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Date: 17/04/2007
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Dear colleagues and friends,

My name is Luis García-Barrios. During the past 22 years I have been a researcher and professor at a multidisciplinary research/postgraduate teaching center in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico (El Colegio de la Frontera Sur). ECOSUR works on Alternative Production Systems, Biodiversity Conservation, and Health, Population, Culture and Gender. My formal education (undergraduate, masters and PhD) is as an Ecologist. Yet, my interests are interdisciplinary, and mainly oriented to socio-environmental issues in peasant-indigenous regions. The topics I currently work on are:

1. Trends towards simplification of multicropping systems in mountainous indigenous regions of Chiapas. Causes and consequences.
2. Participatory development of agroforestry systems in the Buffer zone of La Sepultura Reserve zone, Chiapas.
3. Experimental comparison of multicrop vs monocrop diversification strategies in terms of their productivity, resistance to drought and resilience (greenhouse miniplot experiments and modeling).
4. Nonlinear dynamics and complex system theory: its applications to the evaluation and development of sustainable agricultural and natural resource management systems.
5. Development of graphic-user-friendly software for (a) making complex systems theory easy to learn, (b) process-based and agent based modeling of multispecies agricultural systems and (c) learning how to design sustainable production systems with a multicriteria/ multistakeholder approach.

Upon request, I will be happy to comment more about the literature and the nine software packages we have produced. Two of the most recent packages can be used online at <http://132.248.203.11:8080/mesmis-interactivo> (“Sustentabilidad y Sistémica” and “Diseño de Sistemas de Producción Sustentable entre Agentes Sociales en Conflicto” (García-Barrios and Max Pimm, 2006; in Spanish). The second one (Design of Sustainable Production Systems among Social Agents with Conflicting Interests” is also in English at <http://www.ecosur.mx/sustentabilidad>

Our recent work is demanding that we develop a more participatory modeling strategy. I have recently become aware of the COMMOD approach. I have carefully read the COMMOD charter and agree with its goals, strategy and modeling ethics. I agree that:

1. A new generation of natural resource management models need to be built as a participatory and interactive process through which groups of stakeholders learn about their own situation and develop collective decision making strategies;
2. These models need to be built without a priori frameworks created by “experts” and that such a framework needs to evolve through the understanding and the contributions of all stakeholders.

3. The complexity of such models should not mean unnecessary detail but – rather – that they fruitfully capture the most relevant interactions and the richness of behaviors of the process being modeled.
4. Implementing such modeling strategy implies important challenges which can only be overcome with an open-minded, critical and creative collaboration between all involved parties.

During the next three years (at least) I will be leading a funded project to promote participatory development of agroforestry systems in the buffer zone of an important biosphere reserve in Chiapas. A unique network of stakeholders (including farmers, municipality-level government, bio-reserve officials, research centers, NGOs and funding agencies) is already in place. The project includes developing models and role-playing games for the agroforestry goal and for broader purposes. We think that joining the COMMOD network will be an opportunity for learning, for sharing our experiences and for inviting collaboration and fruitful discussion with COMMOD members.

Best Wishes

Luis García Barrios