers. The farming collective built a wormery to provide a steady supply of compost fertiliser. We experimented making Super Magro fertiliser, worm compost bio-soup and Urimiel made from our own urine. Using organic fertilisers and pesticides, our vegetable garden not only served as a space for cultivation, but as a living experimentation laboratory.

Since the introduction of the Green Revolution in Colombia, many traditional farmers have been persuaded to use chemicals to obtain higher yields. As farmers become dependent on chemicals, the prices of these products rise each year. Traditional farming seems to be disappearing and local government agricultural agencies are emphasising producing more, without a thought to the cost to our health and the environment. And with competing subsidised prices from the US, basic staples like maize are no longer being cultivated.

Mid-year, Indigenous Nasa families from El Cauca join our organic vegetable garden project, bringing their wisdom on planting clean food, their spiritual relationship with the earth and their traditional knowledge on working collectively, cooking and eating together. It was interesting for us to see how the women brought their children into the field while we worked.
One of our main challenges was convincing some of the older men from the initial group to invest in organic cultivation. Many of them left because they preferred to do paid work as opposed to working on the vegetable garden and to buy their vegetables from the market. Firstly, they were not used to cultivating and eating a wide range of vegetables and, secondly, they had a hard time believing in growing food without applying agrochemicals. Those that stayed were the Indigenous participants, a couple of elders and the young people.

We began to share our knowledge with others. A collective from Villa Rica visited CAIS Maloka to learn about organic agriculture and ISBO’s principles of working with the community. The mornings were spent on hands-on learning in the vegetable garden and the afternoons on studying. We explored creating different ways of living, the importance of producing our own organic food, creating a process of alternative education, researching our histories and reaching out to others in our communities. As always the gathering was full of cooking, eating, bonfire discussions and music, along with the company of the Los Alpes collective. Subsequently, an ISBO organising school in Villa Rica provided real opportunities for us to gather with our brothers and sisters from Jamaica to share our learning.
Figure 4.10. Villa Rica collective learning to make an organic fertiliser – SuperMagro

Figure 4.11. Jamaicans and Colombians planning an ISBO school session
4.8 Reflecting on learning

Concientizarse podría ser, entonces, pensar en las relaciones entre el significado propio de la existencia humana y la circunstancia histórica que determina, por lo menos, algunos de los aspectos más importantes de esa existencia. Así concluimos que la “conciencia conscientizada” es aquella capaz de pensar en su época histórica al mismo tiempo que se piensa y determina en esa época. El hombre (la persona) conscientizado no puede dejar de ser, entonces, el hombre (la persona) comprometido con la historia de su época. (Barreiro, 1974: 53)

Translation: Becoming ‘conscientised’ could refer to thinking about relationships between the very meaning of human existence and the historical circumstances which determine at least some of the most important aspects of that existence. We conclude therefore that the ‘conscientised consciousness’ is that which is able to think about the historical era at the same time as thinking about and determining the history of the era. The conscientised man (person) cannot be other than the man (person) who is engaged with the history of their era. ²

Having this interconnectedness with different communities allows us to share knowledge on our organic farming and exchange ideas on social enterprises, challenges within the community and as a collective – all of which has strengthened us. Learning has been at the centre of the CAIS Maloka experience for all involved, in one way or another, not just for us (Javier and Maria), but for all the local people involved, the visiting groups and the volunteers. However, this learning cannot be understood in the conventional sense where there are teachers and students. Our collective learning has been bound by the experience of knowing others like us, who have also been subjected to the experience of colonialism and capitalism. Some of us are able to voice what we feel and make sense of it now, but only because of the dialogue experience we have been part of. This dialogue, about our experiences and our different intersectionalities, has enabled us, as Freire (1972) puts it, to “name the world” – our world, our reality – in order to act consciously as participants in the changing of that very world that oppresses us. Saying this, one of the challenges we face here is the way in which poverty and oppression holds people down, and how it takes a constant and long process for people to rewire their thinking, raise their self-esteem and, not only begin to believe that they can be actors in these changes, but more importantly that they deserve better.

4.9 Changes: what role do ‘we’ play in this?

During 2013, we (Javier and Maria) left Colombia for the UK, leaving COCA space to get on without us, and allowing us to see the process from the outside (we Skyped regularly throughout the year we were away). COCA developed as a group after our

² Quote translated from Spanish by Fiona Hale
experience of managing the Junta de Accion Communal and, for a couple of years, replaced it in the community as a more horizontal structured organisation.

Throughout this year, COCA continued working independently with the community and on community projects. However, the farming project was challenged. The farming collective was made of two distinct groups: the young Campesino men and the newly arrived Indigenous women. It emerged that the young men were now working in one group and the women in another, and on different days. Slowly people stopped coming to the vegetable farm.

When we returned from England in 2014, COCA was still engaged in its community activities but the vegetable farm was a thing of the past. It was quite sad to see the overgrown patch where it had once been. Disagreements among some of the women participants of COCA had resulted in them leaving. The collective had also been under attack from some of the male elders. COCA was accused of not allowing the current Junta de Accion Communal to work, as young people had taken leadership roles and were active working outside what is considered the norm.

4.10 Reflecting on our roles: where is the ‘we?’

One factor we often overlook is the role that we (Javier and Maria) play in this setting. It would seem that in our ambiguous role of outsider-insider, we can subtly mediate between people. Being ‘different’, as we are perceived to be, seems to make it OK for others to be different in our collective. When it works well, differences can be an amalgamating ingredient rather than a divisive factor. However, a conscious understanding of difference is needed, requiring reflection on the historical political process to which we as one people have been subjected. Our differences need to be talked about, studied and collectively analysed. For this to happen, “communicative spaces” as Reason (2006) and Pearson et al. (2016) argue, need to be created. It is in providing a space for processes of dialogue to develop, mediated by differences, that CAIS Maloka serves one of its main purposes. Our challenge was to find strategies to share our roles in this – to create the ‘we’.

While working in the UK in 2013, Javier was invited to join a small team in Refugee Youth who had been asked to produce a paper for publication on Refugee Youth’s experiences of working with Connected Communities, a project of the UK Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This proved difficult for a number of reasons, due not just to our inexperience, but also to the difficulty of representing the experiences of people who were not actually in the room. One team member suggested that we read something collectively as a way to get ourselves on to the same page. We took a paper by Reason (2006) about quality in action research, and spent a whole weekend reading together. We deconstructed almost every sentence, exploring the difficult concepts. We discussed the contents, relating them to the experience of the AHRC project and the history of Refugee Youth as a whole. Through this we
made sense of where we erred in the project and where we had been successful. A paper was subsequently produced and published (Pearson et al. 2016) to everyone’s satisfaction – it was quite a learning experience.

So, on our return to CAIS Maloka early in 2014, we decided to start a similar process to bring people together to make sense of our work and experience as COCA, CAIS Maloka and ISBO. We agreed to meet every Tuesday evening at CAIS Maloka for collective reading. Participation always varies, with seven regular participants who at times bring a friend or family member.

We proposed three books:

1. *The Open Veins of Latin America* (Galeano 1971), an analytical masterpiece of the economic and political history of Latin America from the European invasion in 1492 to the contemporary times of the US invasion.

2. *Canto General* (Neruda 1990), the history of the struggle of this land from before it was known as Latin America, written in the most wonderful gut-wrenching and thought-provoking poetry we have come across.

3. *La Violencia en Colombia* (Campos et al. 2005), an investigation into one of the bloodiest civil wars in Colombia between 1948 and 1958. This really informed us about our recent historical reality in a very graphic and raw manner. Fals Borda’s analysis has assisted us in untangling effects from causes, in understanding that poverty and underdevelopment are part of a historical economic process called capitalism, which needs poor people in order to maintain its dominion.

*Figure 4.12. Critical reading*
To make a start, we opened the reading circle with a poem from Neruda’s *Canto General*, which had some relevance to our central text of the *Open Veins of Latin America*. We would follow this by reading from *La Violencia en Colombia*, which brings Galeano’s writing to a more local context. Anyone who feels confident to read can. At the beginning, not many people read, but as time went on more people started participating. Every time there is a reference to a word, concept, historical epoch or character we do not all know about, we stop and discuss it. We draw examples about what the writing is saying from our own experience, or from the current national or international state of affairs. It helps if the people facilitating this process have some knowledge of history or how to research and find out about it. CAIS Maloka makes its minuscule library available as well as the Internet for this purpose. We also watch documentaries related to the subject we are reading. The more we read the more the collective develops an understanding of our history and begins to appropriate it.

4.11 Knowledge is power

Through this process, we have come to realise that “knowledge is power” as Gevanta and Cornwall (2001: 72) propose in their discussion about Foucauldian analysis. We need to learn to name our world as Freire (1972) proposes, but we have learned that ‘our’ modern world is not something that has been constructed by ‘our’ knowledge. It has been constructed by the dominant power of the elite and its discourse; therefore we need to learn about it, which means engaging with the different paradigms that exist about the modern world and its institutions in order to unmask it, denounce it and change it.

We know that our contribution towards social change is a small one, but we must start somewhere. Our critical reading has taken us (Javier and Maria) and the young people through painful paths, full of horrors about what has been done historically to Colombian Campesinos, and what we have done to one another. But this process also helped us understand the importance of what we are trying to do as a collective, and the ‘why’ we need to keep at it.

4.12 Back to collective farming

Towards the end of 2014 we had reached *King Sugar and other Agricultural Monarchs* in Galeano (1971). We learned how Columbus transported sugarcane, which became the ‘white gold’ that fuelled European mercantilism and sparked the transatlantic slave triangle. We learnt that coffee, cotton, cacao and sugar were planted as plantations, bringing enormous wealth to the colonisers and bringing hunger and death to the enslaved African people and the native Americans. Learning how people died of malnutrition in the middle of these plantations made us reflect on our diet, which is mainly potatoes, rice, beans and a bit of meat if we are lucky. We talked about nutrition and chemical-free foods, our vegetable farming experience, and why it had been abandoned. Someone said our parents did not understand the difference
between organic and chemical farming. Another described how his father cultivated chemical-induced *lulo* (tropical fruit) for many years without protective clothing and how his father would complain from pains in his body, never connecting them with his regular use of agrochemicals.

![Image 1](image1.jpg)

*Figure 4.13. Bio-digester project*

![Image 2](image2.jpg)

*Figure 4.14. Sharing harvest*
We were motivated again by the discussion and agreed to revive the vegetable farming project because we wanted to resist the government discourse that we Campesinos need to become more industrially productive, and because we wanted to re-learn and maintain our traditional way of farming.

And so, we cleared the overgrowth where the vegetable patch had been and started our collective farming once more. We repaired the wormery and vegetable beds. We have been working every Monday since; we read together every Tuesday and for a while now there have been English classes every Thursday. Every last Saturday of the month we work on a reforestation project around the aqueduct intake. We are on track.

4.13 Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that immersing ourselves in the critical study of our reality at a local, regional and international level has, in so many ways, strengthened our epistemological perspectives. Firstly, to make sense at the local level, we must understand our historical process at the local level. Secondly, to make sense of the world, we have to look at the processes from where histories spring and how these are constructed at an international level. It is in the Praxis, the analysis of the micro and the macro, the study of relationships of these two juxtaposed configurations of reality that we, as Campesinos, can start to make sense of our world. By relating this learning to our lived experience we are able to start naming the world and identifying the oppression within it so that we can begin to change it.

We have discovered that it is important for us as traditional farmers to research our
own knowledge because it is being suppressed by 40-odd years of green revolution; our grandparent's knowledge of traditional farming is being lost. Our parents' generation has slowly become accustomed to using chemicals and ignoring the natural rhythms of nature, such as moon phase observation when planting, harvesting, cropping and storing seeds. It is important for us therefore to find literature or knowledge that others have produced on traditional farming. Knowing that many people do not read, or don't enjoy reading, we must also document and produce knowledge that is important to us through other means such as theatre, music, visual arts and video.

It is our belief that we can mutually benefit from partnerships with organisations with agroecological and scientific knowledge, as well as people in general who are interested in food production and consumption. This can help us understand the modern challenges that we are encountering in farming due to climate change, land depletion and proliferation of pests due to the prolonged use of pesticides. Alongside this, we must maintain constant study of our Campesino reality, working together to access the bank of knowledge that is already there. In dialogue, diverse people – some with technical and others with traditional knowledge – can generate new ways of understanding our environment and a more conscientious transformation of the relationship between food systems production and social reality.

4.14 References and further reading


Everyday Experts: How people’s knowledge can transform the food system


Further information online:

ISBO: www.peoplesorganizing.org CAIS Maloka = Accion Comunitaria: www.youtube.com/watch?v=axUCBq7E23M

School transport campaign: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiP0lWKpxF4
Everyday Experts: How people's knowledge can transform the food system