



AN INVESTIGATION OF SEMBRANDO VIDA, A RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OF THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT

Master Thesis with the KTI Chair group (CPT80830)

EXPOSEE

"The day the program ends we know that it will not be for the government, it will be for us because it is on our land and that is a benefit, isn't it? Because, if the project is finished, we still have the satisfaction that we took advantage of it by investing there. Even if it costs us now, in the future we will see that it is paying off. That is our intention, to take advantage now of the support that the government is giving so that in the future we can say "it was not in vain", right? This is what we got and now that we see the harvest, we are happy..." (7:24 ¶ 309 - 315 in L3)

Becker, Theresa

1153773

Supervision: Harro Maat

Co-Supervision: Natsuho Fujisawa Endo

Examiner:

Wageningen University and Research

Table of Content

| | |
|---|----|
| Table of Content..... | 1 |
| List of Abbreviation and other words..... | 3 |
| Abstract | 0 |
| 0. Introduction to a Grounded Theory Research | 1 |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. Methodology | 7 |
| 2.1. Introduction – Why using GTM ? | 7 |
| 2.2. Some fact about my research and its design..... | 7 |
| 2.3. Why topics like sampling strategy, data collection, data analysis can't be explained separately in GTM research..... | 8 |
| 2.4. The Methodological Limitations | 13 |
| 2.5. Concluding Summary..... | 16 |
| 3. Results | 18 |
| 3.1. What participant's viewed as success or positive changes with SeVi..... | 18 |
| 3.2. What participants perceived as problematic or disadvantageous with SeVi | 25 |
| 3.3. What the relevant actors think and say about each other | 28 |
| 3.4. Future of Sembrando Vida | 32 |
| 3.5. The substantive grounded theory..... | 35 |
| 4. Discussion | 40 |
| 4.1. Introduction | 40 |
| 4.2. Exclusion of public from program design | 40 |
| 4.3. Mistakes in program design that caused problems with Sembrando vida..... | 43 |
| 4.4. The substantive theory in relation to literature on Sembrando Vida..... | 50 |
| 4.5. Summary | 55 |
| 4.6. Future directions..... | 56 |
| 4.7. Recommendations | 57 |
| 5. Reflections..... | 59 |
| 5.1. Reflections on objectivity and subjectivity in field research..... | 59 |
| 5.2. Reflective Analysis of Reflexivity and Personal Values in Field Research..... | 60 |
| 5.3. Reflection on Collaboration and Relationships in Field Research | 60 |
| 5.4. Reflection on Learning and Growth in a Cross-Cultural Context | 61 |
| 6. Conclusion..... | 63 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 7. List of Figures | 66 |
| 8. References | 67 |
| 9. Annex | 72 |
| 9.1. Questions for participants of program..... | 72 |
| 9.2. Questions for Becarios (Trainees)..... | 73 |

List of Abbreviation and other words

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AMLO | Andres Manuel Lopez Ortega (Mexico's President) |
| CACs | Leaning groups |
| CCA | Constant comparative analysis |
| GTM | Grounded Theory Methodology |
| SADER | Secretariat of Agriculture and rural development |
| SeVi or SV | Sembrando Vida |
| PES | Payments for ecosystem services |
| Becarios | Jung assistants from field assistant |
| Coyotes | Merchants either from Guatemala or Mexico that buy products e.g. maize and beans, directly from farmer at very low prices and sell it in bigger cities |
| Comissariado | Like a mayor, officially elected representative |
| Convivencia | Social live, living together |
| Ejido | Village with communal land tenure system |
| Pobladores | landless farmer |
| Tecnico | Technician, field assistant from Sembrando Vida |

Abstract

This Master thesis aims to provide an analysis of the Mexican rural development program known as "Sembrando Vida," with a specific focus on the perspectives of individuals working at the village level. This study contributes to the academic research on the program by giving voice to an underrepresented group. Employing Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), a qualitative social science research approach, this research investigates the program's effects on households and villages in two neighboring villages within the province of Marques de Comillas, Chiapas.

The research questions were formulated based on initial impressions, informal conversations with villagers, consultations with other researchers, and insights from a literature review on the region. The research questions centered on understanding the impacts of the Sembrando Vida program and exploring how people envision their future with the program. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and a thorough literature review. Particular emphasis was placed on including diverse perspectives from various stakeholders engaged with the program, ensuring the research's quality and rigor. The collected data formed the foundation for subsequent analysis using GTM.

The analysis resulted in the development of a substantive theory that explains the research findings. The theoretical codes derived from the interviews encompassed three main areas of interest expressed by the interviewees: 1) participants' perception of success and problems with the program, 2) the interaction between the governmental program and the participants, and 3) thoughts concerning the future. These theoretical codes were interconnected in a circular model, with the core category of "participation" emerging as the theoretical lens through which the results were examined.

In the final discussion, the substantive theory was tested for its explanatory power and situated within the existing literature on Sembrando Vida. The discussion highlighted the limited attention paid to participation in the academic literature on the topic, emphasizing the significance of this research's contribution. Overall, this study sheds light on the Sembrando Vida program and its implications for participating communities in Mexico, specifically in the context of participation.

Keywords: Sembrando Vida, Mexico (Chiapas), Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), Participation

0. Introduction to a Grounded Theory Research

This study employs Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), a qualitative research approach that offers a range of tools, guidelines, and recommendations. GTM is a constructivist approach that emerged in the 1990s, and this study follows this particular school of thought. The present chapter provides an overview of how this methodology has influenced the study and the final thesis. In contrast to its name, GTM is more than a simple approach to research. It is a comprehensive framework that requires strict adherence to its principles to achieve credible results. As a result, this study's use of GTM implies that the thesis's presentation may differ from traditional research structures. It is, therefore, important to clarify the GTM standpoints to guide the reader through the thesis successfully. The use of GTM is a meandering journey marked by uncertainties that may deviate from conventional research practices. Consequently, the structure of this thesis reflects the methodology employed, and at different points in the study, deviations from traditional pathways are inevitable. However, each deviation will be clearly explained in terms of how it is reflective of a grounded theory approach.

Short excursion: What is grounded theory methodology and how is it different from a more traditional qualitative research approach?

It should be recalled that GTM emerged in the 1960s from a historical context in which quantitative ideology dominated, partly because, as Charmaz (2006) notes, qualitative research was accused of being "impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic, and biased" (p.5). Thus, it is fair to say that the introduction of GTM by Glaser and Strauss (1967) can be seen as an attempt to redress this imbalance. They challenged the dominance of quantitative methods by offering systematic guidelines designed to improve the quality, transparency, and rigor of qualitative studies. Glaser and Strauss saw the need for an approach that challenged the usual deductive reasoning, often based on a priori assumptions, and envisioned a methodology that gave preference to raw data on a given phenomenon, data on which to build a new theory, thus bridging what they saw as the problematic gap between theory and empirical research.

Why the literature review has proven to be an issue in GTM:

The use of the literature review has proven to be a highly contentious issue within GTM. The fundamental problem can be traced back to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original and controversial dictum that when using GTM, the researcher should initially ignore the theoretical literature on the topic and focus exclusively on the area of study. However, since an early, extensive literature review prior to primary data collection is a central component of most research strategies, this recommendation has generated much debate. Scholars such as (Dunne, 2011), (Thornberg, 2012), and (Tornberg & Dunne, 2019) have written extensively about the ideological and pragmatic reasons for this abandonment of early engagement with the literature. Put simply, the main reason for this rejection is the concern that the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and theory development, could be undermined, hijacked, or "contaminated" by conducting an early literature review, as the researcher could be disproportionately influenced by existing theories, ideas, or frameworks and impose them, either intentionally or unintentionally, on the grounded theory research process. This would essentially involve the ethos of privileging data over existing theory.

What is the constructivist school of GTM ?

Cathy Charmaz is a pioneer of this constructivist school of thought, which challenges claims to objectivity and the notion of an unbiased and detached researcher. Rather than advocating the classical notion of the discovery of theory in data, which posits an external reality waiting to be uncovered by the researcher, constructivist GTM places particular emphasis on the subjectivity of each researcher. In Charmaz's GTM approach, the researcher not only collects and analyzes the data, but constructs it with the participants through the process of interaction. This, in turn, means that the data partially reflect the researcher's perspective and are shaped to some degree by the dynamics - e.g., power relations - that exist between the researcher and the participants. Some scholars see the recognition of the researcher's influence as a shortcoming that undermines the validity of the findings and ultimately the contribution to knowledge. However, through the use of reflexivity and audit trails, the researcher can provide critical transparency that essentially reveals the researcher's modus operandi in coding and creating theoretical categories.

Structural differences between a more traditional Master Thesis and a GTM Thesis

Thus, because GTM is more than a methodology and does not follow the traditional linear research process - literature review > results > discussion model - it stands to reason that the reporting of this process may deviate from traditional structures. While studies that do not rely on GTM typically include a detailed theoretical literature review before describing the methodology and presenting the results, the inclusion of theoretical literature in the case of GTM is met with discomfort by many researchers, primarily because it seems to contradict the chronological sequence of the actual study. If you think about it, most dissertations broadly reflect the chronology of the research process - introduction, literature review, methodology, data collection, analysis, discussion, and conclusion. However, this is not the case with GTM. I will explain how I dealt with this issue more in detail in the method section. Furthermore, a theoretical literature review at the beginning of the written document may seem premature, misleading, and inefficient, as the researcher may want to discuss existing theoretical concepts in relation to the grounded theory after it has been formally presented. Therefore, the possibility of repeating content is a problem. In many ways, this is an example of how the debate over when to address existing literature ultimately determines the structure of the final outcome.

Outline of thesis

The current section serves to introduce the reader to the structure and content of the thesis. Following the pre-introduction is the introduction chapter (1), which will commence with a section (1.1) that introduces the research topic of Sembrando Vida and provides a rationale for its study. This section will identify the current gap in knowledge and highlight previous research on the topic. Additionally, a brief field site description will be included to aid readers in orienting themselves, along with relevant information about Sembrando Vida. Section 1.3 will outline the research questions and how they align with the aims and objectives of the research. Finally, section 1.4 will provide a justification for the research and its relevance.

It is important to note that the introduction chapter will not be followed by a literature review due to the positioning of GTM in relation to the topic. Instead, literature reviews will be presented at three different points in the thesis: the initial literature review (section 1.2), the focused literature review (woven into

the results section in chapter 4), and the theoretical literature review (located in the discussion chapter). Further details on each stage of the literature review can be found in their respective chapters.

The following chapter (2) will cover the methodology employed in the research, beginning with a brief explanation of why GTM was used (section 2.1). An introduction to the chapter will follow, and then a discussion of the design choices made in the research (section 2.2). In section 2.3, the method used in GTM will be explained, followed by a discussion of the methodological limitations of the research in section 2.4. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the discussion.

Chapter 3 will present the findings of the research. Section 3.1 will detail the successes and benefits perceived by participants due to Sembrando Vida, while section 3.2 will outline the perceived disadvantages or problems associated with the program. Section 3.3 will explore the relationships between the relevant actors involved in Sembrando Vida, and section 3.4 will discuss what the future of the program may look like. Finally, section 3.5 will present the substantial theory that emerged from the ground theory research.

The discussion chapter will follow the results chapter, commencing with an introduction to what will be covered (section 4.1), followed by an explanation of why it would have been beneficial to include Sembrando Vida participants in the design stage (section 4.2). Section 4.3 will detail how negligence in the program design resulted in problems with program enrolment. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the discussion (section 4.4), recommendations for program administration (section 4.6), and ideas for further research (section 4.5).

The thesis will conclude with a final summary in chapter 5.

1. Introduction

“Since the program started, they told us that the benefit was going to be for us. The program is for 6 years, so they told us that when the 6 years are over the program may be over, there will be no more money and the day the program ends, they told us, that we should think well about which trees we are going to plant, because in the future the benefit will be for us, and if not for us, for our children.”

11:10 ¶129 in L1

The Topic and its rational

This thesis aims to analyse the Sembrando Vida (SeVi) program, which was implemented by the Mexican Government in 2018. The research topic was identified through a participatory process in collaboration with the villagers and my supervisor, Natsuho. This process aligns with the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), which aims to generate knowledge that is not only relevant to the scientific community but also to others. By involving the community in the identification of research topics, the risk of producing empty and meaningless scientific knowledge is reduced.

The Sembrando Vida program is tied to the term in office of the current Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who was elected in 2018. The program has gained attention due to its controversial nature, and it is important to understand the context in which it was implemented. AMLO has initiated many changes since he took office, which have caused considerable controversy in Mexico¹. In December 2021, an agreement was reached between AMLO and the US President Biden to extend the Program to Central America, with funding from both countries, to address the main causes of migration, namely the lack of jobs (U.S. Mission to Mexico, 2021). AMLO even claims that the reforestation initiative Sembrando Vida inspired the reforestation agreement at COP26 in Glasgow (Carrillo, 2021). As a result, Sembrando Vida is a highly controversial topic not only in Mexico but in the entire North American continent. The World Resources Institute Mexico has documented that the program caused deforestation, contrary to AMLO's claims of reforestation (Warman et al., 2021).

The manner in which SeVi has been studied up to date

Despite the significant media attention devoted to the Mexican government's Sembrando Vida program, there is a paucity of scholarly publications on the subject, with the vast majority of extant research appearing only in Spanish. However, a review of the relevant literature reveals a small number of peer-reviewed journal articles published by Hispanic research publishers that explore different aspects of the program's impact. For instance, Cano Castellanos (2023) examines Sembrando Vida's influence on the changing role of peasants, while Cortez Egremy (et al., 2022) focuses on social, economic, and environmental indicators to understand the program's effects in a specific case study area. Geovany González Cruz & Ponce Dimas (2022) analyze the role of women in the program in their book chapter. Other publications concentrate on the economic benefits and opportunities provided by Sembrando Vida (Runde et al., 2021), while critical perspectives can be found in works such as Pedraza López's (2021) study of the program's impact on food sovereignty. Many publications are limited in significance and range, such as bachelor's or master's theses analyzing Sembrando Vida (Bernabe Ines, 2019; Laguna Idali, 2022).

¹ <https://www.proceso.com.mx/reportajes/2021/9/27/los-proveedores-consentidos-de-sembrando-vida-en-veracruz-272758.html>

Socioeconomic analyses indicate that Sembrando Vida can have negative impacts on local communities' development (Cortez Egremy et al., 2022). Cotler's (et al., 2020) extensive analysis is focused on the selection criteria used in the election process of communities during the implementation phase of Sembrando Vida and how these were applied and played out in the field. The authors conclude that although the program has clear indicators for the national and regional levels, the selection of communities at the local level was influenced by factors that were not mentioned in the initial program focus. The Mexican government has produced extensive documentation on Sembrando Vida, including evaluation reports (Secretaria de Bienestar, 2021), success and problem analyses from the program administration (Paulin Hernandez & Rosales Esteva, 2021), and annually changing rules of operation. Additionally, an analysis commissioned by the Chamber of Deputies examines Sembrando Vida's design, its impact on rural development policies, and its potential role in the broader political context in Mexico (Vazquez Vargas et al., 2020). Finally, Hevia & Hernandez Castillo (2022) adopt a critical approach to Sembrando Vida, arguing that the program neglects indigenous groups and treats all participants the same, ignoring cultural and language barriers that reinforce the dominant Hispanic culture.

The gap in knowledge

Based on the presented academic knowledge about Sembrando Vida, it can be concluded that there is a notable lack of knowledge regarding this program in the English academic community. While there may be new software and programs available to gain access to texts in other languages, it is important to note that only one of the aforementioned articles obtained data directly from the field for their publication (Cortez Egremy et al., 2022). The remaining articles primarily focused on document analysis, international research, and philosophical considerations related to the program design. Because of a lack from research that is based on participants perspectives or people interacting with SeVi on village level, we don't know about their opinion, concerts, ideas, suggestions related to the program. This research gap in the current academic attention on Sembrando Vida presents an opportunity for my research to contribute to the existing literature.

Relevance of Thesis

The present study is of significant societal and academic relevance, as it contributes new perspectives to the ongoing scientific discourse and sheds light on the voices of Sembrando Vida participants, obtained through field research conducted in villages. The study is conducted in English, making it accessible to a large part of the world population, and seeks to enhance knowledge on the subject for all.

The findings of this study are not only significant for the academic community, but also for the program administration, as they provide qualitative insights into areas of responsibility that were previously only obtained through quantitative analysis. By listening to participants, the program administration can gain a deeper understanding of how Sembrando Vida is perceived and its impact on the participants and the implementation process.

The research findings are also of interest to the wider Mexican public, who fund the program and demand accountability for their investment. Given the political interests surrounding the program, which will influence AMLO's legacy, the present study's insights can help improve the program's long-term

application, address known problems, and support communities in commercializing their products to achieve the program's goals in harmony with the people.

The program administration has already demonstrated its willingness to improve by addressing instances of power abuse and acknowledging past mistakes. The findings of this study may encourage the program administration to work on other problematic areas and ensure the program's long-term sustainability, while fostering community support and participation. Overall, with this thesis I aim to make significant contributions to the ongoing discourse on Sembrando Vida and I hope that it will have the potential to improve the lives of program participants and the wider Mexican community.

Research aim, objective, and questions

After identifying the research gap and explain why my research is relevant to society, I will now introduce my research questions. The research aim of this research project is to evaluate or analysis the effects that the Program Sembrando Vida caused. The broader overarching goal of this research is to focus on these effects in two villages, also called ejidos, in Chiapas (Mexico) by doing so I am trying to achieve a better understanding of the program and how it plays out in the field. By identifying research topic of interested together with the communities, I reduced the risk of producing empty and meaningless scientific knowledge.

To make this research aims actionable and practical I defined the following research objectives, that where the steps I had to take to achieve the research aim. As suggested by literature I tried to make them SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound)². This research:

- aims to understand changes in living conditions between before (2019) and now (2022) at (participants) household level
- aims to understand the effects and changes caused by SeVi since its start (2019) on village level (participants and non-participants)
- aims to understand participants' reasoning, decision making, and imaginations for the future (after 2022)

From this research objectives I derived the research question with its three sub-research questions. The overall research question is defined as:

“What effects had the program Sembrando Vida, in two ejidos in Chiapas (Mexico), since its implementation and how do people imagine their future with the Program?”

To be able to answer the research questions I defined the following three sub-research questions, remember ejido is a synonym to village:

SRQ1: What are the living conditions in the ejidos like (focusing on household level) before and after the Program implementation ?

SRQ2: What are the changes and effects caused by Sembrando Vida in this ejidos since its implementation (focusing on village level) ?

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria

SRQ3: How do people in this ejidos imagine and realise their future with Sembrando Vida ?

Based on the aim of this project and the research questions, the research strategy of this thesis can be defined as a case study. I decided to make a case study design because it would give me the possibility to study, in detail, a specific subject, Sembrando Vida, of interest and engage long-term with the people studied. The chosen research strategy guided me on questions related on “how to conduct this research”.

Project Outline

In summary, "Sembrando Vida" seeks to address two problems: rural poverty and environmental degradation. In this way, its objectives are to rescue the countryside, reactivate the local economy and regenerate the social fabric in the communities. The Program aims to reduce environmental degradation through the reconversion of degraded land in environmentally sensitive areas into productive units under agroforestry schemes. Typically, each producer works plots of 1 ha fruit trees intercropped with Milpa (MIAF) and 1.5 ha of timbre plantations (SAF).³ The programme's intervention consists of transferring program payments directly to the participants bank accounts , 4.500 pesos (250 US\$) per month, plus a deposit of 500 (25 US\$) pesos in a savings account, which has been paid out in autumn 2022. The producers are grouped in Peasant Learning Communities (CAC), with 25 producers each, where they meet to generate knowledge through the exchange of experiences and training. A pair of advisors (one technical and one social) will be in charge of 8 CACs(Secretaria de Bienestar, 2022). The advisors or field assistants or Technicians as I will call them are supported by the "Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro" programme, getting additional supported by three young people from the participating villages which are in training by them. With this Integral Vision (Social, economic, environmental components), it energizes the socio-environmental and cultural diversity of the communities, contributes to the generation of jobs, environmental care, promoting food self-sufficiency and greater social cohesion(Morales Nunez, 2020). See a summary of what Sembrando Vida has achieved until 2022 in Figure 2.



Figure 1:General data about Sembrando Vida. Source: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/image/file/736060/Banners_Pagina_WEB_datosG_datosG.jpg

Field site description

Boca de Chajul, better known as ‘Chajul’, is located next to the Lacantun river and sizes 3.810 hectares (RAN, 2015) whereof 47% consists of forest. It was founded in 1976 as one of the first ejidos (villages)

³ <https://www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-sembrando-vida>

in the region, it has 398 habitants (INEGI, 2010). Chajul is one of the better known ejidos as it houses the research station of 'Natura Mexicana' and in the past two decades many researchers have successfully worked in the ejido. Early settlers mainly came from the Guerrero province. The ejido is located next to the river Lacantun providing fertile land, locally known as vega(Mahesh & Nalini, 2018). The dominant land use types are agriculture and livestock and partly temporal and commercial work. It is an ejido that has been actively involved with various governmental projects, both agricultural, horticultural and forestry and has one of the highest adoption rates of PES (Carabias et al., 2012). Chajul is an interesting ejido because the underlying mentality that drives the ejidatarios is one of independence from each other which makes Chajul very different from the other ejidos in the region, where collectiveness is the general driver. (van Haperen, 2019)

Loma Bonita is not part of Marques de Comillas, like Chajul but the municipality of Benemerito, it is located between the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve in the north, from which it is separated by the Lacantun river, and the Guatemalan border in the south. It sizes 1.731 hectares (32% forested), housed 164 inhabitants in 2010 and was founded in 1976 (INEGI, 2010; RAN, 2015)This former number is either outdated or wrong due to unregistered inhabitants, because according to the inhabitants themselves the ejido counts approximately 300 people, who belong to around 3-5 families' clans. Loma's inhabitants form a heterogeneous group with people coming from different places and social groups in south Mexico and Guatemala(Valle-García, 2016). It is one of the few ejidos which does not participate in PES, due to the scattered, little amount of forest that is left. It is located next to the river and its main type of land use consists of pasture for livestock and agriculture with se of Milpa(de Vries, 2016).

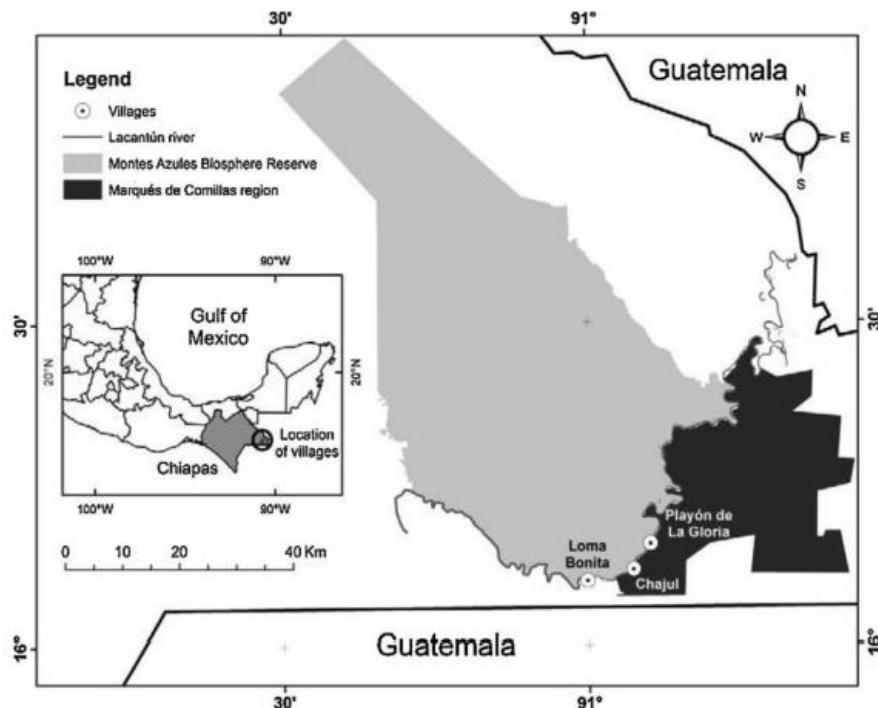


Figure 2: Geographic location of Marques de Comillas and the study sites Loma Bonita and Boca de Chajul (Zermenio-Hernandez et al., 2016)

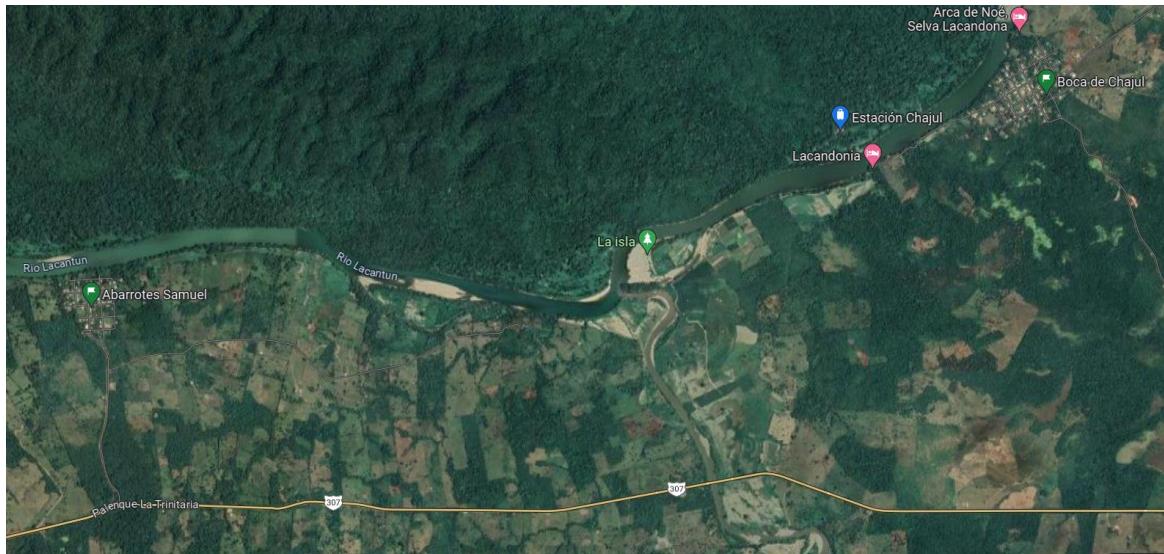


Figure 3: Copy of a satellite image from Google Maps showing Loma Bonita (left corner) and Boca de Chajul (right corner). Underneath the Highway is the boarder with Guatemala and North of the river Lacantún is the biosphere reservoir of Monte Azules.

2. Methodology

This methodology chapter provides answers to questions related to the key design choices made for this research. Beginning with an explanation of why GTM was chosen (section 2.1), the research design is presented in section 2.2. Justification for the sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis choices are provided in section 2.3, including an explanation of how GTM was employed. Methodological limitations are addressed in section 2.4, and a summary of the chapter's results is provided in section 2.5 through an audit trail.

2.1. Introduction – Why using GTM ?

In selecting grounded theory methodology (GTM) for my research, I considered its suitability to my circumstances in the field. Due to the constraints of time, limited access to the internet, and an unsuccessful proposal, it would have been challenging to develop an extensive new research proposal. GTM is a methodology that does not require a lot of preparation that use the internet and discourages the upfront literature review. It encourages to collect field work impressions, reflect on research experience, examine the different way of knowing and thinking about the research topic, this is done to prepare the new proposal. It "prohibits" the use of a theoretical framework that may narrow the focus of the research (Urquhart, 2017c). GTM was also aligned with the objective of my research, which aimed to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Sembrando Vida participants with the program. At an abstract level, I aimed to develop an understanding of Sembrando Vida in its context in Mexico and as a development program in its historical context. GTM was a suitable approach for my personal desire to explore the experiences of program participants, which has received very little scholarly attention.

2.2. Some fact about my research and its design

As previously outlined in the introduction, my research philosophy adopts a constructivist view. This worldview is grounded in the belief that the researcher plays an active role in observing the world, and that reality is subjectively constructed. Specifically, I adopt a social constructivist approach which recognizes that reality is unique to each observer. In the field, I found the interpretivist view to be particularly useful as it allowed for the acceptance of multiple realities and viewpoints, while remaining open to new discoveries. I acknowledge that my interactions with the field and its people were co-constructed, and that my role in the research and the limitations of this form of inquiry must be taken into account.

These underlying assumptions have significant implications for data collection, analysis, and use, as I will now explain. Given the exploratory nature of this research and my adoption of grounded theory methodology (GTM), the research approach must be inductive in nature. Inductive research generates theory from the bottom up, starting with the collected data. Consequently, this research will employ qualitative methods for data collection and analysis, which are suitable for understanding and gaining a first impression of a relatively unexplored research field, such as the impact of Sembrando Vida in Chiapas. Qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited to working with non-scientific knowledge, given that farmers are the primary informants in this study.

Due to time constraints, the field research for this study was limited to a 10-week period during which most interviews and observations were recorded. However, documents such as newspaper articles and

governmental reports were researched at a later time during the data analysis phase. The research questions aimed to gather information about the past, current, and future interactions of Sembrando Vida with its participants. As this case study seeks a holistic explanation of the phenomena under study, it explores all three time dimensions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions of the program. Notably, GTM has a unique approach to data collection which requires the researcher to consider all available data as relevant, including pre-field research, which, in my case, was conducted out of personal interest. As a result, this research considers all available data as potential sources of information and influence on my perceptions of the research topic.

Table 1: Time schedule Master Thesis

| Date | Activity |
|--------------------|---|
| 25.08.2022 | Arriving in Tuxtla Gutierrez |
| September 2022 | Field work Loma Bonita |
| October 2022 | Field work Boca de Chajul |
| 1.11 – 7.11. 2022 | Finding place in Tuxtla Gutierrez |
| 7.11. – 21.11. | Visit Boca de Chajul and festival of Sembrando Vida |
| 21.11 – 31.12.2022 | Data analysis in Tuxtla Gutierrez |
| 1.1. – 3.2.2023 | Vacations and traveling back |
| 3.2. – End April | Writing thesis |

In accordance with ethical standards in academic research, all data generated from this study, including audios, photos, transcripts, and documents, are exclusively accessible to the researcher and stored on a password-protected computer. Additionally, backup copies of the audio files were made on a USB stick, and the documents were synchronized with the Wageningen University OneDrive as a precaution in case of any computer issues. The data will be shared with the co-supervisor, Natsuho Fujisawa Endo, in accordance with the learning agreement for this thesis. As a post-doctoral researcher, Natsuho is a trustworthy individual with whom the researcher feels confident sharing the data. The data will be used solely for the purposes of the master thesis, and the researcher has not shared the raw data with anyone else. To maintain confidentiality, a coding system was implemented to anonymize the interviews. Throughout this thesis, a combination of letters and numbers, such as "L7," will be used to refer to specific interviews, indicating that the interview was conducted in Loma Bonita. These measures were taken to ensure that no harm was caused to any third parties, particularly the interviewees in the villages.

2.3. Why topics like sampling strategy, data collection, data analysis can't be explained separately in GTM research

In grounded theory methodology (GTM), the processes of sampling, data collection, data processing, and data analysis are interwoven and cannot be viewed separately. Therefore, in the following section, I will explain how I followed GTM guidelines to carry out these processes. In traditional qualitative

research, these processes are typically explained separately because they are consecutive. However, with GTM, these methods have a more processual character. Overall, GTM involves a highly iterative and recursive process that includes collecting, analyzing, and refining data until a comprehensive theory is developed that is grounded in the data.

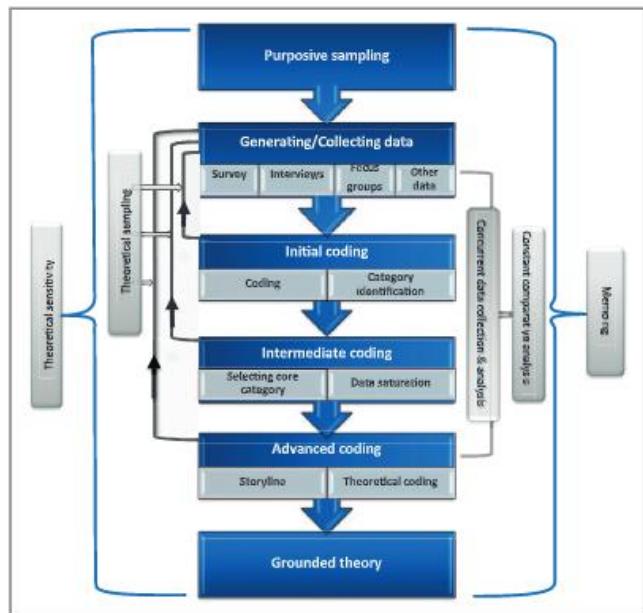


Figure 4: Research design framework: summary of the interplay between essential grounded theory methods and processes (Chun Tie et al., 2019)

Some things related to sampling

Figure 4 serves as a visual aid to guide the reader through the following explanation, highlighting the core methods employed in GTM. To begin, the concept of "purposive sampling" is introduced, which is used to describe the sampling strategies employed. In this qualitative research, non-probability sampling was used, whereby participants were selected in a non-randomized and non-representative manner. The sampling methods employed included convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling. The latter proved particularly useful in ensuring that all the different actors from Sembrando Vida, such as participants, Becarios, and field assistants, were sufficiently represented in each village. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure equal representation of both male and female participants. Key actors, such as village chiefs, activists, non-participating members, and those responsible for Sembrando Vida were also identified to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's effects. Interviews were contacted directly, through recommendations of host families or other interviews, some were also volunteering after CACs meeting. It is important to note that the results of this study cannot be generalized to the Mexican population, and in section (3), further details on the limitations of this research will be provided.

Some things related to data generation & collection

Following the explanation of the sampling strategy, this section will detail how the data was generated and collected. In this qualitative research, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted, as presented in Table 2. The selection of interviewees was based on their respective functions, and interviews were only conducted after obtaining their consent. The interview questions were developed with regard to the three sub-research questions, and different sets of questions were prepared for participants, field

assistants, and becarios to gain a better understanding of their roles in Sembrando Vida, as well as their perceptions of the program and of each other. Semi-structured interview guides were developed on basis of first impression gained in the field, talking to my supervisor Natsuhiko and the other researcher present (other master student and field work assistant), after first small talks to host family members that work with the program, people working in the shops and after attending CACs meeting. Also guiding questions had to be readjusted after some interviews, changing questions to make the more specific, taking out other that proven to be of no interested, adding new topic that came up. While doing so I always tried to look for topic that were of interested for the different actors (brought up by them), were they have competencies and not imposing topic of interested on them that were only interesting to me, the researcher. The questionnaires are included in the appendix.

During the interviews, audio recordings were made using the audio recording function of a smartphone, with the permission of the interviewees. Additionally, field notes were taken after the meetings to capture any noteworthy observations that may require follow-up work.

Table 2: Data generated for this thesis

| Data | Loma Bonita | Boca de Chajul |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Semi-structured interviews | 2 Becarios (m/f) | 2 Becarios (m/f) |
| | 1 Field assistant | 1 Field assistant |
| | 1 Chief/participant | 1 Chief (non-participant) |
| | 5 SeVi participants | 3 participants |
| | | 1 activist |
| | | 1 landless participant |
| | 2 regional responsible from Palenque | |
| Observations | 2 learning group meetings (CACs) | 1 CACs meeting |
| | 1 SeVi meeting with all CACs | 2 SeVi meetings with all CACs |
| | 2 Ejido administration meetings | |
| | 2 preparing tree seedlings | |
| | Sembrando Via festival from 12-14.Novembre 2022 | |
| Documents | Newspaper articles | e.g. (de Haldevang, 2021) |
| | Scientific articles (2.LR) | e.g. (Warman et al., 2021) |
| | Governmental documents | e.g. (Secretaria de Bienestar, 2021) |
| | Evaluations reports | e.g. (Chapela et al., 2018) |

In order to gather data for my research, I conducted participatory observations of various meetings and group activities related to the Sembrando Vida program. The learning groups, known as CACs, meet every other week to discuss urgent tasks assigned by the field assistants. These meetings are relatively informal and brief, lasting between 30-60 minutes, and are announced via loudspeaker one day prior to the meeting. I attended several of these meetings in both Loma and Chajul. Additionally, once or twice a month, all of the CACs convene together with the two field assistants, and I was able to participate in three of these larger meetings. During these meetings, I introduced myself and my research to the participants, identified potential interviewees, and established contacts with the field assistants.

Moreover, I joined the participants twice in Loma Bonita while they were preparing tree seedlings in the greenhouse.

In addition, I observed the meetings convened by the village chief, called Comissariado, which provide updates on the administrative affairs of the community and regional business. These meetings take place every or every other week, and I attended several of them. During my visit to Chajul, the village also elected a new Comissariado for a one-year term, which sparked some debates as the former chief, who had been in office for many years, announced that he would not run for re-election.

During all of these meetings, I asked for permission to attend and only observed, occasionally seeking clarification from people nearby. Following each meeting, I documented my observations and reflections by writing down notes or making voice recordings.

In my study, the third data source consisted of various documents that were mainly used for the discussion section. Unlike the previous data sets, these documents were not used for generating results through coding, but rather to provide additional context and support for the findings. To collect this data, I conducted internet research to identify relevant documents such as newspaper articles, publications, governmental documents, and evaluation reports. The purpose of this data collection was to compare and contrast my findings with existing literature on Mexico, highlighting both limitations and overlaps in the research. It is important to note that in GTM, all sources of information, including documents, are considered data.

The GTM process of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity

In conducting my research, I applied a Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) process called "Theoretical Sampling" to select new participants or data sources based on the emerging theories and concepts that were being developed. This approach enabled me to test and refine my theories and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Urquhart, 2017b). However, due to time constraints and limited internet accessibility in the field, I had to adapt the process of theoretical sampling by listening back to the conducted interviews to further orientate my research. In fully employing "theoretical sampling," I would have needed to conduct multiple field visits to run the circle of data collection and analysis multiple times. Theoretical sampling requires theoretical sensitivity, which encompasses the entire research process. The ability to recognize and extract from the data elements that have relevance for the emerging theory is crucial for theory development, as described by other researchers as 'the ability to know when you identify a data segment that is important to your theory' (Goulding, 2012). Conducting GT research requires a balance between keeping an open mind and the ability to identify elements of theoretical significance during data generation, collection, and analysis (Bryant, 2020). To increase theoretical sensitivity, researchers can use analytical tools such as reading the literature, using open coding, category building, and reflecting in memos, followed by doubling back on data collection once further lines of inquiry are opened up (Mills et al., 2014).

Some Things related to Data analysis using constant comparative analysis

The GTM process of theoretical sampling, which involves theoretical sensitivity, is not only used for sampling participants and generating data, but also for data analysis. Together with the "constant comparative analysis" (CCA), they form the backbone of GTM and are applied throughout the process of sampling, data collection, and data analysis. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 4. CCA is a concurrent data generation and analysis process that is integral to GTM. It involves comparing data as

it is collected, analyzed, and coded, and is used for coding and category development. The process begins with the first data collected and continues throughout the research process, allowing the researcher to identify similarities and differences in the data and develop categories and themes that emerge from the data. In addition to using CCA, I also wrote memos and field notes to clarify my thinking and identify areas for further exploration.

To analyze my data using CCA, I first transcribed the recorded semi-structured interviews with the help of a professional transcriber I contracted via Fiverr.com. This was necessary due to the amount of interview hours and the poor quality of some of the interviews, which could not be transcribed using transcription software. We used a clean verbatim style for the transcription to ensure standardized documents, which I then collected in Atlas.ti, a commonly used software for qualitative analysis that is easily accessible and user-friendly. I followed the constructivist GTM manual for coding, which involves three different stages of coding (see table below). Coding involves categorizing and labeling segments of data based on the emerging concepts and categories from the data, allowing the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships present in the data (Urquhart, 2017a).

Table 3: See in picture description and Source

Table I. Comparison of coding terminology in traditional, evolved and constructivist grounded theory.

| Grounded theory genre | Coding terminology | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| | Initial | Intermediate | Advanced |
| Traditional | Open coding | Selective coding | Theoretical coding |
| Evolved | Open coding | Axial coding | Selective coding |
| Constructivist | Initial coding | Focused coding | Theoretical coding |

Adapted from Birks and Mills.⁶

The data analysis took place from November to December 2022, with a second field visit in November to attend a Sembrando Vida festival and gather additional data inspired by the theoretical sampling and constant comparison analysis. After transcribing the first interviews, the process of initial coding began to compare incidents and identify patterns and differences in the data. Open coding was used to generate as many codes as possible from the early data, labelling important words or groups of words. As more transcriptions were obtained, categorization and meaning assignment were applied, comparing incidents and patterns and looking for code comparisons. The GTM recommendation of asking "What does the data assume, 'suggest' or 'pronounce,' and 'from whose point of view' does this data come, whom does it represent or whose thoughts are they? What collectively might it represent?" was utilized to guide the initial coding process.

Intermediate coding, including identifying a core category, theoretical data saturation, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sensitivity, and memoing, occurs in the subsequent phase of the GT process. Here, basic data is transformed into more abstract concepts to enable theory emergence. Reviewing categories and identifying any that can be subsumed beneath other categories, refining category properties and dimensions, and recognizing relationships between categories refine the analysis. Diagramming is used to aid analysis in the intermediate coding phase. Grounded theorists closely interact with the data in this stage, continually reassessing meaning to determine what is

happening in the data. The method involves collecting data until no new insights or concepts emerge, which signals reaching theoretical saturation and developing a comprehensive theory on the studied phenomenon.

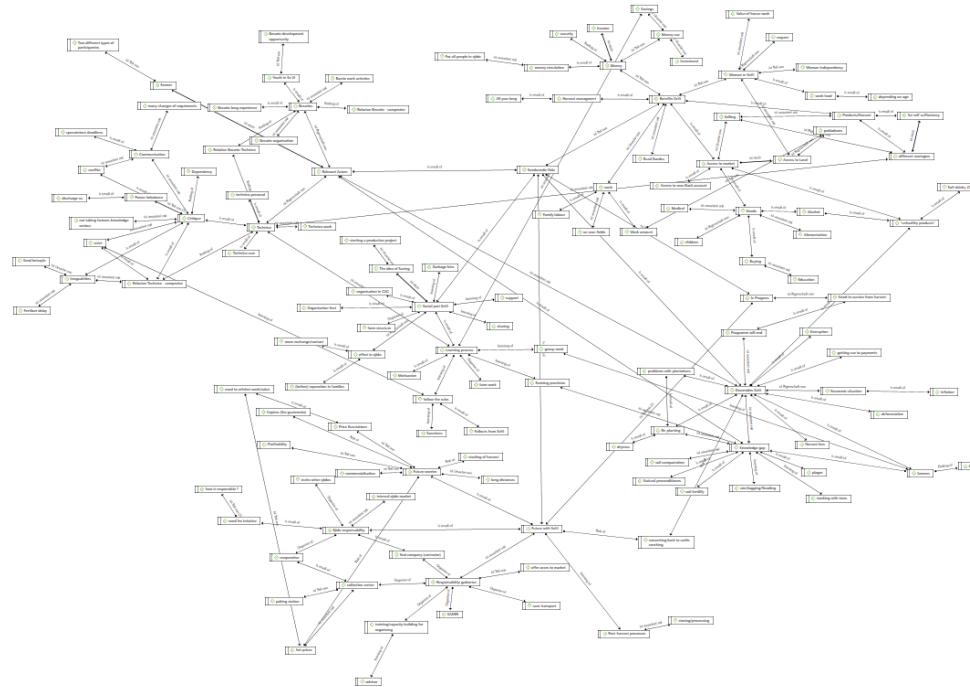


Figure 5: Diagram as result of Intermediate coding stage

The final stage in achieving a grounded theory is theoretical coding, which aims to integrate the substantive theory that is grounded in the data and possesses explanatory power. As explained by Noble and Mitchell, theoretical coding involves synthesizing the categories (i.e., concepts that have reached the stage of being categorized) that were derived from coding and analysis to create a theory (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Unlike presenting themes, the findings are presented as a set of interrelated concepts, with explanatory statements detailing the relationships between categories. To facilitate integration, construction, formulation, and presentation of research findings, I used storylines as a tool for theoretical integration, as suggested by Chun Tie (et al., 2019). Storylines involve building a narrative that connects the categories and produces a discursive set of theoretical propositions. Therefore, the storyline presented in the results chapter serves as the explication of the theory.

2.4. The Methodological Limitations

In this section, I will provide a detailed account of certain methodological limitations of my research. To evaluate the credibility of the qualitative research findings, I will employ the terminology and criteria developed by Noble & Smith (2015). As shown in Table 1, qualitative researchers use distinct terminology and criteria to establish the trustworthiness of their research findings, in contrast to quantitative researchers who rely on statistical methods to establish validity and reliability. Qualitative researchers focus on incorporating methodological strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings. An audit trail can be found under 2.5. Such strategies include:

Table 1 Terminology and criteria used to evaluate the credibility of research findings

| Quantitative research terminology and application to qualitative research ⁴ | Alternative terminology associated with credibility of qualitative research ⁵ |
|--|---|
| Validity The precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data | Truth value Recognises that multiple realities exist; the researchers' outline personal experiences and viewpoints that may have resulted in methodological bias; clearly and accurately presents participants' perspectives |
| Reliability The consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings | Consistency Relates to the 'trustworthiness' by which the methods have been undertaken and is dependent on the researcher maintaining a 'decision-trail'; that is, the researcher's decisions are clear and transparent. Ultimately an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar or comparable findings. |
| Generalisability The transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts | Neutrality (or confirmability) Achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed. Centres on acknowledging the complexity of prolonged engagement with participants and that the methods undertaken and findings are intrinsically linked to the researchers' philosophical position, experiences and perspectives. These should be accounted for and differentiated from participants' accounts |
| | Applicability Consideration is given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings or groups |

Figure 6: Source: Noble, H.; Smith, J. (2015) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054>

Validity or True value

Drawing inspiration from Figure 6, I will detail my methodological limitations in a similar format. In the first part, I will address the issue of validity in my research. When conducting fieldwork and interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, it is important to recognize the existence of multiple realities and acknowledge that people construct their world through their interactions with others. Reflecting on my role as a researcher, there are three topics that I would like to highlight.

Firstly, in the initial weeks of my research, I found it challenging to bridge the cultural differences between myself and the rural Mexican community. If I were to conduct this research again, I would allocate more time to adapting to the field before starting data collection. Additionally, I observed that Mexicans tend to interpret events more positively, leading to a positivity bias that made it difficult for me to accurately interpret their statements. While discussing this with other researchers in the field, we noticed both similarities and differences in our observations, suggesting that this bias is a subjective characteristic that varies among individuals.

Secondly, I recognize that my tendency to focus on problems or complaints during interviews may have been influenced by my German background. This led me to ask questions that focused on issues with the program or interpersonal conflicts among members. This observation made it increasingly difficult for me to interpret what people were saying accurately, and I found myself frequently changing my impression of the program, from being highly enthusiastic about its potential impact to feeling disappointed and questioning its effectiveness overall.

During the data preparation phase, there were weeks where I only transcribed interviews, which caused me to disconnect from the impressions I had gathered from the field. As a result, during data analysis, I found myself anticipating participants' responses based on my prior knowledge, which led to a loss of

agency on their part. However, participants were able to correct me if I made incorrect assumptions, which helped me to stay true to their perspective.

To overcome this bias, I could have modified my questionnaire or conducted more in-depth interviews with a wider range of respondents. I addressed this bias by writing extensive field notes and making audio recordings when something caught my attention. I also wrote down related ideas and follow-up questions after each interview and reflected on my personal opinions on newly developed impressions daily. To triangulate the data, I used field notes as a data source and engaged in participatory observations. I also sought feedback from colleagues and peer groups to uncover any taken-for-granted biases.

To accurately represent the participants' perspectives, I relied on qualitative open coding to stay true to their voice and to account for my mistakes and constantly evolving assumptions in the memos. This approach was only possible because I followed the GTM rule of multiple repetitions and the ground rule of staying open-minded about possible outcomes. Ultimately, this methodology helped me to position my findings accurately and reflect on potential biases. Prior to conducting each interview, I explicitly informed participants that the information they provided would solely be used for my thesis, that all data would be anonymized, and that I would not share any of their information with anyone at the field site, thus ensuring confidentiality. By recording interviews, I was able to revisit the data repeatedly to check for emerging themes and remain true to participants' accounts of their experiences with the Sembrando Vida program. I have also included verbatim extracts from participants to help readers determine whether the final themes are accurate depictions of participants' experiences.

Reliability or consistency

In the following section, I will evaluate the reliability and neutrality of my research. I will discuss how procedural bias related to data collection and measurement may have influenced my research. For instance, through purposive sampling, I may have included selection bias by only interviewing those who were willing to speak with me. Additionally, by selecting individuals based on their function or position, I excluded those who were not direct participants in the program, thus presenting a limited perspective based on informal talks and interviews with only two members who were not directly involved. It may have been important to include the voices of those who had left the program, but it may have been uncomfortable or impossible for some to reject my interview request directly.

To minimize such situations, I first made casual contact with potential participants before visiting them at home and asking if they would be interested in participating in an interview. If necessary, I would arrange another meeting at a later time that was more convenient for them. I tried to avoid any discomfort or pressure by providing clear information about the topic and duration of the interview, bringing refreshments as a gesture of gratitude, and conducting interviews one-on-one or with couples in a relatively quiet environment where both parties felt comfortable speaking without time pressure.

While some interviews were conducted outside on the porch or in the living room or garden, most were conducted in the respondents' private homes, where they were free to choose a comfortable location. However, I acknowledge the possibility of the Hawthorne effect, where people may have responded differently because they knew they were being interviewed, such as overemphasizing complaints or positive experiences. In such cases, I reflected on my own preconceived notions and expectations,

examined my theoretical framework, and consulted helpful lectures and documents from my supervisors or field assistant Eduardo.

Overall, I attempted to conduct interviews as ethically and professionally as possible, while remaining mindful of potential biases and limitations in my research. For future research, I would use a professional recording device and request that children be absent to avoid distractions and maintain a higher recording quality.

Generalisability or Applicability

In this final section, I will discuss the applicability of my research to other contexts, settings, or groups, which is commonly known as external validity in quantitative research. Based on my findings, it is possible to apply or generalize them to other mestizo communities in southern Chiapas such as Marques de Comillas, Benemerito de las Americas, and Ocosingo. However, it should be noted that my research cannot accurately represent the indigenous communities in the region, which comprise the majority, due to their use of the traditional ejido land tenure system. This creates different struggles and opportunities for these communities when interacting with Sembrando Vida.

2.5. Concluding Summary

| Audit trail | | |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Topic | What I did | GTM |
| Research Philosophy | Constructivist | |
| Research type | Inductive, case study | |
| Type of knowledge access | Non-scientific knowledge, farmer knowledge | |
| Time horizon | Start august 2022 - 10 weeks field work – data analysis Nov/Dec 2022 – thesis writing Feb-Apr 2023 | |
| Ethics | Permission for recording etc. Anonymous in shared data | |
| Data management plan | Storage on hard drive + copy +cloud Sharing raw data with co-supervisor | |
| Literature review | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Initial, before field work, included in Introduction chapter: Sembrando Vida, Chiapas, Marques de Comillas, Mexico's history Focused, while data analysis can be found in results chapter: former governmental development programs, Sembrando Vida evaluation reports Theoretical, while writing process can be found in discussion chapter: News about SeVi, Critiques on Program, governmental rural development programs | |
| Data type | Audios, photos, documents (transcripts, literature, field notes, memos etc) | |
| Sampling strategy | Non-probability sampling: Convenience, snowball, purpose sampling | Theoretical sampling |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | requires theoretical sensitivity (skill) |
| Data collection/generation & co-construction | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Semi-structured interviews (find questions in appendix) 2. Participatory observations 3. Documents | Theoretical saturation, constant comparative analysis, concurrent data collection, and analysis writing memos |
| Data processing (preparation) | Transcribing of audio files (with support native speakers found though fiverr.com) clean verbatim style | |
| Coding | <p>Use of Atlas.ti software</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial coding – categorising 2. Focused coding – develop core category 3. Theoretical coding – integrate substantive theory | |
| Trustworthiness techniques | <p>Triangulation of data collection (data sources and methods > data from interviews, observations, documents etc.)</p> <p>negative case analysis; ‘thick’ descriptions of phenomena; diagrammatic illustration of theory generation (with codes/sub-themes and themes); auditing/peer review; Peer debriefers feedback from research advisors;</p> <p>Prolonged engagement with participants;</p> <p>Participant guidance of inquiry (theoretical sampling); Use of participant words in the emerging theory</p> | Analysis accounting for: True value; Consistency; Applicability |

3. Results

This chapter will present the findings of the study, organized according to the emergent structure identified during analysis. The highest level of abstraction was captured by four theoretical codes, which will be presented in the following sections. The first theoretical code, "Success or Positive Changes," will be explored in section 3.1, where the participants' accounts of positive outcomes will be described. Section 3.2, "Problems and Downsides with the Program," will then present participants' views on negative changes associated with the program. In section 3.3, "Relations Between Relevant Actors," the theoretical codes related to how the participants perceive and interact with each other will be summarized. Finally, section 3.4, "Uncertain Future with Sembrando Vida," will provide a summary of the impressions of all actors regarding the program's future. At the beginning of each chapter, a table will be presented that outlines the development of open codes to selective codes and theoretical codes to demonstrate the analysis process. The first section will also feature a detailed table with examples of line-by-line coding to illustrate the GTM analysis process. The chapter will conclude with section 3.5, where the substantive theory resulting from the GTM analysis will be presented. This will include the theoretical codes' interrelationships and the core category. Every section will be further sub divided and presented following the selective codes.

3.1. What participant's viewed as success or positive changes with SeVi

This chapter will present the findings related to the first and second research questions, which explore the participants' perceptions of success or positive changes resulting from the program. The section will primarily focus on the participants' views, although perspectives from other actors will occasionally be provided for context. Therefore, this section is titled accordingly. This section is sub divide following structure of the selective codes.

Table 4: Example for development of categories and codes

| Success/Benefits of Sembrando Vida | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Exemplary citate | Open Code | Selective code | Theoretical code |
| “I am satisfied because I see all the producers who are there, who receive a salary. It is a self-employment salary that they have because they work on their own land.” (2:9 ¶ 37 – 41 in C4) | Income | Money | Success or positive changes |
| “Yes, it is safe, because every month there it comes safely, and you have a place where you can pay from.” (11:16 ¶ 157 – 173 in L1) | Security | | |
| “But whoever wants to take advantage of it and makes savings.” (2:17 ¶ 75 – 76 in C4) | Money use for Savings | | |
| “And there are people who have set up stores. There are people who have set up hardware stores with that money.” (2:17 ¶ 75 – 76 in C4) | Money use for Investment | | |
| “Only here. Every month. So, half a million pesos; put it that not all of it is spent here, but half of it is like 200 or 300 thousand pesos; that's what's generating more trade here, employment, it's already inside and before where was all that money going to come from? Because it is quite a lot. Well, there wasn't any. And that's every month, every month, every month. Economically it's very good, I think.” (8:40 ¶ 204 - 206 in L7) | Money circulation | | |

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------|--|
| “So if you work at Sembrando Vida you often work together with your husband ? Yes. That's right. Most of the times in the mornings.” (7:10 ¶ 108 - 126 in L3) | Family labour | Work | |
| “ it benefits and affects, you could say, because Sembrando Vida's is all work, work, work. There is no time to sow enough maize, to sow enough beans. It's not enough time, because in this one they demand a lot.” (6:19 ¶ 494 - 512 in L2) | Work amount | | |
| “Well, I really couldn't tell you because for many it has been a good help, for almost all of them because it is an income that they are obtaining from work that is for themselves. From my point of view I feel that it has been very good for them because it is a help for them and they are working their own land and for themselves. Not for someone else.” (19:20 ¶ 113 - 114 in C7) | Investment in own field | | |
| “If the woman, because she was a woman, she was respected and valued the work in the home, in the house. But not now. They leave. They give us the example, they take the machete with picks or shovels, and they go to work. There is equality now.” (2:19 ¶ 79 - 86 in C4) | Value of domestic work | Women | |
| “They give freedom to women, which before maybe was a little bit less, almost less freedom that they gave them and now they have, now that they are representatives of their own, of their own work, well they, they have the name, well they gave their name.” (19:22 ¶ 118 in C7) | Respect, Independency | | |
| “And above all the motivation. Here before, it was not customary for women to work in the fields. Here it was only the men who worked in the fields. But with the program, the women are very motivated and set an example for us. They go, they sow, they already know the names of the trees, the plants, the fruit.” (2:9 ¶ 37 - 41 in C4) | Work hard | | |
| “OK, everyone goes in. In other words, there is no distinction”. In the sense that we said to the woman "no, if the woman wants to go in, she can borrow it from her husband, her father, her grandfather etc. And we just make some contracts. Lease contracts, use contracts, usufruct contracts or whatever it might be so that she can work the land. That is the part of access to the land. So it's an achievement of the program really...” (26:16 ¶ 377 - 389 in C10) | Access to land | | |
| “This year there were people who had their first harvests for example of pineapple. Maybe it would be good if the programme already had a market for them so that they could sell their products, because so fare they haven't. If there was a good market and if the market would be good accessible, they could sell their products. If there was a good market and if there was a good price.” (8:43 ¶ 217 - 221 in L7) | Access to market (for selling/buying) | Access | |
| “I already have some money coming in. If I want to do some service for medicine, if someone gets sick, we have that income, as it is monthly, we have that. When Sembrando Vida wasn't there, we didn't have any money, and here we have the confidence that we get paid monthly.” (23:16 ¶ 281 - 283 in C1) | Access to medical treatment | | |
| “... sometimes my husband goes monthly to collect the support from our bank account, so from there we dedicate | Access to own bank account | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| a part of it to buy what we need for the household.” (7:15 ¶ 169 - 175 in L3) | | | |
| “Well, he already said that. That is, when I arrived and spoke to him personally, he said yes. But only in the period of... in the period of the president, the six years. And after the six years, that's the end of it. He's already working all his land, everything that's planted, so there's nothing to see. We are renting.” (13:7 ¶ 179 - 205 in C5) | Access to land (Pobladores and Women) | | |
| “Financially it helps us, because it's 5,000 pesos a month, it's good money and here we are, but this house is on loan to us, and by saving we manage to do something. But it does benefit us, we buy things from it, we also support our daughter who is in school.” (25:6 ¶ 18 - 19 in L6) | Access to fulfilling family needs (education material, children's needs, better alimentation) | | |
| “Here it has been the same. He who is vicious is vicious, whether he has money with the program or not. Here the people here... It has been very busy, more money has come in. And those who like to drink... Now and before. Now or when he used to drink, because... He always finds his source for this.” (23:32 ¶ 527 - 545 in C1) | Access to “unhealthy products” (Alcohol, soft drinks, snacks etc.) | | |
| “Yes, I have oranges, lemons, soursop, rambutan and mango. I think for next year I will have avocado too.” (21:10 ¶ 32 - 33 in C6) | Product variety | Producti on | |
| “It's better what we do, we just plant for consumption, just for the chickens, for human consumption. We don't sell maize. Right now we are planting life, because what we are planting is rambutan, but it is not yielding yet, and we hope that if we plant more soon we will be able to sell this product, because there are not many of them.... I mean, we are not going to finish it ourselves, because, for example, we, in the case of the family, me and my wife have 2 hectares of Rambutan. You have to look for a market or where to get it.” (17:2 ¶ 8 - 10 in L3.1) | Different strategies Self-sufficiency or commercialisation | | |
| “Perhaps yes. Because, as I said, before we all dedicated ourselves to our work and now I feel that, well, personally, there has been a closer relationship between the people we know, because we work as a group and we try to get along well, right? Of course, there is one or the other one that suddenly gets out, but personally we try that when we work everything is in harmony, not arguing, nothing like that. And I feel that yes, on that side it has helped us, because working in groups has brought us closer as people. “ (7:11 ¶ 132 - 150 in L3) | More exchange/contact | Convive ncia (social live) | |
| “Yes, that was also a topic we worked on. Yes, some other topics that have to do with collective work, right? the collective work in the cac's, which is reflected in the nursery work, in the bio-factory, more than anything else it is to sensitize that part, right? so that they come out in a positive way, all the collective work that exists in the cac's, right? (...) Do you know what the most difficult part of the program is? It's the social part. It's the social part, why? because as you said teamwork is difficult. Why? Because we are not used to it.” (22:16 ¶ 94 - 98 in L9) | Support/sharing in learning groups (CACs) | | |
| “Yes, of course. The productive technical part and the social part. It is another of the beauties of the program. Because it is not only about agriculture. It goes beyond that, to the social structure. In the communities. Trying to | Social education | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| make a transformation from there. That's what makes it beautiful, then, to this program." (26:7 ¶ 151 - 167 in C10) | | |
|---|--|--|

Money

The direct payments that are being made to people in Loma have been received with great happiness. Unlike other projects that they have participated in, they have the impression that there is no corruption involved, and all the money is ending up in their bank accounts. The people are using the money primarily for enhancing their dietary needs, medical treatment, school materials, and general household materials. Some of them are also saving parts of the money to later make a bigger investment or for improving their housing or building stalls for livestock. They like the freedom they have to decide what to use the money for, and many are also dedicating a part of the money for reinvesting in their farms or work.

However, there have been some negative effects. People have observed more illegal alcohol drinking than before, and there is also more consumption of unhealthy products like chips, cookies, and soda. Despite this, many people understand these payments as their income for the work they are doing on their new Sembrando vida plantations and feel that the amount is fair.

The payments have also had some secondary effects on the village level. Many businesses, such as the bakery or the shops, are benefiting because people are buying more. People frequently mention that now there is more money circulation in the area, which they can notice, and they mention that this would have never happened with another program.

Some participants say that people in the village are also more united than before. There is no jealousy between the farmers, and people that have more share products with those that are not in the program. The meetings that they are having are causing more frequent social gatherings, where people share more about their lives and know each other better, than before. They have also built up a saving of 17,000 pesos, which was meant to be for an investment project. This could be something for the community, organized in a group activity, but it had to be productive, and an investment that is serving for the future.

However, people are worried about what is going to happen if the program finishes. *"Yes, that is the insecurity,"* says one interviewee. *"What happens is that the peasants realize which president helps and which one doesn't. We are not going to vote for a president who is not going to help us, right?"*

The program has also had a positive effect on businesses in the area. *"Well, the truth is,"* says one interviewee. *"Since the arrival of sowing life, now you often hear people doing business, but not before. Even water has to be bought."* Moreover, once a year, people from Sembrando Vida come and make interviews with the participants about what kind of things they own to see the development of their households. However, some participants mention being suspicious about it.

Finally, the program has had a positive impact on the people's lives, providing them with a fixed monthly income that they can rely on. Frequently people mention that now they feel safer, because they know that there is a secure monthly income so in case that they are in urgent need of money they will have some savings or other will be also more willing to lend money, than before. *"I used to work and we depended only on what we made,"* says another interviewee. *"Now, with this, you know, you have a date*

every month for sure that you will receive your salary. And it helps us a lot. Imagine, you get a little bit from here and with what you get from here you have more possibilities to eat better."

Work

The implementation of a new program has had a positive impact on the lives of villagers, according to several interviews. For some villagers, the program has been a reason to stay in their village or even return to work instead of migrating to other places like the USA. The program has created more job opportunities, and now many rent day laborers to help them, which also positively affects landless farmers called "pobladores" and young villagers who don't have access to own land. Before the program, only the richer livestock farmers could afford to pay for workers. For the same reason people are satisfied that now they are work on their own fields, investing in their own farm whereas before they had to work a lot for others to survive, they were investing in someone's else's business so to say.

The program has also allowed families to work together, and different constellations make it possible for everyone to have something to do. Some farmers started organizing their fields more efficiently, working in batches for different purposes. People are happy about the new idea of working with trees because, before the program, no one was thinking of doing so. Before everyone was working by their own, now you can see them working more frequently together. If there is a call to work they come, there is more unity. Others feel obligated to work in team although they don't want to.

However, some interviewees expressed feeling pressure to complete certain tasks, as they were told they had to do them. One interviewee stated, "*Well, it's not that we don't like it, but it's like a little more pressure because, for example, they tell us 'we have to do this, we have to do...' and sometimes we have felt a little pressured because one job comes and another one comes. But we know that we are going to do it. I also think that sometimes as human beings not many of us like to be told 'you have to do this.'*" (Interview L3, 7:7 ¶ 63 – 73)

Another interviewee explained that the program encouraged them to think about their future and that of their children. They were told that at the end of the six-year program, there would be no more money, so they should think carefully about which trees they plant. They were encouraged to plant trees that would benefit them in the future. (Interview L1, 11:10 ¶ 129)

Despite the pressure felt by some, the program has had a positive impact on the villagers' economy. They receive 5,000 pesos every month and can work 10 days in the program and about 20 days somewhere else, earning additional money. One interviewee stated, "*since the project has been in place, our economy has improved and everything. It is a help because every month they give us 5,000 pesos, every month. And, well, we work 10 days there and about 20 days we can work somewhere else, planting corn, earning... Let's say, I am going to earn with someone else, they pay me my day's wage, my day, and I earn there and I am earning here too and so on. And so, yes, we have more money. In other words, it is easier. And so now we are in this program because suddenly, as it is safe every month, every month, let's say, my child or my wife gets sick and the month is going to fall because, in fact, every 6th of every month the payments start to fall. I can pay for their needs.*" (Interview L1, 11:14 ¶ 153)

Overall, the program has brought positive changes to the lives of villagers, allowing them to work together, increase their income, and invest in their own farms.

Women

The traditional roles of women have been changing in the villages, where they mainly worked in households. Through the program, it has become more normal to see women working in the fields. Men have mentioned that they value their work and respect the housework. Depending on their age, women work harder if they are younger. However, women mentioned that they have very little free time as they have to work in the household, on the field, and take care of children and elders. Women with smaller kids only work if they have someone to take care of the baby or if they are going to the kindergarten in the morning, and sometimes they also bring them to the field. Women mainly dedicate their work to less heavy tasks like planting, and now with the new diesel-run grasscutter, some women are also starting to do the work that was previously only done by men with machetes. Some women are motivated to work and motivate others as well. They sometimes pay for day labor, for example, for cleaning the fields, which is a very heavy work that has to be done frequently, so that the weeds don't grow over the trees.

As stated in the interview, *"when I went to the nursery, I noticed that there were many women and not so many men, but we felt more comfortable because we were gossiping, working, and chatting. We felt at ease and it was de-stressing, because we forgot about our daily chores, sweeping, mopping, washing dishes..."* (21:22 ¶ 66 – 67 in Interview C6). However, another interviewee said, *"yes, but the truth is that sometimes we use it to distract ourselves. For me, as a woman, I feel that it does because it distracts us. Because from here just to the plot; when you go and enter the pile you are distracted by talking there and also working"* (9:14 ¶ 151 in Interview L8). Women's participation in work is evolving, and it is important to provide a supportive environment where they feel comfortable and valued.

Access

Access has become easier for many people in the area, with more frequent trips to larger cities like Zamora, Benemerito, and Comitan. This is due to the fact that they have more money to spend, thanks to their participation in the program. Even landless farmers are able to enter the program by making agreements with landowners. All participants receive their payments through the Bank of Well-Being, which has provided access to banking services to people who previously had none.

While some people have expressed a desire for more meat to be available in local shops, access to diverse food options will soon increase as their fruit trees begin to produce. Family members and friends also exchange products, which spreads the harvest throughout the year, ensuring a nutritious diet.

Since the program began, there has been an increase in the number of people selling goods in their shops, with more products and greater diversity. This has improved access to goods and services for everyone in the community. Moreover, access to technology has also improved, with many people now having access to phones, the internet, and television, which was not the case just five years ago. Overall, access has improved significantly thanks to the program and the opportunities it has created.

Production

The Sembrando Vida program has brought significant changes in the production habits of the communities. Farmers have started producing a wide range of crops, both perennial and annual, such as maize, beans, yams, banana, cacao, cardamom, coffee, lime, and other fruits. While part of the production is used for self-consumption, some farmers also sell a small portion of their produce, although they express the need for better market access to sell their products.

Farmers adjust their production strategy every year depending on the market prices. For example, when the maize price was low, many farmers shifted their focus to cattle farming. Some farmers even had palm oil plantations, but due to low prices in recent years, they abandoned them. However, they are proud of their first own harvest/products and love to see the results of their hard work.

The Sembrando Vida program is going to support community-led projects, such as the production of hibiscus wine, by helping them formalize their work. However, first, they want to have quantities of the products produced before making further steps. Currently, SADER is working on a form of register of all the trees and the amount they produce. They are taking care of the commercialization and making decisions.

As one farmer mentioned, diversity in production is essential to avoid losses due to pests or diseases. *"So, we need to be diverse, so that it does not cost the producer too much, if one died, it does not cost him too much to reforest,"* said one farmer. Another farmer expressed hope that by the end of the program, they will have much more production, so that they can survive by themselves without the payments.

Convivencia (social live)

The Sembrando Vida program has brought a significant change in the lives of people in rural areas of Mexico. Previously, the farmers felt left alone, and the government's focus was never on the countryside. However, with the implementation of this program, people feel seen by the president, and they are content with it. They appreciate the government's efforts in realizing the importance of farmers in society, especially during the COVID crisis and the current inflation.

Although people have knowledge about different governmental programs of the past, such as procampo, they have also witnessed their contradictions and negative effects. However, with Sembrando Vida, people have gradually changed their mindset from resistance to acceptance. Initially, many people were against the program and believed that they could do whatever they wanted. However, through various workshops and meetings, they have been given tools to work with, and the program has been structured gradually.

"The main bases were worked on. But little by little we were given the tools to work with and we focused on that. And now little by little we have been structuring the program, because it is a new program, a program that does not happen overnight." 12:50 ¶ 981 in Interview C9

In conclusion, Sembrando Vida has made significant progress, and people have started to benefit from the program. The program has provided them with a sense of belonging and ownership, which is essential for the sustainability of any development program. As one farmer said, *"It is a benefit for me. Because the production is going to be for you, because they are not going to make a profit, it is yours."* 18:30 ¶ 290 – 291 in Interview L4

3.2. What participants perceived as problematic or disadvantageous with SeVi

This chapter will focus on the first and second research questions, which aim to understand participants' perceptions of Problems or negative change associated with the program. Accordingly, this section will be titled "Problems or disadvantageous with SeVi," with a primary focus on the participants' views. However, at times, the perspectives of other actors will also be considered to provide additional context.

Table 5: Summary of codes summaries under final theoretical code

| Open code | Selective code | Theoretical code |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Selection of Plot | Knowledge gap | Problems or downsides with SeVi |
| Selection of tree varieties | | |
| Plantation of trees | | |
| Treatment of trees | | |
| Group work (more fights) | Conviviencia | |
| Sanctions and fallouts | | |
| Learning to work together | | |
| Harvest loss | Program design | |
| Deforestation | | |
| Finite program | | |
| Inflation and Covid | Macro economic conditions (living circumstances) | |
| Corruption | | |

Knowledge gap

Participants in the tree plantation program have faced various challenges in achieving the goals set by the government. Many of the plantations had problems, and participants needed to replant a lot. In Loma, many participants have not reached the benchmark of 60% trees planted, while in Chajul, a few participants with difficult plots struggle to reach the benchmark. Some participants have problems because of their field location, which may be close to a river, at the hillside, or close to a fountain. Others have problems with field soils that are very acidic, compacted, low fertility, or loamy. Additionally, some participants have problems with too much water entering through rain, logging, or flooding, or not having enough water in certain periods of the year because of soil composition.

Many participants also face problems with plagues like fungi and insects, and most of them lack knowledge about tree cultivation, such as pruning (adequate farming practices) and plague treatment.

Regarding the tree species to plant, some participants were reluctant to plant rambutan, which was a recommendation of the technician. They preferred to plant criollo, the normal one, the one they normally eat. However, the technicians recommended rambutan for commercialization. Many participants did not want to plant it because it cost 100 pesos (5\$) per plant. Therefore, the government created a nursery, so participants did not have to pay to rent it. (18:29 ¶ 281 – 288 in Interview L4) Overall, the tree plantation program has been beneficial, but participants have faced various challenges that need to be addressed for the program's success.

Convivencia (social live)

The program faces a variety of challenges in achieving its goals in Chajul, Mexico. One of the main challenges is the perception of the farmers who participate in the program. Field assistants and their assistants, called "Becarios," believe that farmers cause the program to delay because they are lazy, block group work, stick to their farming practices, and do not want to learn or change. Some farmers see group work as hindering and believe that they would be faster working alone.

Participants opinion about group work: "I do not know if it is obligatory, I do not know how we can name it there. Yes, because of groups they have us working there, even if we don't want to, we have to do it. Sometimes there are people who say that we cannot work among a lot of people, that some work less and others more, but no way, that is how they want it, that there is unity to work. Well, yes, there is... but here we go." 9:15 ¶ 143 in Interview L8

However, enthusiastic participants understand that it is their own responsibility to take the maximum out of this program to benefit themselves. They recognize that all the benefits are also for themselves.

The Greenhouse project failed in Chajul, with people arguing that they would prefer their seedlings at their own farm so that they could take better care of them. The technician considers this a failure of collaboration because they couldn't work together around the greenhouse project and find compromises on how to manage it.

In the beginning, the program elected a person responsible for organizing the selling and commercialization, but this person never took action. People cannot remember who was elected. Per learning group called CACs, they have elected people with different functions like treasurer, accountant, team leader, and assistant.

Responsible field assistants have different opinions about the participants. Some participants did not accept the pace of work Sembrando vida was expecting and got angry in the beginning.

Responsible field assistant: "They did not arrive and got angry, they were not used to it. They didn't accept the pace of work we were doing. (...) They did not want to pay cooperations, fees, fines. The same group also decided to remove him. Or there are people who were also very conflictive. That is the other part too. They are men who are bad leaders, who want to do what they want." (12:4 ¶ 29 in Interview C9)

Participants are also accused of not wanting to invest in their patrimony, land, plants, tools, or follow the program's requirements. However, early adapting participants have shown a positive attitude towards the program, with some of them starting to plant and clean before the program began.

Participants have different opinions about other participants. Some feel that not everyone is doing their part, and some are just collecting the money without working. However, others believe that the program is good and appreciate the support it provides.

Participant talking about her opinion about other participants: "From what we hear, many of them are planning to receive their five thousand pesos a month and not working. (...) We know this from the Becario who supervise us, who say, "no, such and such person has not done anything". (9:38 ¶ 600 – 604 in Interview L8)

Participants interaction with the program can be better understood when looking on the regions history with governmental development and support programs in the last 40 years. People would enter program for a short period of time receive the payments but not implement the measures requestes and slowly one after one they would leave the program saying they didn't like it. Another interviewee also stated that many different programs get announced but half of them doesn't even enrol, making people more and more suspicious when new program are presented.

Becarios description of program enrolment: *"With the, you know, at the beginning there were like...like no, I don't know if they had not understood the program well or they were a little reluctant, because there had never been a program like this before. All the programs that were there before, they just come and give you and you do what you want with what they gave you. And nobody cared about what you did. But with this one it's different because they are supporting you and asking you to do... [16:25] A: They control you.[16:27] B: In that, there was a little bit of disagreement, but now everything is... it's like everyone understood what's what."* (8:15 ¶ 67 – 69 in Interview L7)

In conclusion, the program faces various challenges, including resistance from some participants to change and group work, lack of collaboration, and inconsistent participation. However, some participants have shown a positive attitude towards the program and are willing to work hard to improve their farming practices and reap the benefits. The program could benefit from addressing the concerns of the resistant participants, finding ways to improve collaboration, and providing more consistent support and guidance to all participants.

Program design

The program in question was initiated around 3 years ago with the promise that it would end with the current president's term. However, people have become accustomed to receiving payments from the program and are now anxious about how they will survive without them.

The program's objective is for the income generated by the harvested products, to replace the payments. However, some participants have reported instances of corruption. In Loma, for example, the field advisor misused fertilizer by storing it for over a year in the biofabrice, causing it to corrode and become unusable. In Chajul, the field advisor stole money for seeds and provided the community with cinnamon seeds that would not germinate. These cases were reported to the appropriate authorities, and the field assistance was replaced.

Participants in the program were required to clear the "Acahual" fields, which are natural succession fields that follow a rotational use after Milpa plantation. Some people found it strange that they had to cut down large trees to enter the program when they were supposed to be planting trees. However, this was a mandate of the program's rules.

In Loma the technician developed a planting strategy with others in the region, giving farmers two choices of plantation design they could choose from. One would focus on the plantation of Rambutan fruit trees and the other on Guyana fruit trees with different annual crops underneath. In so fare farmer didn't had a free choice after the tree species in Loma. Some farmers had and still have many problems with installing their plantation so that technicians opened up a little giving them the opportunity to make more diverse plantations.

In Chajul people had to select around 5 main fruit trees species which they would annotated in the beginning with the technician and couldn't change them afterwards. Only in severe case of tree growth failure the technicians would allow a change of tree species

Despite some challenges and instances of corruption, the program aimed to promote sustainable agriculture and create a viable source of income for participants. The transition away from payments may be difficult for some, but the program's long-term goals remain focused on sustainability and community development.

Marco economic conditions

Living in a rural area can be challenging, especially when the economy is affected by inflation, making investments more expensive and everyday expenses harder to afford. This is the reality for participants of the Sembrando Vida program who have become accustomed to payments and are now worrying about how to live without them. The program was always intended to end with the presidency of the current president, which means people will need to survive on their own, but currently, most participants don't have access to a market. Some don't have cars, only motorcycles, which can't transport the harvest, while others can't afford the increasing gasoline prices, making it not feasible anymore to transport the harvest to the markets. This leads to a lot of the current production getting wasted and rotting on the fields.

Some are considering converting the Sembrando Vida plot back into pasture after the program if their products don't sell. However, the products sold in shops are already too expensive, forcing people to buy long-life dry goods only once a month when it's payday and they can get them cheaper in the next bigger city. Fresh products are also too expensive and too little, leading to many complaints. People would like to have more meat offered in the shops to complement their diets.

Despite the challenges, many participants remain optimistic and believe in the importance of being self-sufficient. As one participant stated in an interview : *"Yes, that it remains firm for the future, not to be tied to the fact that they give us support, that they give us what they have to give us and now, yes, we work to maintain ourselves. There are many options, the thing is to be willing. Because there are also jobs, but they are poorly paid, because most of the jobs you can't get enough to pay for the fare and food from wherever you are, because here, there are none, only agriculture, and government work, only in Marqués de Comillas and it is very poorly paid, maybe for young people, but for families like us, it would not be enough, it is very little, they don't pay more for having more studies. The young people get married and stay here, but those of us who are used to living here, it is more comfortable, in the city it is difficult, and if you do not work, you do not eat and here, if you want to work and if not, you do not, but you eat well, just enough and that is fine, we do not pay water, or anything, but you have to have something to survive and not enjoy."* (21:51 ¶ 138 in Interview C6)

3.3. What the relevant actors think and say about each other

This chapter represents a new focus in the research, which emerged during the GTM analysis and is closely related to the core category of participation (see section 3.5). Specifically, the focus of this chapter will be on the "Relations Between Relevant Actors." In addition to the participants, this research included other actors associated with the program, and this section will showcase their perspectives on each other.

Table 6: Development of codes summaries under final theoretical code

| Interaction between relevant actors | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Open code | Selective code | Theoretical code |
| Relation Technico-farmer | Field assistant | Relations between relevant actors |
| Work activities | | |
| Responsibilities (care) | | |
| Communication (interaction) | | |
| Dependency (power imbalance) | | |
| Conflicts | | |
| Irregularities | | |
| qualifications | | |
| Relation Becario-Tecnico | | |
| Relation Becario-farmer | | |
| Experienced | Becarios | |
| Development opportunity | | |
| Work activities | | |
| Organization in SeVi | | |
| Two different types of participants | Farmers (Participants) | |
| lazy | | |

What people think about the field assistants

Field assistants play a crucial role in agricultural development programs, as they are responsible for engaging with farmers, monitoring their progress, and ensuring that they comply with the program's rules and regulations. One of the challenges that field assistants face is the different levels of participation and engagement from farmers, which they categorize into two groups: early adopters and enthusiasts, and compliers who only do the minimum required to stay in the program.

Despite the power imbalance in their relationship with farmers, as field assistants have the power to remove participants from the program, they cultivate a relationship based on mutual respect. Farmers are not afraid of field assistants, and they are open to discussing their opinions and ideas.

In the beginning, field assistants had to be very strict in enforcing program rules and educating farmers on how to work with the program. However, they are also empathetic towards farmers' situations and are tolerant of their reactions. Field assistants describe their responsibilities as including holding regular meetings to update farmers about the program, visiting farmers on their fields, giving recommendations, answering requests, documenting, and meeting with other field assistants in the region.

One participant in the agricultural development program described the work of social technicians as including workshops on how to use the nursery, how to save money, and other similar topics. However, they have not received any workshops recently, but they have been promised more in the future.

Field assistants are also thankful for the support of Becarios, who play a crucial role in providing additional resources and assistance. However, some farmers have expressed critiques related to technicians and how they enrolled in the program. For example, some farmers did not believe that there would be control of the work they were supposed to do because they thought it would be similar to former programs.

Overall, the work of field assistants is critical to the success of agricultural development programs. They must navigate the different levels of participation and engagement from farmers, while also enforcing program rules and regulations. Despite facing challenges, field assistants are committed to improving farmers' lives and ensuring the success of the agricultural development programs.

What they say and think about the Becarios

The "Becarios" of Sembrando Vida are an integral part of the program and play a crucial role in facilitating the success of the project. They work in teams of two to three and are responsible for one CAC. The work is generally described as easy but time-consuming, and not physically demanding. Becarios are happy with the work they get in their home village and are paid well. Most of them get a one-year contract, and after that, they can get an extension for another year if they work well. They use the payment to support their families and to start their own projects or to satisfy their personal needs.

Before the program, most of them didn't have work, but all of them finished at least high school, which was required for them to enter as Becarios. They are responsible for various tasks, such as documentation of farmers' progress, live on the fields with GPS, documenting natural disasters affecting farmers' plantations, protocolling and organizing meetings with their groups, communication between Technicians and farmers, knowledge transfer, and assistance tasks. Some mention having learned how to use a computer, doing documentation work and organising and leading meeting as new skills they obtained with their work in Sembrando vida.

Becarios work under the supervision of Field Assistants, and the relationship is hierarchical but friendly. The Field Assistant gives them tasks, and they make it. The Field Assistant also trains them in their tasks. They are sometimes contacted on very short notice for announcing a meeting the next day, and they would prefer having more time. The female Becarios are a little bit more critical towards the participants because they have more issues with the males, with the farmers accusing them of working incorrectly, mixing things up, being irresponsible in their work, etc.

Most Becarios have good relations with farmers, but some of them described the farmers as lazy or unable to compromise, always causing discussions. Farmers sometimes accuse the Becarios of "snitching" or being too strict, they also don't like it if the Becarios visit their fields and critique their work because it hasn't been done correctly, but in reality, both of them are just trying to do the work the best they can. People still need to get used to this controlling component of the program because they are not used to this form of interaction.

There was one case in which a Becaria was thrown out because she was poorly organized, and some of the others were suspended because they weren't working responsibly, coming later, not inviting to the meeting, etc. Becarios receive the same payments as the farmers and are aware of their responsibility to work correctly and support the Field Assistant. They don't answer questions from farmers because most of the time, they don't have that specific knowledge, but they mandate questions and information between farmers and Field Assistants as it is one of their tasks.

According to an interview, the Becarios work very well, and people are very relaxed with them. However, sometimes farmers don't take the Becarios seriously because they are people from the same village and start to say things in a playful way. But when the Technicians are present, the Becarios are taken more seriously because they are outsiders and intermediaries (21:27 ¶ 92 – 97 in Interview C6).

Overall, the Becarios play a critical role in the success of Sembrando Vida and are appreciated for their work.

What they say and think about the farmers

The Sembrando Vida program has been implemented in various regions, and the farmers participating in the program have differing opinions about it. In Loma, the farmers have expressed their annoyance and confusion about the technical requirements related to the amount and species of trees required for the program. The requirements have changed several times, causing mistrust and reluctance towards the program. The farmers would have preferred less confusion and more consistency in the program's technical requirements. Additionally, the spontaneous announcements of meetings and changes in deadlines for activities have caused concern and frustration for the participants.

While most farmers are aware of the technicians' power over them, they don't seem to be worried or afraid. However, they feel that their local knowledge about planting seasons and tree species has not been taken into account. In the beginning, they were forced to comply with activities like planting trees in the dry season, despite knowing that the trees would dry out and not survive. Furthermore participants dislike the spontaneous announcements of meetings, which they have to attend in order to stay in the program. Also especially in Loma they are worried and annoyed about the spontaneous changes of deadlines for certain activities they have to comply with.

Some farmers have described their relationship with the technician as conflict-ridden and too strict. They feel that the technician does not consider their opinions and ideas, which leads to frustration and resentment. Furthermore, the farmers complain about working in groups as they believe they are faster working alone and do not see the added value of working in groups, only the problems it causes.

In conclusion, the farmers participating in the Sembrando Vida program have expressed their concerns about the technical requirements, the spontaneous announcements of meetings, and changes in deadlines for activities. They feel that their local knowledge is not being taken into account, and some have a conflicted relationship with the technician. The farmers are not against the program, but they would like more consistency and would like to see their suggestions being taken into account seriously.

Social component of Program (aims at rural development and poverty alleviation)

As the program is not only an agricultural development program but a program aiming to rebuild rural communities and their social tissue, which the program administration view as gotten lost in the past, the program has a lot social components. In the beginning when the villages were founded (around 1970-80s) people would help each other a lot and there would be more group activities, lately people observed that everyone is more and more working for themselves or only supporting within their family. Especially the field assistance sees this topic as in a learning process where they need to continuously work on, changing the habits the villages had developed in the past years.

To achieve the program's social goals, people needed to learn to work in groups again and find compromises. They also needed to learn how to interact with the program, because they were used to short term agricultural support programmes. This means they needed to learn to comply with the rules, that results are checked and that not compliment can end in sanctions or fallout. Moreover, the program aims to teach people about saving. Participants received 4500 pesos, and 500 pesos were saved every month for three years in a special fund. In autumn 2022, they received the 17,000 pesos, and they were

asked to invest in a productive project that they organized and decided upon as a group. They could choose to build a chicken or swine stall, install Wi-Fi, or purchase tools, among other things. The idea was to do something together that would last for the future and make them more self-sufficient.

The program also emphasizes the importance of teamwork and finding a way to get access to the market together. This will require collaboration, communication, and compromise. The program administration recognizes that social development is a long-term process, and they are committed to supporting rural communities in rebuilding their social tissue. By promoting teamwork, teaching people about saving, and encouraging productive projects that benefit the community, the program aims to create a more vibrant and sustainable rural community for the future.

3.4. Future of Sembrando Vida

This section will address the third research question, which seeks to understand participants' perceptions of the future with Sembrando Vida. The theoretical code that emerged from the analysis indicates that the overall finding of this section is an "Future with Sembrando Vida."

Table 7: Showing development of codes summaries under final theoretical code

| Future with Sembrando Vida | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Open code | Selective code | Theoretical code |
| Contact other ejidos | Village (ejido) responsibilities | Future with Sembrando Vida |
| Organise internal village market | | |
| Lack of initiative (leader) | | |
| Offer access to market | Governmental responsibilities | |
| Offer training/capacity building for organising village initiatives | | |
| Provide advisor | | |
| Find companies (buyers) | | |
| Converting back to cattle range | Insecurities /concerns | |
| Stealing of harvest | | |
| Save transport | | |
| Long distances | | |
| Commercialisation | | |
| Price fluctuations | | |
| Cojotes | | |
| Profitability (fair price) | | |
| Post harvest treatment | Ideas | |
| Storage | | |
| Processing | | |
| Collection centre (packing station) | | |
| cooperative | | |
| Waits for initiative of villages | Technicians view | |
| Sufficient production volume | | |
| Waits for instructions | | |

Responsibilities

The farmers in the program have a variety of visions related to their future with the program. Most participants see the responsibility for organizing the future of commercialization as lying with the government, specifically with SADER (secretariat for agriculture and rural development), the responsible institute. Only a few farmers can imagine that a cooperative could work, citing people's tendencies to fight. Some believe that a village-based initiative is needed but that they are missing a leader. Currently, they are led by the field assistant who helps and guides them with everything related to the program. They also consider collaborating with other villages for commercialization.

Some farmers would like to have a market hall in the village where everyone could sell their products. The most important thing for them is that someone takes care of the harvested products or makes the commercialisation as easy as possible. Farmers don't have a lot more (time) capacities besides producing the primary products to also take care of the marketing etc. They are willing to produce other kinds of products as well. They cite examples of the past where they collaborated to produce large amounts of chillis, but the village-initiated program failed because prices changed and they were not sufficiently legally organized, meaning that they didn't have contracts with retailers. They also collaborated to export mahogany trees to different regions in Mexico, but this project failed because they had to pay illegal fines to cartels in order to pass through the streets.

Despite these challenges, the farmers believe that the program has benefited them. As one farmer said in an interview, "*The day the program ends, we know that it will not be for the government, it will be for us because it is on our land and that is a benefit, isn't it? Because, although we no longer receive the support, rambutan is a fruit that is very commercialized, they look for it and there are states where there is none and when they transport it from here to other places, it is more expensive*" (7:19 ¶ 251 in Interview L3).

However, the farmers acknowledge that they need an advisor who can give them recommendations on legal questions and the organization of commercialization. They are hopeful that they can work together and collaborate with other villages to create a sustainable future for their communities.

Insecurities related to future with Sembrando Vida

The Sembrando Vida program has brought hope and opportunities for many farmers in Mexico, but there are also insecurities about its future success. Some participants are concerned about the mixed outlook for the program and see the possibility of converting their plots back to pasture. As one farmer stated, "*Well, each one will know if he is producing what he sowed and if not, he will make it a pasture again.*" (6:47 ¶ 1180 in Interview L2)

For these farmers, the key element to measure the success of the program is a fair price for their products. They worry that the coyotes, who buy maize and beans very cheaply directly from farmers, will also take over their fruit production. There are some cases of Coyotes (intermediaries) buying pineapple from the neighbouring villages. Although they have to sell to the coyotes as they are the easiest option available to them, they do not like them as they buy at very low prices. They accuse the coyotes frequently of grabbing all the benefits, by selling their products to high prices at the markets. The coyotes (intermediary) and farmers are currently depending strongly on each other. The new fruit products are more sensitive than maize and beans, which means that they need to be brought to the market faster and transported differently to avoid high losses.

In the past, the safe transport of products has been an obstacle, and it is essential to ensure that transports are not charged fines by cartels. Some farmers do not believe that the people will be capable of organizing themselves, which is necessary for successful commercialization.

Finally, if there is no commercialization, people do not see the value in their work, and they will stop producing. This has happened before in other projects and initiatives, where people only take care of the crops that have monetary value for them and change their production strategy yearly. The Sembrando Vida program needs to ensure fair prices, safe and efficient transport, and help farmers organize themselves to secure a successful future.

Ideas for the future with Sembrando Vida

The participants of Sembrando Vida have many ideas for the future of their program. Some suggest post-harvest processing, such as making juice from their produce. Others believe that it is crucial to secure contracts with large supermarket retailers or export their products to regions where there is no local production. To achieve this, many farmers suggest building a packaging station in their villages, where sensitive products can be packed and loaded onto trucks.

The participants acknowledge the need for training and capacity building to organize a cooperative or company successfully. They desire advisors who can guide them on how to improve their business skills. Additionally, they propose that the government-owned agricultural shop, LICONSA, should expand its activities to include buying the new products at fair prices.

The price of their produce is also a significant concern for the farmers, as they need to ensure that it is economically viable to continue their work. Some participants want buyers to come directly to their villages, as it is the easiest for them. Sembrando vida organised a flea market in Tuxtla were producers could present their products and try to get contract with retailers. A neighbouring village made a contract about pineapple production with wallmarket but the two villages under investigation weren't in production yet so they didn't participated in the flea market.

One farmer suggested, *"We have to look in the market to sell it or as we are, I would say, we are waiting for them to come and buy them already, to let us know, the same program will come, it will take them to us and then we... it is easier because... well, they will come here and here we just have to ship them and they will leave. And if not, it is more difficult."* 11:48 ¶ 749 in Interview L1

The participants of Sembrando Vida are aware of the potential challenges they may face in the future, but they are determined to make their program a success. With their innovative ideas and desire to improve their skills and resources, they are laying the foundation for a better tomorrow.

Field assistant view on the future with Sembrando Vida

The field assistants of Sembrando Vida have an important role in the success of the program. They are the ones who provide valuable information about the trees and crops being grown in the villages. They also play a crucial role in the collection of data related to the amount of products produced. However, when it comes to commercialization, the field assistants admit that they lack knowledge about the process.

Field assistants believe that it is important to have enough production volume before they start the commercialization process. They have handed information about the amount and species of trees to

SADER and await further instructions from the organization. They also stress the importance of waiting for more farmers to come into production before initiating commercialization. They leave the responsibility of initiating commercialization with SADER and are waiting for more information from the organization in the coming years.

Field assistants also believe that the villagers' initiatives are crucial to the success of Sembrando Vida. They are waiting for the villagers to come up with ideas that can be developed further. The lack of knowledge about commercialization and getting contracts with supermarkets means that they can only rely on the information and resources provided by SADER.

In addition, field assistants note that there is Sembrando vida money available that can be used to develop ideas in the villages. However, they stress that the villagers need to come up with ideas and initiatives that can be developed further before the money can be utilized.

In conclusion, the field assistants of Sembrando Vida are waiting for the villagers' initiatives and are relying on SADER to provide them with information and resources on commercialization. They believe that it is important to wait for more farmers to come into production before initiating commercialization and stress the importance of having enough production volume. They are also ready to utilize the available funds to develop the villagers' ideas and initiatives for the program's success.

3.5. The substantive grounded theory

The theoretical framework, known as substantive grounded theory, consists of four fundamental codes: success and benefits, problems and disadvantages, the interaction between the program and participants, and thoughts regarding the future with Sembrando Vida. Through the utilization of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) during the final phase of analysis, the core category of "Participation" emerged as the connecting thread among these theoretical codes. Subsequently, this core category was integrated into the final substantive theory. The resulting theory provides a generalized explanation of the observed phenomena, specifically highlighting that the success of Sembrando Vida depends on its design and the form of participation employed.

Although I briefly addressed the development of the final theory in the method section (2.3: Aspects related to data analysis using constant comparative analysis), I will now provide a more comprehensive account of how the final substantive theory was constructed (1). This account will elucidate the proposed theory and outline my role in its construction (2). Finally, in the discussion chapter (3), the suggested theory will be rigorously tested in terms of its explanatory power, plausibility, and functionality during the final analytical stage .

Development of the substantive Theory

Various methods were employed during this analytical stage to ensure the development of a theory with robust explanatory power for the generated data. A crucial step at this stage involved establishing relationships between the theoretical codes and comprehending their interconnections. It also aimed to identify a core category that could encompass and relate to all the theoretical codes, as well as the data. Not every substantive theory necessitates the development of a core category. As emphasized by Urquhart (2017e) building relations at this stage is essential:

"Until we have related our categories, our thinking is not done. It is obvious, then, that the theoretical coding stage is as much about the relationships between categories as it is about the categories themselves. It is when we theorise about the data. I cannot stress enough how important relating the categories is. Without thinking about relationships, we cannot claim to be building theory."

The process of theorizing in GTM involves more than just establishing connections between codes; it is an inherent discursive process that entails continually testing the theoretical codes and their interrelations, assessing their sustainability, and possibly reorganizing them. This process involves posing questions to the data, categorizing, and conceptualizing through trial and error. The suggested theory must withstand scrutiny from various perspectives and pass rigorous tests, involving revisiting interviews, examining coding, and consulting memos and relevant literature.

Urquhart highlights the need for theoretical codes and their relationships to earn their place in the analysis, just like any other code, as substantive patterns begin to emerge. His work demonstrates that theory building requires both concepts and relationships, which can be borrowed from existing theories within the discipline as well as from other qualitative analysis methodologies. The richness of these codes lies in the possibilities they offer, as they abstractly illustrate how elements of theories relate to each other. However, it is crucial to remember that the data should not be forced into a predetermined path, and researchers must generate their own substantive theory. Theoretical codes are often researcher-generated rather than pre-existing, and imposing a theoretical code on the data would be equivalent to imposing a specific path on the theory (Urquhart, 2017a).

The process of theorizing is facilitated by several methods, including theoretical memoing, diagramming, peer debriefing, and focused literature reviews (final literature review). Engaging in discussions with fellow students helped me reflect on factors that influenced the final theory and my own role in its development. There were instances where fellow students did not immediately grasp the emerging theory, even after a careful explanation. This prompted me to critically examine issues of conceptualization and justification. It may also pertain to how I utilized theoretical codes to establish their relationship with the core category. Here, theoretical sensitivity played a role in drawing inspiration from existing theories while ensuring that theoretical codes were not imposed on the data. This process was accompanied by a focused literature review to evaluate the sustainability and support of relational claims in other research.

The use of theoretical memoing served not only to refine the definition of categories and their relationships but also to explore relevant bodies of theory or literature that could inform the emerging theory. In essence, theoretical memos are flexible tools that support theorizing in various ways and can even include diagrams. I developed multiple versions of such diagrams, building upon one another through testing and questioning. These diagrams compel us to consider the relationships between categories not merely as static textual concepts but as conceptual objects that contribute to building a theory.

The core category can be perceived as a theoretical lens, which, unlike a classic natural science approach where the theoretical lens is clarified at the outset, emerges as a means of reading and interpreting the results in this GTM study. The theoretical lens results from the iterative process of testing, redefining, and theorizing that characterizes the GTM analysis. The suggested substantive theory proved to be the most suitable theoretical lens for explaining the results.

The development of this theoretical lens is influenced by the possibilities, limitations, and interpretations I envisioned. It is crucial to acknowledge the influence of the education received at WUR, the knowledge acquired, and the perspectives introduced.

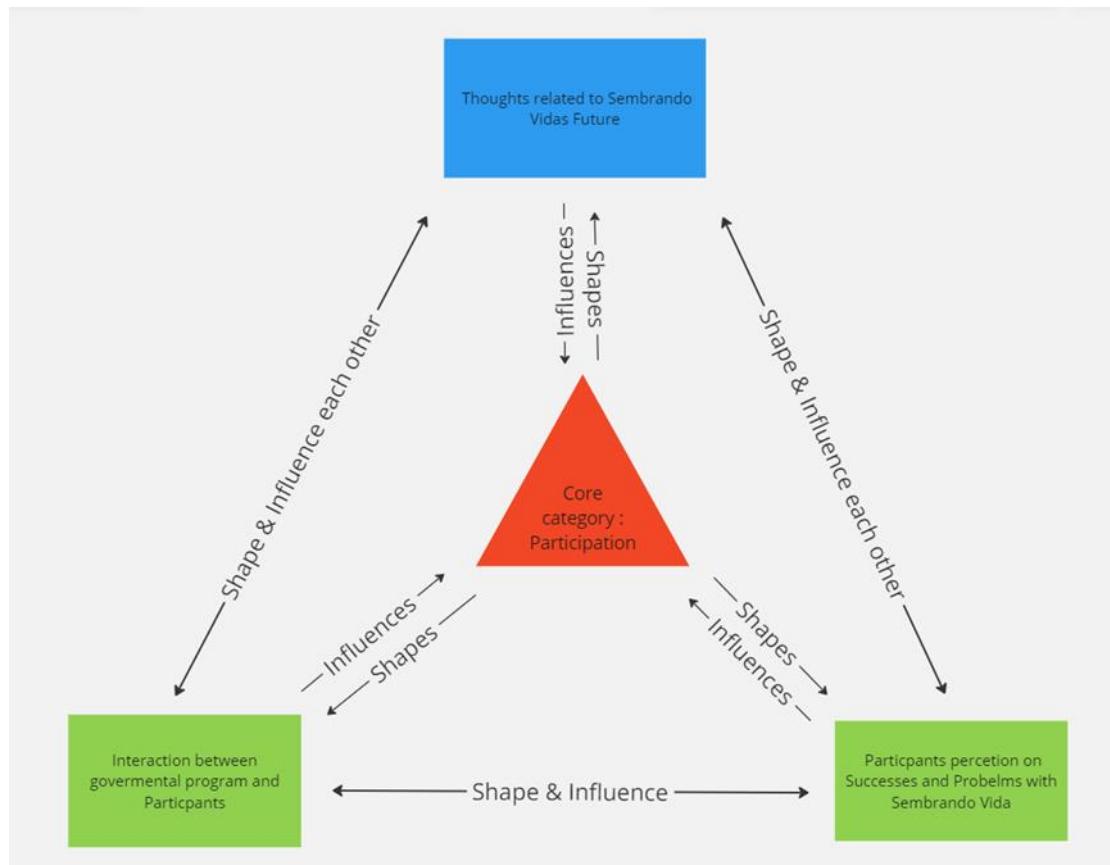


Figure 7: Visualization of the substantiative theory

The substantiative theory explained

I will now elucidate the substantiative theory, elucidating the interconnections between the core category and the theoretical codes, as well as the implications of their relationships. The rectangles in the diagram represent the theoretical codes, with the green-colored ones signifying results related to the past implementation process of the program Sembrando Vida until the data collection, and the blue-colored one representing future results. In the center of these three rectangles lies the core category, depicted as a triangular shape, with each side representing one theoretical code. Since the core category encompasses all time periods—past, present, and future—it is assigned a new color, in this case, red. I have named the core category "participation," but as you will see in the following definition and discussion, this concept also encompasses related topics such as participatory approach and participatory methods. The theoretical codes are interconnected with double-sided arrows, and I have defined their relationship as "shaping and influencing each other," taking into account their interlinked nature. While each code is clearly defined and distinct, resulting from the analysis, in reality, each of them has multiple links where they influence, shape, limit, and impact one another. For example, the way in which the program interacts with the participants shapes their thoughts about the future with the program, while their expectations, imaginations, dreams, and fears about their future with the program influence how they interact with it today.

The core category of participation naturally emerged from the final analysis, not only because the program itself (its design) aimed to incorporate participation more than previous Mexican development programs but also because it is a prominent topic in the development sector for evaluating and analyzing development programs and their design (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). As participation is inherent in the program design, it "shapes" the results under the theoretical codes. However, it is important to note that each case is shaped differently, with different limitations and opportunities. What occurred in the studied villages may not necessarily be replicated in another village. Furthermore, participants react to these shaping forces and influence the form, manner, type, and style of participation in their specific cases. This highlights the highly dynamic nature of the relationships between the categories and the core category. To provide a concrete example, consider the different tree planting approaches in the two studied villages—one focused solely on productive aims with the Rambutan fruit, while the other also emphasized self-subsistence with multiple tree species. This decision was made without considering the participants' opinions, and it shaped how people would subsequently interact with the program and with each other. The chosen form of participation, in turn, influences participants' willingness to further engage with the program and their manner of interaction with it and with others. All the relationships described in the substantive theory are circular, forming a stable system in which topics are constantly in motion within this closed cycle, mutually shaping and influencing one another, resulting in actions and counteractions.

After explaining the overall substantive theory, I will now provide a brief definition of the core category "participation" and discuss its implications. I will also employ related terminologies, namely "participatory approach" and "participatory methods," to ensure a shared understanding of the concepts.

1. **Participation (concept):** Participation refers to the act of individuals or groups being involved in decision-making, problem-solving, or activities that affect them. It recognizes the importance of including diverse perspectives, promoting inclusivity, and empowering stakeholders to contribute to the process. Participation can take place in various settings, such as community development projects, organizational decision-making, or political processes.⁴
2. **Participatory Methods:** Participatory methods are specific techniques or tools used to facilitate participation. These methods provide structured approaches to engage individuals or groups and ensure their active involvement. Participatory methods can include activities like workshops, focus groups, surveys, brainstorming sessions, participatory mapping, and other interactive processes. These methods are designed to encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the co-creation of solutions.
3. **Participatory Approach:** The participatory approach is a broader framework that guides the overall philosophy and principles behind engaging stakeholders. It emphasizes a more inclusive and democratic decision-making process. The participatory approach involves valuing local knowledge, building capacity within communities, fostering empowerment, and creating opportunities for meaningful participation. It goes beyond simply using participatory methods and emphasizes a shift in power dynamics towards shared decision-making.

⁴https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000399931000095X?casa_token=jOpJH6Snt9EAAAAA:yiWzd26Clm_GOJvW55dRy55NUt1CwDz1UV2HOZUN6s_iMoCvH3wWkLyb8GADtQodMlj-3Hii0g#sec12

In summary, participation refers to involvement, participatory methods are specific techniques used to facilitate participation, and the participatory approach is a broader framework that guides the overall philosophy and principles behind engaging stakeholders. While there are similarities between them, the participatory approach encompasses a more comprehensive and transformative perspective.

4. Discussion

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to assess the impact of Sembrando Vida on rural communities through analyzing and evaluating different actors' perceptions of the program identified relevant topics themselves. In doing so, I gained an understanding of how these actors interacted with each other and identified various issues related to the program's uncertain future. The theory, presented above, can be regarded as a conjecture, a proposition, and a set of hypotheses aimed at examining the interconnectedness of results. In the subsequent discussion, I will involve you in the final stage of analysis (involving data analysis and theory development) where I examined the core category of participation to determine its adequacy in supporting the case. I will elucidate its relationship with other theoretical constructs and assess its explanatory capacity. Following a detailed examination of the case, the second part of the discussion will shift focus to a broader view of the substantive theory within the context of literature pertaining to Sembrando vida. I will assess how my study contributes novel nuances and identify areas of overlap with existing literature.

Participation emerged as the core category of my analysis, and while there are several participatory approaches that rural development programs can utilize, they are generally more prevalent in bottom-up initiated programs than in top-down ones. Nonetheless, Sembrando Vida's designers attempted to blend the two approaches, and whether or not they succeeded is up for interpretation. However, I will demonstrate how they sought to harmonize these opposing approaches, where more public participation would have been vital, and where they did well.

4.2. Exclusion of public from program design

Sembrando Vida was developed by the Mexican government, specifically by the Secretariat of Social Welfare and the National Forestry Commission with contributions from other government agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER). Sembrando Vida was already part of the President's election campaign, and it is known from confidential conversations that supporters of the President, AMLO, began searching for professionals who could develop, design, and implement the program even before the campaign had concluded. This indicates the pressure under which the program was developed, following a tight timeline bound to the presidency.

After AMLO officially won the election in December 2018, the program began enrolling participants only about six months later in the first communities (Egelhoff, 2021). Although some efforts were made to incorporate participatory approaches in the program's design, such as consulting with local communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it is difficult to ascertain the exact process by which the program's design took place, given the constraints of time. Furthermore, mistrust in the participating communities, which are often still perceived as corrupt and backward by urban residents, may have limited participation in the program's design. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of participatory methods and recognize that they are not a panacea for all the issues encountered with Sembrando Vida.

Critics have argued that the program's design did not sufficiently take into account the needs and priorities of local communities and did not provide them with adequate opportunities to participate meaningfully in the program's design (unknown, 2022). Instead, the program was designed to address

specific government priorities related to reforestation, rural development, and poverty alleviation. The political importance of Sembrando Vida for the President of Mexico may have influenced the program's design and implementation. When a program is highly politicized and closely associated with a particular political leader or party, there is a risk that the program's design may prioritize political goals over development objectives or community needs.

Due to the political significance of Sembrando Vida for the President, it was crucial to control the program's outputs. The program's objectives were already evident since its initial announcement, addressing the needs of rural Mexico, which has been long neglected by former presidents who focused solely on urban development. An extensive analysis could be conducted on how Sembrando Vida is designed specifically to support the clientelism promoted by AMLO, but that's not the aim of this discussion only so much: It worked ! Many of my interviewees voted for him, indicating that they finally felt heard again by politics, and that Sembrando Vida fulfilled the promises made by AMLO. In contrast, previous presidents only spoke of supporting rural farmers, but the promised assistance never materialized, resulting in increased mistrust and disinterest in the government.

Returning to the importance of producing success with this initiated government program, it is logical that the program's design was developed with little participation. The program's objectives were already identified from the start, emphasizing the need to aid rural Mexico's development and alleviate a significant portion of the population's poverty by supporting agroforestry and strengthening rural communities. By promoting this notion of rural development, AMLO and his team follow the concept that there is only one path of development, which is symptomatic of modernization theory. While I will not elaborate extensively on this finding, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the program's design, where problems are identified and solutions are proposed, inherently embraces the idea of (neoliberal) modernization as the means to save rural Mexico. There are numerous examples in Mexico's history where policy changes and development programs following neoliberalization and modernization in the 1990s weakened rural communities and their land tenure systems, making Mexico more dependent and causing unrest in rural communities, as exemplified by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas.

Many Zapatista communities refused to participate in the program because they did not appreciate the government's attempts to interfere with their community organization. Although rural communities may support the idea of modernization theory, the development of a national rural development program that follows this approach can be viewed as rather critical, ignoring alternative paths for the future that participating communities may have proposed. It is probable that a combination of factors influenced the Mexican government's decision not to fully incorporate participatory methods in the design, such as limited resources or a lack of capacity or expertise in participatory approaches among government officials.

It is worth noting that the use of participatory methods in development programs can be challenging, requiring a certain level of commitment, resources, and expertise to be effective. Additionally, it may necessitate a shift in power dynamics, which can be difficult for those in positions of authority to navigate. One significant factor is the program's design, developed by government officials and experts without substantial input from local communities.

In the following section, I will demonstrate how the exclusion of participants in the program's design resulted in several problems that could have been prevented at an early stage. Early inclusion of

participatory approaches would have been the most cost-effective and efficient method in producing favorable outputs and achieving a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

4.3. Mistakes in program design that caused problems with Sembrando vida

How the program design ended up causing deforestation

In relation to the research findings, participants expressed various concerns that they perceived as problematic, many of which were associated with insufficient knowledge on the part of both the participants and the field assistants. The participants themselves selected plots for the Sembrando Vida program based on specific criteria, such as pasture, forestry succession, and fallows would be eligible for application. It was also required that the selected plots were fully cleared to be eligible for the program. However, a research team discovered that this criterion was one of the primary reasons for the deforestation caused by the implementation of Sembrando Vida (Warman et al., 2021).

Some of the interviewees were aware of the conflicting positions between Sembrando Vida, which is promoted as a reforestation program, and the need to cut down old-growth trees on their plots to qualify for the program. Engaging with participating communities would have revealed that this requirement weakened the overall credibility of Sembrando Vida, especially in the eyes of those who had to clear their land. It appeared to them that this was just another top-down agricultural development program that lacked an understanding of the realities on the ground. Due to previous experiences with similar programs, they were largely dismissive of this requirement.

Although many participants expressed pride in their efforts to reforest their plantations, which has been a hot topic in the last few decades with the government urging communities to halt deforestation and increase reforestation, it became apparent that reforestation was only secondary to the program's primary focus on productivity and development. The program administration admitted that they lacked indicators to measure the impact of the program on reforestation (Carabana, 2021). Sembrando Vida was primarily a development-focused program and only later included reforestation as a topic due to the growing pressure from the international community, as the first cases of deforestation were documented in Mexico (Pulse News Mexico Staff, 2021).

The Sembrando Vida program did not provide recommendations on the type of plots that would be most suitable for agroforestry systems, leaving the participants and technicians to make uninformed choices and guesses about the best fit for their respective plots. As a result, some participants experienced delays in the growth of their plantations e.g. because of flooding, inundations, compacted or acidic soils that limited the growth of tree seedlings. Additionally, participants were instructed to plant non-native timber trees for economic reasons, and the selection of productive fruit trees was limited to a pre-selected list deemed appropriate by the field assistant. Early engagement with agroforestry experts and the local communities would have revealed the dissatisfaction of the local participants with these choices.

It is worth noting that at least one of the field assistants, who was an expert in forestry management, supported the participants in selecting appropriate fruit tree crops and did not require them to plant non-native tree varieties. However, this field technician belonged to a different regional team where the concept of production was primarily for self-sufficiency, and only secondarily for the market. These strategic decisions were made by the regional team of field assistants without community engagement, indicating that the program operates with a top-down approach at the local level.

The role of field technicians: Between top down and bottom up approaches

In the village of Loma Bonita, the regional team of field technicians focused on commercializable fruit crops and enforced the planting of rambutan trees for all participants, resulting in varying outcomes. This demonstrates that, in addition to the lack of knowledge, the role of the field assistant is critical in determining the success or failure of the program. The field assistant holds power over the participants and becarios, with the ability to remove individuals from the program without proper investigation. Furthermore, the power dynamics between program officials and local communities operate through a hierarchical structure, where field assistants and becarios oversee the work of participants, potentially creating power imbalances and limiting participant input in decision-making processes.

Several newspaper articles have reported on the relationship between field assistants and participants, documenting cases of inadmissible kickouts from the program and instances of power abuse by field assistants, with little investigation from the program administration (Arista et al., 2021; Ortega, 2021). By placing the power of participating communities solely in the hands of field assistants and failing to establish a reliable system for documenting and submitting complaints, the program's administration and design disadvantages participants and discourages honest engagement. Many participants may be hesitant to speak up against program officials for fear of expulsion (Marquez, n.d.).

The program's design aimed to incorporate participatory approaches by assigning one technician to handle agroforestry-related topics and the other to handle social or community-related topics. The program also developed criteria for selecting suitable candidates, requiring both technicians to have higher qualifications in their respective fields and experience working with rural communities. However, field technicians admitted in interviews that it was challenging for them to find their role as program representatives in the community, and they did not receive additional training despite program recommendations to do so (Egelhoff, 2021).

According to my interviews, participants were informed about and received some training, particularly at the beginning, on specific topics deemed important for the rural community by the program administration, such as savings and money management. This could have been an excellent opportunity to train field assistants in using participatory methods and community engagement to jointly identify topics of interest and specific community needs in subsequent workshops. Many interviewees expressed a desire for capacity-building courses on how to commercialize products and properly prune trees and treat pests. There is potential for future development if field assistants engage more with community needs, which could reveal many ideas for future Sembrando Vida projects. To facilitate the development of these projects, education of the technicians in applying participatory methods is necessary.

An instance in which field technicians had the opportunity to facilitate participatory decision-making was when the savings fund of each program participant became available. The program design mandated that \$500 be saved from each participant's monthly stipend over the first three years of the program, with the savings transferred to participants' bank accounts in autumn 2022. The intention was for the funds to be used for a productive project that would benefit the participant or their community. Within each community, participants had the option to decide whether to undertake an individual or group project. Some neighbouring communities chose to undertake projects such as road reconstruction or building a small market center, while the villages I visited opted for group projects.

Participants were able to generate project ideas, but the final decision was subject to approval by the field assistant, allowing for participation only under certain conditions. This was significant, as participants were required to provide receipts to demonstrate how the funds were used. Group projects included the installation of internet routers, chicken coops, swine stalls, and the purchase of tools, all aimed at ensuring that the saved funds were used to increase the families' independence in the future. Many participants used the funds to buy motor scythes, which is a labor-saving device for cutting pasture compared to the traditional use of machetes.

What happens with the SeVi payments

The fact that Sembrando Vida is using the program funds to pay them directly to its participants is causing divided opinion. The participants are overjoyed and grateful for the payments and see it as a great progress to receive them directly to their own bank account and not as in the past cash based payments that were always under the control of corruption. Critique of such programs worry that the use of direct payments ends up only changing consumption pattern, with more spendings in luxury articles and unhealthy products (like alcohol, sweets, cigarettes and chips) as they are the most available goods in rural area to spend the money one. In my opinion, this is rather a general critique of direct cash transfer programs with people being suspicious, worried, and distrustful about what the participants will use the money for. Some would rather see the program's money invested in ideas that support the strengthening of the community or to resolve infrastructural problems to work on the causes that keep people in poverty or make it extremely difficult for them to escape poverty (Santigo, 2022). But Sembrando Vida's idea is that the support of poor rural regions and the direct investment in the development of individuals and their families can be the motor for development for all, not only the participants.

In addition to concerns raised in news media, there have been critiques regarding the use of Sembrando Vida payments, particularly in relation to communal dynamics and potential deforestation. Some argue that the payments promote individualism and neoliberalism by encouraging spending on personal consumption and luxury goods, rather than on community development (de Haldevang, 2021). However, in my own research, I found that people also invested their payments in education, health, and their farms and houses.

Another issue with the direct payments is that they may incentivize deforestation. As one critic argues, the payments create a dilemma for communities who feel pressured to cut down their habitats in order to receive much-needed income (de Haldevang, 2021). Additionally, some critics question the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the funds are being used effectively and efficiently. They argue that the direct payments may disincentivize productivity and self-sufficiency, promoting instead a culture of dependence on subsidies (Santigo, 2022).

The social component of Sembrando Vida

Although less visible, the work conducted by field assistants on the social level in villages is no less important. In my interviews, both field assistants mentioned that this is the most challenging aspect of their job, which is understandable given their limited training and qualifications in this area, and the difficulty and time required to change people's mindsets. As explained in the background information, the program administration sees the social fabric being destroyed in rural communities, stating that "the countryside, as a whole, has been the victim of neglect by the authorities that have directed the country's destiny in past administrations" (source, page 4). That is why the new administration wants to address the countryside with this program and regenerate the social fabric. The following is the official definition of what the program understands as the regeneration of the social fabric:

"Regeneration of the Social Fabric: It is the set of social links that allow recognizing, strengthening and rebuilding interpersonal and community relationships (of coexistence, trust, harmony and affection), strengthening the sense of belonging and cultural identity (customs, beliefs, principles and values that unite people), which contributes to promote organizational processes based on agreements and decisions within the Peasant Learning Community (CACs). It is based on solidarity awareness and a spirit of cooperation, capable of uniting individuals in a collective project for the improvement of the lives of the people who make up the Peasant Learning Community." (source, page 19)

Later in the document, these highly complex goals are broken down as follows:

"The objective of the Social Technicians of the Sembrando Vida Program will be to contribute to the generation of the community social fabric, through the delivery of training programs that promote social integration, community organization, productive inclusion, and financial inclusion, serving 100 legal subjects each." (source, page 53)

At a different point in the operational rules of the program, these ideas are concretized as follows:

"Provide technical assistance and social accompaniment to farmers with cultural relevance in the areas of savings, citizenship building, community development, gender equality, community health, human rights, non-discrimination, and other topics that contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric in rural localities." (source, page 21)

But it is up to the social technicians' decision, interpretation, initiative, and knowledge of how they will implement these ideas in the field. In general, supporting the CACs to become stronger and survive even after the program is not a bad idea, but it also excludes non-participants. Furthermore, I got the impression that there is a lot of power in the field associates' hands to educate (manipulate) people in their worldview, following their interpretation of the program's guidelines. Instead of dictating certain topics like saving money, this would be great opportunity to use participatory approaches identifying topic of concern with the learning groups, while at the same time trying not to interfere too much with the ejidos administration and rather trying to harmonize them.

The social aspect of Sembrando Vida, as observed in the villages I visited, has several effects. In most participating locations, participants are required to attend frequent Sembrando Vida meetings, and failure to show up three times results in expulsion without investigation. If individuals are unable to attend, they must provide a doctor's note or a strong explanation for their absence. In both villages, some

individuals were expelled at the beginning of the program's first years, and although the exact number was unclear, it was widely known that this consequence was enforced.

The field assistants explained that strict adherence to the rules was necessary, especially in the program's initial stages, to ensure that participants took the program seriously. Although this rule was not necessarily developed in collaboration with the community, the program framework ensured that the overall work could only be accomplished if participants were present.

In the beginning, the program provided funds to each learning community, which were administered by technicians for the construction of a tree nursery and a storage and meeting place called a biofabrique. Construction occurred collectively, and other activities frequently conducted together included the preparation of tree seedlings. Learning groups were responsible for their own seedlings, and they worked together to acquire soil, prepare seeds or seedlings, organize planting bags, and water the plants.

Participants had differing opinions on these group activities, with some disliking the group work due to arguments, slow progress, and time wasting. Others found the activities interesting, as they enjoyed chatting and gossiping while working together. Technicians observed that participants fell into two categories: those who were enthusiastic about Sembrando Vida and actively engaged with the program, and those who saw it as a regular program that they could benefit from and only did the minimum necessary to remain in the program.

It is important to note that participatory approaches need to align with the participants' needs and willingness, as highlighted by these results. The field assistants noted that people in the specific area where the program was implemented were accustomed to government programs that offered payments without any accountability for whether the promised measures were implemented. As a result, the program designers had to be strict about output controls, investing significant time in documentation, and visiting fields twice a year with the Becarios to check on the program's progress and give advice.

Although the program came with many rules and mechanisms for control, it also offered numerous benefits, opportunities, and chances for individual and community advancement. The field technicians aimed to teach people how to work with the program, not only regarding the technical aspects of agroforestry but also the social components. They supported learning groups in their development, aiming to strengthen their connections and foster independence to ensure the program's sustainability.

The design of development programs presents a classic struggle between the level of control needed and the resources allocated to direct engagement with participants. In Sembrando Vida, it was evident that significant effort was invested in ensuring that participants remained in contact with their responsible parties and that field technicians were not only responsible for technical issues but also the social component of the program.

Sembrando Vida and how its interacts with ejidos

Above mentioned concerns related to Sembrando Vida's influence on communal dynamics, is not only limited to the programs payments but to the overall program design and how it plays out in the field. Critiques argues that Sembrando Vida is undermining community organization in indigenous and campesino communities in Mexico, according to a report published by the Centre of Studies for Change in the Mexican Countryside (Ceccam). The leaning groups they form, the so-called CACs, are perceived "as the creation of parallel organizations to that of the communities for decision-making, which is used

to buy wills. Among these problems, identified by campesino and indigenous communities of Chiapas, they underscore that the most damaging effect of the program is the destruction of the community fabric and of the organizing structures of decision-making.” (Chapela et al., 2018). The director of Ceccam indicates that the implementation of the program weakens community organization due to the fact that it follows the neoliberal logic “that leaves the realm of rights and places itself in the realm of handouts, granted to whomever the government decides.” This way, the resources are given to individual producers, who spend the money on personal consumption rather than strengthening community organization, he concludes. To him, this means that the program encourages collective social property to be parcelled and individualized. “In lands of common use, that the *ejido* cedes for a period of time to *campesinos* that don’t have it, they will plant fruit and timber trees that will just be producing when the program ends, so it will be very difficult to return this land to the common use of the agrarian nucleus,” the director of Ceccam argues (Santigo, 2022).

The future with Sembrando vida

In conducting interviews with participants in the field, it became evident that there was a significant level of uncertainty regarding their short-term future with the Sembrando Vida program. This uncertainty stems from the top-down program enrolment approach, with field assistants guiding participants along the path developed in the program design. Consequently, individuals were unable to provide concrete plans for the program's future, instead offering ideas on what they believe to be important without specific details. Furthermore, participants were uncertain about who is responsible for organizing and managing Sembrando Vida's numerous aspects, including the commercialization of products produced on the Sembrando Vida plantation. While some believe that parallel to the organization on the government's site, it would be necessary to organize the harvest on the village level, my findings suggest that no initiatives at the village level were meeting for commercializing the products.

In my view, the program is currently at a critical juncture where it is crucial to support the participants and the learning group to take full ownership of their involvement in the program and begin developing their own projects for commercialization, by using participatory approaches. This way, after the program finishes, they can continue working with the system developed based on their needs and knowledge, independent of the program, which may not continue. In speaking with field technicians, it is apparent that the program has only been fully developed until the plantation's finishing point. For the second phase, which is starting now, where the trees begin producing, there are still no guidelines in the program design or responsibilities regarding who is responsible for what. The lack of organization for this phase of the program results in delays in village-level preparations, confusion regarding responsibilities, and lost harvests. Despite most participants not being in full production yet, they already have too much harvest that they can sell locally.

Field assistants are struggling to offer assistance as they depend on information and decisions from the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER), which is responsible for organizing commercialization. Ultimately, they are waiting for participants to reach full production and motivate them to come up with ideas themselves. However, they cannot initiate anything yet because they must wait to see if large-scale commercialization is organized through the state. At this stage, participatory methods offer a great opportunity to initiate the village process of deciding what to do with the harvest. This way, participant concerns, such as ensuring safe transportation and fair prices, can be taken

seriously. Early initiation is crucial to have enough preparation for the next harvest season, which begins in the summer/fall, to avoid harvest losses again. As indicated by the participants themselves it will be important to invest in capacity-building programs for local communities to help them take a more active role in the programs future. This could involve training programs on sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship, and other skills relevant to the program.

4.4. The substantive theory in relation to literature on Sembrando Vida

After having examined the findings presented in the preceding discussion, this paper now seeks to position the substantive theory within the academic context of research specifically focused on Sembrando Vida. The core category of participation serves as the theoretical lens for analyzing the findings and has been found to be the most appropriate fit, albeit subject to the researcher's personal skills, knowledge, and experiences. However, it is acknowledged that other concepts may have yielded an even better fit.

How trust is supporting CACs performance

Despite the limited number of studies that explicitly address participation in Sembrando Vida, many related topics have been discussed in the literature, which can inform and enrich the substantive theory. For instance, Blas-Cortés (et al., 2023) identified trust as a crucial factor that enhances the performance of CACs. However, the author also found that being a woman has a negative impact on trust, revealing the complex gender dynamics within the CACs, which are composed of at least one-third female members. This finding can help explain the unrest and aversion to group activities or meetings that emerged in the study's results. The author also documented that trust was initially low, limited only to family members and close neighbours. However, after four years of program implementation, the trust circle expanded to encompass most of the village members, confirming the positive impact of frequent group meetings and activities in promoting collaboration and mutual acquaintance. While trust is not explicitly included in the substantive theory, it emerges as a vital issue in the context of participatory methods, which should not be overlooked.

Interaction between field assistant and participants

Multiple researchers have explored the dynamics of the interaction between technicians and participants in the Sembrando Vida program, but their findings are inconsistent. While (Gallardo López (et al., 2023) argue that technicians learn from participants during meetings, and participants make all the decisions, the present study's analysis suggests that technicians have power over participants and only allow for certain production strategies that they deem acceptable. Cortez Egremy (et al., 2022) supports this view and found that the implementation of the program does not entail any knowledge exchange, only an assignment of tasks to beneficiaries. In interviews conducted by Cortez Egremy (et al. 2022), beneficiaries reported that there was no exchange of experience or knowledge between technicians and themselves, and that the relationship felt more like that of an employer and employee, with the technicians holding all the power.

"There is no exchange of knowledge, not even among ourselves, and even more so with the technicians and the Becarios, who see us as inferior, as people who don't know anything and who must obey them in order not to be sanctioned" (José, beneficiary, April 2021).

Gallardo López (et al., 2023) attribute this dynamic to the historical approach of governmental development programs that relied on classical extension work with field assistants bringing knowledge, money, and products to "underdeveloped, unknowing, and poor villagers," with villagers only being the receiving part in this equation. The new Sembrando Vida program aims to adopt an "integral rural development" approach, but changing this learned dynamic can be challenging on the ground, especially given the inexperience of most farmers with productive fruit trees and agroforestry systems.

Cortez Egremy (et al. 2022) findings suggest that technicians in the Sembrando Vida program focus more on administrative activities than advising and supporting participants and CACs. Presenting yet another explanation for the problems in the relationship between field assistant and participants as one of their interviewees describes:

"The engineers are more concerned about filling out their reports and getting more people into the programme than training us. They are really leaving us alone and everyone is doing their own system in their own way." (Eduardo, beneficiary, April 2021).

This may lead to field assistants overestimating participants' abilities and knowledge of working with agroforestry systems, as well as addressing the wrong topics in group meetings, leaving participants to make practical decisions alone on their plots. Insufficient communication between technicians and participants, including one-to-one communication, could be another explanation for the documented problems.

Mistakes in SeVi program design and the role of participation

Several publications also analyzed Sevi's design and its impact on implementations in the locations. Macario (et al., 2020) supports my findings that central factors e.g. participation, were not considered in program design (p495), but they argues that the underlying problem in the development of such programs is that they come from above, from experts working in the government, who do not solve problems of societies. They suggest that a priori diagnosis must be carried out, including an in-depth investigation together with the people of the communities to determine their needs. So that they can then be converted into public policies in accordance with the needs and contexts of each territory. They further suggest that it is also necessary to educate and train the people of the communities so that they become aware of the situation in which they find themselves and so that they understand that there are alternatives. Macario (et al., 2020) are they only other research team working on Sembrando Vida that highlights the importance of using participatory approaches, as just explained, to determine engage with communities. Finally, they recommend that Sevi and the NODOS program can complement each other, as they both seek to solve problems from the territory with the participation of the communities' actors. For this, it is sought that they participate in the solution to their problems, with the support of the academia and governmental entities. To achieve this, it is necessary to reach agreements with those responsible for SeVi, as with the training and formation strategy that the NODESSs carry out, it is possible to strengthen the groups (CACs) of the program so that they can be sustained over time, forming cooperatives or social enterprises. Following their argumentation there are several similarities with suggestions made by my analysis of the substantive theory in the chapter before.

Another research focusing on SeVi design was conducted by Bernabe Ines (2019). She identified in her research multiple inconsistencies in the implementation process of the program which were caused by a lack of substance in the design, which doesn't clearly identify the public problems it seeks to solve (p.6). She found out that there is indeed a need for a public policy aimed at rural areas because it is where the majority of the population living in poverty is found, 58.2%, compared to 16.5% in urban areas (CONEVAL, 2018). However, in relation to the assumption that agrarian subjects with incomes below the welfare line have land, only 32% of rural households reported owning land (CONEVAL, 2018). In the case of gender, it is even worse because only 26% of the registered agrarian subjects are women (RAN, 2019). This means that at least two-thirds of the population in rural areas are excluded

from the program, and a large part of them are women because they do not meet the requirement of having 2.5 ha of land available.

She argues that despite the lack of clarity about the problem to be addressed, the solution had already been planned fifteen years before the program was implemented. She suggests that this situation is what Kingdon (1992) refers to when he mentions that sometimes people in and around government do not solve problems but instead become solution drivers by looking for problems to which they can associate their preferred solution. She further suggests that, in general, the problems encountered in the operation Sembrando Vida stem from the design of the program, starting with the fact that the problem that the program seeks to address is not properly identified, which means that the program design is not justified. The government's overall disinterest in developing a program design that is grounded in a problem analysis and not just suggesting a program with solutions that they deem legible can be seen in the design's insufficient elements for evaluating program progress and the objectives it aims to reach Laguna Idali (2022). The vast majority of objectives presented in the program's design, especially for the objective of social cohesion, don't have indicators presented to measure program outputs. In her work, she suggests using a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures and proves that results about program progress can be easily obtained with engagement of participating communities. Currently, the government is mainly relying on in-house evaluation and some evaluative reports from semi-governmental institutes like CONEVAL. Evaluation could be another potential point in the program where participation with the communities could support the government in its work and reveal new insights for changes in the program design to make it better fitting to the communities' needs and their specific context.

“Implementation gap” a new explanation for results ?

The study by Hevia & Hernandez Castillo (2022) focuses on the role of indigenous groups in the SeVi program, but their findings are relevant to the program as a whole. The authors note that the program's strength lies in the appreciation and recognition of indigenous knowledge and practices of local work, which occurs through the "dialogue of knowledge" in the CACs. However, this exchange is limited due to the program design's failure to consider the cultural and linguistic membership of participants, as it does not use original (indigenous) languages. Additionally, the study highlights the critical role played by technicians in facilitating intercultural exchange and approaches when working with the CACs. Thus, it is crucial to select technicians who have adequate training and skills to ensure that CACs work for all.

These findings, including my own, are highly specific, and their generalization is limited due to the heterogeneity of Mexico's population, where every locality has its own needs, history, and specialties. Hevia and Hernandez Castillo (2022) also document that information assemblies of rural subjects (indigenous and non-indigenous) were halted, where the community was diagnosed and consulted for supporting program design, but there is no documentation of periodic consultations to inform program design. This argument weakens my proposition that more participation with local communities to inform program design could prevent the following problem in program implementation. The authors identify that many problems in the communities arise due to an implementation gap, he refers to the disparity between the intended goals and objectives of the program and the actual outcomes achieved on the ground. It signifies the difference between what was planned or promised and what was effectively executed or accomplished. This concept adds to the developed substance theory, where I identified that

the ideas presented in SeVi design do not play out in the field as planned, resulting in the program's mentioned disadvantages.

SeVi deficit in targeting the objective population

The inadequate identification and assistance of the target population by the Sembrando Vida program has been a topic of concern in several analyses (Pedraza López, 2021)(p.154). According to Pedraza López (2021), regional governments have not adhered to the set criteria, which includes utilizing indicators such as the line of well-being, the value of marginalization, and indicators for biodiversity. Instead, local factors such as the suitability of land plots, absence of land disputes, and the availability of labor from landowners have been prioritized for participant selection. This contradicts the program's selection criteria and excludes individuals such as landless farmers and women who are part of the rural poor as they do not own property. Pedraza López (2022) supports the notion that the program's selection criteria are flawed, which is similar to my argument made developed in the aforementioned discussion that selection criteria were developed without considering communities causing exclusion. However, he does not suggest that early participation of local communities could have prevented this exclusion, as I propose with the substance theory. He shares my mentioned concern that Sembrando vida is, could, or will be used as a political instrument, as it has happened in the past when social programs were used to create electoral clienteles.

Direct cash transfer in SeVi

Cano Castellanos (2023) work offers new insights to contextualize the impact of Sembrando Vida, despite focusing in his paper on the effects of capitalism present in the program design. Similar to Pedraza López's (2021) research, he contends that the program overlooks rural poor families, including those in economic hardship, unmarried couples, and newcomers. Instead, the program favors the rural rich who own land, possess adequate work power, and have stable family relationships (p.25). Cano Castellanos's study further reveals that the technicians defined the number of potential beneficiaries per village, around 10% of the village population, which was not related to the program's set of criteria but was based on the field assistants' practical considerations (p.25), showcasing their power in relevant decisions as argued in the substance theory. Cotler (et al., 2020) also found similar evidence that the criteria for target groups were inadequately modified at the local level due to a lack of considering practical issue, allowing field assistants to interpret and select participants at their discretion.

Furthermore, Cano Castellanos (2023) argues that the program's design caters to a specific type of participant, particularly those who have adequate labor available or can easily forego other productive activities. He maintains that the program inadequately considers other productive activities of potential participants who may not sign up because they prefer to engage in other productive activities and lack sufficient free or low-cost family labor to benefit from the program. These concerns highlight the program's rigidity and unsuitability for the heterogeneity present in rural Mexico. Cano Castellanos also notes that while some participants do not need the money from the program, they still sign up, arguing that the "aid" would go elsewhere. Some participants justify their enrollment by arguing that they "know how to work it" and use the program as intended, unlike others who use the money for alcohol or other extravagant expenses (p.26). I found similar answers from participants, mainly when criticizing others for how they engaged with the program, namely only doing the minimum necessary and taking the benefits. Mentioned concerns are all related to the use of direct cash transfer to participants. Early engagement with potential participants or literature of benefit and disadvantages of direct cash transfer

programs, would have revealed these contradictions, which disperse not only participants with participants but also with non-participants.

Cano Castellanos (2023) contends that the program reproduces existing social differentiation and heterogeneity. Although the program aims to optimize participants' circumstances, not everything is viewed as an opportunity by participants. Similar to previous conditional cash transfer programs, he argues that peasants experience contradictions in these programs, where the "aid" given and what is demanded can change with each six-year government. Participants understand this but also realize that their livelihoods and desires to "achieve something" cannot be subject to government swings, particularly due to the remote and marginalized nature of the border region (p.28). Living in these circumstances encourages opportunism, and people use programs as much as they benefit them. These findings offer a new perspective on Sembrando Vida and the historical context in which it was implemented, highlighting limitations in the participatory approaches used, including a reluctance to invest more in a temporary limited program than necessary. People's experiences with past development programs have dulled their enthusiasm, and as Sembrando Vida is also one of the six-year programs, it is difficult to believe that it will effect any significant change.

4.5. Summary

Overall, I conclude that the Sembrando Vida program aims to engage with the communities in which it is implemented, but with very limited space for participants to truly engage with the program and take on responsibilities. Furthermore, the willingness, identification, and qualification of all parties are needed to fully employ participatory methods at the village level. Sembrando Vida made a good start in trying to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches in its design, but it also shows that governmental programs have not shown to be flexible enough to allow for more participation at the current stage. Participation is also not a panacea, as I have shown that clear rules and controls are also necessary to give all the different actors a framework in which they can orient themselves and not get lost.

In my opinion, to ensure real participation from the villages participating in the program, it would also be necessary to use a different payment system. With the current system, non-participants are excluded from all the activities related to Sembrando Vida, creating inequality and separation in the communities. If a program truly wants to use participatory methods in its design, it would be important to think about how much money should be given to individuals and to the community to decrease the inequality caused by the program. For Sembrando Vida, it is too late, but if they had used participatory approaches to design the program, they would have probably thought about these issues and developed solutions.

With this discussion, I want to argue that although participatory approaches can be used at many different stages in a program, it would have been most effective and efficient to use them in the program's design. As I have shown, many of the problems that participants and field assistants have now could have been prevented when engaging with the communities the program was designed for. In general, I think it will be important for future development programs to have more flexibility, allowing for adjustments to account for all the different scenarios that exist on the ground.

Using participation at the design stage can be very difficult because different stakeholders prioritize differently, and program designers still have the power to make decisions ultimately. This means that the limits to participation are already given through where the money is coming from and what philosophy the money giver (in this case, the government) supports and sees as credible to produce desired outcomes. That is why the program has spent a good amount of attention controlling for outcomes to ensure accountability among stakeholders.

The Sembrando Vida program has developed a good basis in the Mexican government for further programs to follow this path of compromising between top-down and bottom-up approaches. A lot of capacity building has taken place at all levels, and the participants in the rural communities are now better prepared on how to work with such approaches. I hope that the program will continue so that the collective knowledge that has been built up does not go to waste but instead inspires a follow-up program that is even more innovative, allowing for more participation. For the current program, it will be important to engage with the communities, using participatory methods to ensure the sustainability of the program's outputs and its long-term impact. Maybe also thinking about possibilities for ongoing engagement and support from stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of the program are maintained after the program finishes.

4.6. Future directions

Based on my research, I have formulated several follow-up questions that may be of interest to fellow researchers in this field:

1. Do the accusations made in international and Mexican media against Sembrando Vida have any validity, or are they motivated by a specific political agenda or view (supporting clientelism)?
2. How will the government respond to these accusations? Will they establish evaluation systems with indicators for the program's environmental impact and produce reports reflecting its effectiveness and impact?
3. In what ways can the program support its participants over the next two years, particularly with regards to commercializing the products they produce?
4. What are the program's long-term management plans, and how can it support its projects beyond the duration of the program?
5. Are Sembrando Vida learning groups or CACs (Community Advisory Committees) parallel institutions that threaten existing ejido institutions? Are they intentionally undermining local administrative infrastructure?
6. What socio-institutional changes have been brought about by Sembrando Vida in the ejido structures?
7. How have farmers changed their productive activities when starting with Sembrando vida ?
8. Look for reasons that explain the Implementation Gap identified, between program desig on national level and how it played out on village level.
9. Further explore potential of participation in national rural development program together with responsible (more an inside analyse focusing on field assistant and Sembrando vida responsible).

These questions are crucial to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the program and its impact, and could be the focus of future research in this area.

4.7. Recommendations

After reviewing the earlier discussion, I have several recommendations for Sembrando Vida. Firstly, I propose that field assistants organize workshops or group activities that focus on the future, soliciting Sembrando Vida participants' opinions on their vision for the future. In subsequent meetings, they should consider what the communities need to turn these ideas into a reality and brainstorm ways to facilitate action.

It is essential for the program's progress and long-term sustainability that participants take full ownership of it. This means ensuring their full participation and governance in the program's activities, management, and eventual enterprises. Additionally, the program should be integrated into the communities and territories it serves, interacting with all relevant parties to promote inclusion and opportunities for the same projects generated by the program.

To achieve this, the program needs to establish participatory management structures that take into account the experience and organizational capital built up over many years. Interaction with existing spaces for collaboration, both institutional (e.g. the District Rural Development Councils) and otherwise, should also be considered.

Overall, direct subsidy transfer programs run the risk of creating consumption patterns in beneficiaries that do not contribute to improving living conditions or avoiding poverty reproduction, as well as disassociating themselves from productive aspects. Therefore, it is crucial to work intensively on the program's appropriation by its beneficiaries. This is essential to achieve the program's two main objectives: poverty alleviation and environmental restoration. However, this effort also faces the demands of the committed goals, creating a dilemma that will ultimately determine the success of Sembrando Vida.

Sembrando Vida aims to assist small agricultural producers in various ways. Facilitating beneficiaries' access to new markets to sell their products is one of the program's most critical tasks. To achieve this, the program should focus on developing relationships with potential buyers, both domestic and international. This could include creating a marketplace for products or connecting beneficiaries with existing distribution networks. It is also important to provide training to producers on market trends and consumer demands to help them tailor their products accordingly.

Another component that could benefit small agricultural producers is supporting them in joining cooperatives. By helping beneficiaries legally associate in cooperatives, the program can help them sell higher levels of production together, reduce costs by taking advantage of economies of scale, and access credit and physical capital to develop other activities within the agricultural value chain. Cooperatives can also provide a forum for producers to share knowledge, skills, and best practices, creating a supportive community of growers.

Creating a sustainable environment for young people in rural areas to continue agricultural activities is also important. This includes ensuring that they receive fair payment for their crops and breaking the patterns of poverty between generations. Sembrando Vida could support young people by providing them with training in modern farming techniques, connecting them with mentors and other resources, and promoting agriculture as a viable career option. Additionally, the program could explore ways to attract investment to rural areas, creating jobs and economic opportunities beyond agriculture.

It is recommended that Sembrando Vida develops a diagnosis and change theory for the project (evaluation system). In doing so, the project can identify areas in which it may need improvement and develop strategies to address them. Additionally, a theory of change should be established to identify how each component of the project contributes to achieving specific results. By doing so, the project team can prioritize and allocate resources to those components that will have the greatest impact. Finally, the theory of change should also identify assumptions and risks that may impact the program's further role out. This will enable the project team to be proactive in addressing potential challenges and ensure the successful execution of the program. Overall, developing a comprehensive diagnosis, change theory, and theory of change will enable Sembrando Vida to achieve its objectives effectively and efficiently.

5. Reflections

5.1. Reflections on objectivity and subjectivity in field research

This reflective chapter delves into the interplay of objectivity and subjectivity encountered during my field research in a rural community.

Personal Bias and Educational Differences

As I embarked on my research journey, I found myself grappling with the dichotomy of being a researcher while not wanting to be perceived solely in that role. This dilemma stemmed from my awareness of the stark educational differences between myself and the local population. The realization of my privileged position led to a constant negotiation of my identity within the community, striving to blend in while being conscious of my academic background. This awareness necessitated a continuous reflection on how my education influenced my perceptions and interactions within the research context.

Insecurity, Experience, and the Research Process

Undertaking social science research for the first time, I encountered feelings of insecurity and inexperience. Despite my academic background and aspiration to conduct valuable research, the lack of prior experience in this specific field of study generated a sense of self-doubt. However, as I immersed myself in the rural community, I began to appreciate the easygoing lifestyle that contrasted with the demanding nature of my own cultural context. This appreciation led to introspection regarding the living conditions of some families and raised questions about my role and responsibilities within the community.

Development Opportunities and Mindset

Throughout my research, I found myself occasionally viewing the community through the lens of development opportunities. Business ideas and potential development projects emerged, highlighting the extent to which these notions had shaped my mindset. However, I also recognized the importance of maintaining objectivity and refraining from becoming overly invested in pursuing these ideas, as it was not my primary role within the community. This realization served as a reminder of the biases I carried and the need to balance my personal perspectives with the realities and aspirations of the local population.

Assumptions and Transferred Experiences

Before commencing my research, I had formed assumptions about the rural community based on information provided by my supervisor and the literature I had read. These assumptions portrayed the place as extremely impoverished, with limited access to basic amenities. However, upon arrival, I discovered that the situation was not as dire as I had imagined. This realization prompted reflection on the impact of preconceived notions and the importance of questioning and challenging assumptions in research. Furthermore, my previous experiences in Panama, both in my work and with my host family, influenced my research process. While these experiences provided a foundation for understanding certain aspects of the community, they also limited my ability to fully immerse myself in new experiences and engage in meaningful conversations due to preconceived communication patterns and biases.

5.2. Reflective Analysis of Reflexivity and Personal Values in Field Research

Agricultural Knowledge and Identity

Throughout my research, my agricultural knowledge played a crucial role in establishing rapport with farmers. By demonstrating an understanding of their practices and concerns, I aimed to present a nuanced picture of myself as a researcher and gain their trust and respect. This background knowledge provided a foundation for meaningful interactions and facilitated a deeper understanding of the farmers' perspectives. However, it also required a delicate balance to ensure that my knowledge did not overshadow their expertise and experiences.

Education and Critical Analysis

As a student at WUR, my education occasionally led me to question the practices employed in the rural development program I was studying. The exposure to various concepts and critical discussions in my master's classes provided a framework for evaluating the program's design and arguments. This critical lens allowed me to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the program's approach. Acknowledging this influence on my perspective, I aimed to present a nuanced portrayal of the program, drawing from both personal experiences and academic insights.

Beliefs, Values, and Cultural Context

Personal beliefs and values played a significant role in shaping my experiences and interactions in the field. Strong aversion towards the church and its activities worldwide posed a challenge in remaining neutral and objective, particularly in an area where the influence of the church was prominent. It required conscious effort to restrain myself from expressing disdain and critically examining the implications of the church's actions. Additionally, deeply held beliefs in the importance of education clashed with the reality of limited access and motivation among the local population. This dissonance prompted reflection on the disparities and desolation caused by these circumstances.

Furthermore, my feminist values, beliefs in open communication, and perceptions of gender roles faced a significant disconnect from the cultural context of the rural community. Accepting and understanding different ideas of gender roles became essential for fostering meaningful connections and avoiding the imposition of my own beliefs. This process required self-reflection and awareness of the cultural relativism inherent in the research setting.

Moments of Self-Awareness and Reflection

Throughout the research journey, there were moments of self-awareness and reflection that influenced my perspective. Gratitude for the opportunities I had been afforded and the privilege of education fostered a sense of appreciation for personal growth. Simultaneously, the experience of living in a small community and witnessing the simplicity of life led to a realization of the value of focusing on the positives and embracing gratitude. These moments of self-awareness reminded me of the potential pitfalls of excessive worry and the importance of finding balance in life.

5.3. Reflection on Collaboration and Relationships in Field Research

Language Barriers and Communication

The presence of a foreign language created limitations in expressing myself precisely and potentially hindered participants' understanding of my intentions. It remained unclear whether people were always aware of this language barrier and the potential gaps in communication that it created. This uncertainty

added an additional layer of complexity to the research process, as subtle nuances and intended meanings might have been lost in translation. Despite these challenges, efforts were made to ensure clear and effective communication, albeit with some lingering doubts about the accuracy of conveyed messages.

Power Dynamics and Hierarchical Relationships

Interacting with different individuals within the research setting revealed varying levels of comfort and ease. Engaging with farmers in the field felt more natural, as the hierarchical position and educational backgrounds of technicians and regional authorities sometimes created a sense of unease. There was a concern about inadvertently conveying a sense of superiority, which could potentially impact the dynamics of the interviews and manipulate participants' responses. To mitigate this, conscious efforts were made to blend in, support their arguments, and avoid challenging their worldviews, opinions, or hierarchies.

Limitations of Scope and Surface-Level Understanding

Given the limited scope of the research, along with constraints on time and the depth of relationships that could be established, the understanding of the villages and their underlying functionality, value systems, and program impacts remained surface-level. Although efforts were made to gain insights into these aspects, the constraints posed challenges in unraveling the complexities of the communities. Acknowledging these limitations, the findings presented in this research should be interpreted within the context of these constraints and the need for further exploration.

Interpreting Nonverbal Communication and Ambiguity

Reflection on my own appearance and the impact it had on participants was challenging. While people might have been hesitant to express any discomfort directly, subtle cues and nonverbal communication could provide insights into their feelings. Instances where individuals rejected or seemed uncomfortable during interviews highlighted the complexities of interpreting their attitudes and perspectives. The indirect nature of communication in these situations added further ambiguity and required careful analysis to comprehend the underlying meaning.

5.4. Reflection on Learning and Growth in a Cross-Cultural Context

Challenging Biases and Perspectives

Recognizing the bias held by some Mexicans that views everything from the Western world as superior posed a significant challenge. As an individual who does not condone the glorification of Europe or the USA, it became essential to maintain a balanced perspective. Striking a balance meant positioning oneself amidst differing worldviews while remaining fully integrated into the local community. This process of navigating and challenging biases was intellectually stimulating but also emotionally demanding.

Shifting Perceptions of the Development Sector

The experience of clashes in worldviews and ideas of development within the development sector led to a personal aversion towards working in such programs. These clashes raised questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of external-driven development interventions. Moving forward, there is a desire to explore alternative avenues for development, such as focusing on health and sustainable regional economies, with less emphasis on globalization and more on continental independence. This shift in perspective reflects a personal growth trajectory and a desire to contribute to meaningful change.

Knowledge Gaps and the Importance of On-the-Ground Understanding

The realization of a lack of knowledge about the functioning of development agencies and organizations became apparent during the research. This acknowledgment serves as motivation to deepen understanding in this area in future endeavors. The research experience emphasized the value of on-the-ground knowledge and the significance of local initiatives and grassroots-driven development. These insights underscore the importance of considering local perspectives, needs, and agency when designing and implementing development programs.

Struggles, Trust, and Government Involvement

An exploration of village struggles revealed complex dynamics in personal clashes, familial disputes, and cooperative challenges. The frustrations encountered during this process underscored the absence of simple solutions. Surprisingly, many villagers appeared content with the government taking on more responsibility for purchasing their products rather than pursuing independent selling or cooperative efforts. This observation raises intriguing questions about trust, democracy, and the role of the state, presenting potential avenues for further research.

Language Skills and Cultural Understanding

The research experience provided an opportunity for language skill improvement and a deeper understanding of Mexican traditions and culture. Enhancing language proficiency facilitated better communication and engagement with the local community, enabling a more nuanced comprehension of their experiences, aspirations, and challenges. This acquisition of language skills and cultural understanding enriched the research process, fostering meaningful connections with the participants and fostering personal growth.

6. Conclusion

The research questions that were developed during fieldwork in collaboration with local partners, reflecting their interests in relation to the Sembrando Vida program, have been exhaustively answered. Sub-research question 1 focused on understanding changes in living conditions at the household level in participating villages, while sub-research question 2 aimed to understand changes at the village level within the participating communities. Both sub-questions sought to understand changes before and after the implementation of Sembrando Vida. The results of the two sub-research questions were presented together, as there were strong linkages between both analytical levels. The findings were presented following the analytical codes of "positive changes and perceived benefits" and "negative changes and perceived disadvantages," derived from GTM analysis. Participants highlighted that they perceived an increase in income through program payments as a great benefit of the program, giving them access to participate more in society by accessing the market, medical care, education, and other services. Many mentioned positive changes in the way women are perceived in their roles, with women now being more respected and accepted in doing work in the field. Another benefit the program provided at the regional or village level is the increase in work, with many participants hiring laborers for certain tasks, such as clearing the pasture, offering more work opportunities for young and landless villagers. The topic of changes perceived in social life (Convivencia) was split between some participants showing their support and liking of the implemented changes, and others mentioning their dislike of the same. In general, a large variety of opinions on this topic was documented, as other voices, not only from participants, were included. Topics that participants perceived as disadvantageous with the program were related to problems they have with their plantations caused through a lack of knowledge on both participant and field assistant sides. Many of the problems that were perceived as disadvantageous were related to the initial program design and how the program was implemented from top-down. It was documented that participating households struggle very differently with various issues, making it difficult and demanding to find solutions that can be generalized. The final sub-research question (3) aimed to explore how people imagine and realize their future with the program. These findings were presented in their own section as they could be clearly separated from the other levels of analysis because of their focus on the future. Resulting from the GTM analysis, the theoretical code of "insecure future with Sembrando Vida" already indicated the overall outcome, namely, unresolved responsibility issues between villages' initiatives and the government-initiated program. With the field assistant being in an intermediary role, awaiting instruction from the program but also initiative from the participants, reflecting a wait-and-see attitude. Participants expressed concerns about future commercialization, which will be important to address in any future commercialization initiative. Emerging as another theoretical code from my GTM analysis was the new topic of the relation between relevant actors and how they perceive each other. Although not initially intended to be a topic of research, it now forms a relevant focus in this thesis and proved to be of great relevance. Together with the other findings, they form a substantive theory resulting from GTM analysis, with "participation" being the final core category.

In the subsequent discussion, I elaborated on the proposed grounded substantive theory presented earlier by contextualizing it within the framework in which Sembrando Vida was implemented. In the first part of the discussion the proposed theory is tested on its explanatory power for the results. In the second half, this study is located in context with the existing literature in the field. I explained that the program aimed

to be innovative by combining top-down and bottom-up approaches, and then proceeded to provide a chronological account of how participation played a role in Sembrando Vida from its inception. I argued that participation has both positively and negatively influenced program implementation and overall impact.

In conclusion, I posited that it is important to acknowledge the benefits and disadvantages of both top-down and participatory approaches, rather than blindly favoring one over the other. I noted that while participatory development programs are typically employed on a smaller scale than national programs, using participatory approaches at the program design level can be a meaningful decision, particularly for governmental programs that cannot fully employ participation at every stage of a development program. However, I also pointed out that it can be challenging to harmonize the two approaches in reality and effectively trickle down their effects within the entire governmental system, especially for larger programs where many actors need to be convinced and trained to facilitate, use, and implement participatory approaches. In practice, program design ideas may clash with different approaches, ideas, worldviews, knowledge, and convictions about how a rural development program should be implemented. Therefore, change will take time, and we must keep this in mind when attempting to implement change in development cooperation by using more participatory approaches because both we and the structures we work within are entrenched.

There are several limitations to my research that stem from various sources. Methodologically, I was unable to fully employ the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) with several cycles, as is regularly done in larger research projects. Furthermore, as this was my first time using this methodology, it presented a significant challenge. Not only did I need to become an expert in the field of research, but also in the methodology employed. The generalizability of my research was limited to a rather small area in southern Mexico due to the case study character of my research. As is typical of qualitative research, the reliability of my findings is limited because I chose to use a constructivist perspective on research. Critics may argue that the results of my research are rather vague and untangled, influenced by personal impressions and perspectives. However, I can argue that by using GTM and the mechanisms it suggests, I was able to control for my own perspective in this research, always being aware of the perspective I was presenting. Line-by-line coding was one of the mechanisms suggested by GTM to stay true to the data, ensuring research validity and a research that is built up from the ground.

Based on my research, I recommend that the program administration of Sembrando Vida develop a control and anonymous complaint system for both participants and employees to protect against power abuse. Additionally, the program should implement mechanisms to monitor and address power abuse within the program-specific governmental structures. Cases involving Sembrando Vida officials should be further investigated, and a penalty system should be developed for government officials, not just program participants. This will help to close the blind spots and ensure that all individuals involved remain true to the program's aims. Furthermore, I suggest that future commercialization of Sembrando Vida products on the village level should be co-developed using participatory approaches to ensure participant ownership of the resulting village initiatives. By doing so, program-initiated outcomes will not only be seen as program-dependent, but the participants will also take responsibility for their future after the program finishes.

My research aims to present the voices of the participants by collecting data from the ground, making it the first work in the English language to do so. To achieve this, I plan to prepare two summarized versions of my thesis; one for the field assistants, regional officials, and the other for the chiefs (comisariados) of the two villages. Through feedback on my findings, I hope to inspire responsibility and enthusiasm among the participants, encouraging them to make the most of the program's final phase by focusing on the commonalities between them and the local program administration. This will facilitate a meaningful exchange that will benefit both parties. However, I understand the importance of my role as a "scientist," and I am mindful of how my findings will be perceived. To address this, I will carefully select the findings that I present and seek support from my supervisor, Nausho, and our local fieldwork assistants.

In addition to the topics and issues previously discussed, it is evident that the participants of Sembrando Vida expressed a clear enthusiasm and satisfaction with the program. This positive attitude can serve as a powerful tool for field assistants to collaborate with the communities and ensure a lasting impact during the final phase of the program. Through my research, I aim to give a voice to an underrepresented group and shed light on an overlooked program in the current academic landscape that aims to reform the way government-initiated rural development programs operate. This, in turn, can pave the way for a new era of governmental development work in Mexico. While future analyses will provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's overall output, my research provides insights into the program's ecological, economic, and social impacts on villages.

7. List of Figures

| | |
|---|----------------|
| <i>Figure 1: General data about Sembrando Vida.</i> | <i>Source:</i> |
| <i>https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/image/file/736060/Banners_Pagina_WEB_datosG_datosG.jpg.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Figure 2: Geographic location of Marques de Comillas and the study sites Loma Bonita and Boca de Chajul (Zermeno-Hernandez et al., 2016).....</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>Figure 3: Copy of a satellite image from Google Maps showing Loma Bonita (left corner) and Boca de Chajul (right corner. Underneath the Highway is the boarder with Guatemala and North of the river Lacantun is the biosphere reservoir of Monte Azules.</i> | <i>6</i> |
| <i>Figure 4: Research design framework: summary of the interplay between essential grounded theory methods and processes (Chun Tie et al., 2019).....</i> | <i>9</i> |
| <i>Figure 5: Diagram as result of Intermediate coding stage</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Figure 6: Source: Noble, H.; Smith, J. (2015) http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054.....</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Figure 7: Visualization of the substantive theory.....</i> | <i>37</i> |

8. References

Arista, L., Peralta, M., Ortega, A., & Ibarra, M. (2021, October 28). *Sembrando vida, el programa para el campo mexicano que siembre opacidad y dudas.* Expansion Politica. <https://politica.expansion.mx/mexico/2021/10/28/voces-seembrando-vida-irregularidades-pagos-programa-amlo>

Bernabe Ines, L. (2019). *Evaluacion del diseño: Programa Sembrando Vida* [Master Thesis]. Universidad Autonoma Chapingo.

Blas-Cortés, J., Omaña-Silvestre, J. M., Quintero-Ramírez, J. M., & Montiel-Batalla, B. M. (2023). Capital social y políticas públicas para el desarrollo rural. Análisis del programa sembrando vida. *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Agrícolas*, 14(3), 477–483. <https://doi.org/10.29312/remexca.v14i3.3119>

Bryant, A. (2020). GTM – A Family of Variants. In *The Varieties of Grounded Theory* (pp. 5–29). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716542.n2>

Cano Castellanos, I. J. (2023a). Interpreting “disorder”. Agricultural change, farm workers and the Sembrando Vida (Planting Life) Program. *Estudios Sociologicos*, 41(121), 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.24201/es.2024v42n124.2362>

Cano Castellanos, I. J. (2023b). Interpreting “disorder”. Agricultural change, farm workers and the Sembrando Vida (Planting Life) Program. *Estudios Sociologicos*, 41(121), 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.24201/es.2024v42n124.2362>

Carabana, C. (2021, November 29). *Opinión / Sembrando Vida no es un programa ambiental. El gobierno de AMLO debería investigarlo y corregirlo.* . The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/11/29/seembrando-vida-amlo-deforestacion-chocolates-aristegui-mexico-2021/>

Carabias, J., Meli, P., & Hernandez, G. (2012). Evaluacion de los impactos de proyectos de desarollo sustentable sobre la reduccion del cambio de uso de suelo en ejidos de Marques de Comillas, Chiapas. Informe final. Coordinacion del Programa de Cambio Climatico. *Instituto Nacional de Ecología, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Mexico*.

Carrillo, E. (2021, November 3). *Plan de reforestación de COP26 salió de Sembrando Vida: AMLO.* Forbes Mexico. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/politica-plan-de-reforestacion-de-cop26-salio-de-seembrando-vida-amlo/>

Chapela, G., Torres Rojo, J. M., Arriaga, V., & Carabias, J. (2018, January 18). «*Sembrando Vida*», análisis general del programa. CEIBA. <https://ceiba.org.mx/seembrando-vida-analisis-general/>

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7, 205031211882292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927>

Cortez Egremy, J. G., Baca del Moral, J., Uribe Gomez, M., Gomze Hernandez, T., & Valdes Velarde, E. (2022). La multifuncionalidad de la agricultura como herramienta de análisis de políticas agrarias: el caso del programa Sembrando Vida en Chahuites, Oaxaca. *Acta Universitaria*, 32, 1–18.

Cotler, H., Manson, R., & Nava Martínez, D. (2020). *Evaluación de la focalización del Programa Sembrando Vida Elaborado por*.

de Haldevang, M. (2021, March 8). *How Mexico's Vast Tree-Planting Program Ended Up Encouraging Deforestation*. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-03-08/a-tree-planting-program-in-mexico-may-encourage-deforestation>

de Vries, Y. A. (2016). *Contingencies in Land Use Change-An Ethnography of Local Landscape Dynamics in an Ejido in Marqués de Comillas, Mexico* [Master]. Wageningen University and Research.

Dunne, C. (2011). The place of the literature review in grounded theory research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), 111–124.

Egelhoff, R. (2021, October 15). *Is a massive government tree-planting program doing more harm than good?* Mexico News Daily. <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/is-the-massive-government-tree-planting-program-doing-more-harm-than-good/>

Gallardo López, F., Hernández Chontal, M. A., Linares Gabriel, A., Morales Narváez, O. A., Navarrete Rodríguez, V., Estrella García, A. G., Nazario Lezama, N., Chi Pech, V. M., Lavín Castañeda, J., Perea Gómez, L., Ruiz Molina, V. E., García Rodríguez, D. A., Sósol Reyes, D., Beristain Moreno, M. E., Camacho Moreno, E., Torres Tadeo, C. M., López Escudero, R. de J., & Morales Pablo, R. (2023). *Reinterpretaciones y transformaciones en la aplicación del programa Sembrando Vida en México desde la voz de los actores* (F. Gallardo López, M. A. Hernández Chontal, A. Linares Gabriel, & O. A. Morales Narváez, Eds.). Ediciones Comunicación Científica. <https://doi.org/10.52501/cc.114>

Geovany González Cruz, E., & Ponce Dimas, T. (2022). *La organización como espacio de poder y desigualdad* (Vol. 1). Huika Mexihco. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359055116>

Glaser, Barney, G., Strauss, & Anselm, L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory. Strategies for qualitative research*. IL: Aldine Transaction.

Goulding, C. (2012). The Identification and Explanation of Concepts and Categories. In *Grounded Theory* (pp. 133–152). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209236.n6>

Hevia, F. J., & Hernandez Castillo, Z. (2022). Pertinencia cultural en el diseño y en la implementación de programas sociales. El caso del Programa Sembrando Vida en México 2018-2022. In *Hacer Políticas Sociales: Estudios sobre experiencias de implementación y gestión en América Latina* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 69–95). Estudios Sociológicos Editoria. www.estudiossociologicos.com.ar

Hickey, S., & Mohan, G. (2004). *Participation: from Tyranny to transformation: exploring new approaches to participation in development*. Zed books.

INEGI. (2010). Censo general de Poblacion y vivienda, Mexico. *Instituto de Estadistica, Geografia e Informatica*.

Kathy, C. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative research*. Sage.

Laguna Idali, R. C. R. J. C. (2022). *Construcción de indicadores de evaluación del componente social del Programa Sembrando Vida (PSV)* [Bachelor Thesis]. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana .

Macario, P., Caudillo, G., Canales De La Fuente, E. A., & Arenas, G. M. (n.d.). *Articulación del programa Sembrando Vida, con la red nacional de nodos para el impulso de la economía social solidaria en México: El caso del NODESS ESSALIA*.

Mahesh, & Nalini. (2018). *Rural household decision making in land use transitions two Mexican ejidos of the municipality Marques de Comillas, Chiapas* [Master]. Wageningen University and Research.

Marquez, R. A. (n.d.). ¿Sembrando vida? Excelsior. Retrieved April 7, 2023, from <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/ricardo-alexander-marquez/sembrando-vida/1368380>

Mills, J., Birks, M., & Hoare, K. (2014). Grounded Theory. In *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide* (pp. 107–122). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473920163.n7>

Morales Nunez, M. G. S. (2020). *Sembrando Vida - Programa de grandes expectativas y áreas de atención prioritaria*.

Noble, H., & Mitchell, G. (2016). What is grounded theory? *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 19(2), 34–35. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2016-102306>

Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. In *Evidence-Based Nursing* (Vol. 18, Issue 2, pp. 34–35). BMJ Publishing Group. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054>

Ortega, A. (2021, November 4). *Sembrando Vida, uno de los programas con menor desempeño del gobierno federal*. *Expansión Política*. <https://politica.expansion.mx/mexico/2021/11/04/seembrando-vida-el-programa-mal-calificado-del-gobierno-federal>

Paulin Hernandez, H. P., & Rosales Esteva, L. B. (2021). *Informe de resultados del seguimiento físico y operativo del programa sembrando vida*.

Pedraza López, J. (2021). El programa estratégico Sembrando Vida: ¿promueve la soberanía alimentaria? *Grietas. Revista Crítica de Política Internacional*, 147–161.

Pulse News Mexico Staff. (2021, November 30). *AMLO's Tree-Planting Scheme Is Ravaging Mexico's Rainforests* . Pulse News Mexico. <https://pulsenewsmexico.com/2021/11/30/amlos-tree-planting-scheme-is-ravaging-mexicos-forests/>

RAN. (2015). Padron e Historia de Nucleos Agrarios. *Registro Nacional Mexico*.

Runde, D., Sandin, L., & Parham, I. (2021). Opportunities for the U.S. - Mexico Economic Partnership under the Biden and AMLO Administrations. *Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep30081>

Santigo, A. (2022, May 15). *Sembrando Vida: Counterinsurgency, Neoliberalism, and Clientelism*. Avispa Midia. <https://avispa.org/sembrando-vida-counterinsurgency-neoliberalism-and-clientelism/>

Secretaria de Bienestar. (2021). *DIAGNÓSTICO DEL PROGRAMA PRESUPUESTARIO SEMBRANDO VIDA 2021*.

Secretaria de Bienestar. (2022). *Reglas de Operacion del Programa Sembrando Vida*.

Thornberg, R. (2012). Informed grounded theory. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 56(3), 243–259.

Tornberg, R., & Dunne, C. (2019). Literature review in grounded theory. In Anthony Bryant & Kathy Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 206–221). Sage.

unknown. (2022, September 26). *Evaluaciones del CONEVAL al Programa Sembrando Vida*. Blog CONEVAL. <http://blogcneval.gob.mx/wordpress/index.php/2022/09/26/evaluaciones-del-cneval-al-programa-sembrando-vida/>

Urquhart, C. (2017a). Building the Theory. In *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (pp. 106–128). SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196.n6>

Urquhart, C. (2017b). Grounded Theory Method (GTM). In *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (pp. 14–34). SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196.n2>

Urquhart, C. (2017c). Research Design Using GTM. In *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (pp. 55–77). SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196.n4>

Urquhart, C. (2017d). The Contribution of GTM – Some Reflections. In *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (pp. 176–190). SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196.n9>

Urquhart, C. (2017e). Writing up a Grounded Theory Study. In *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (pp. 148–175). SAGE Publications, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196.n8>

U.S. Mission to Mexico. (2021). *U.S.-MEXICO JOINT STATEMENT ON SEMBRANDO OPORTUNIDADES - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Mexico*. U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico. <https://mx.usembassy.gov/u-s-mexico-joint-statement-on-sembrando-oportunidades/>

Valle-García, S. E. (2016). Environmental policies and socio-territorial impact in lacandon jungle 2002-2012. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 11(6), 875–885. <https://doi.org/10.2495/SDP-V11-N6-875-885>

van Haperen, L. (2019). *Unravelling the role of Nature's Contributions to People for land use decisions by ejidatarios in the Lacandon rainforest, México* [Master]. Wageningen University and Research.

Vazquez Vargas, N., Esquivel Fernández, E., Rojas Rustrian, R. M., Cavero Pérez, E. R., & Burguete Zúñiga, K. B. (2020). *Sembrando Vida : Programa de grandes expectativas y areas de atencion prioritaria*.

Warman, J., Zuniga, J. I., & Cervera, M. (2021). WRI México Análisis sobre los impactos ambientales de Sembrando Vida en 2019. *WRI Mexico*.

Zermenio-Hernandez, I., Pingarroni, A., & Martinez-Ramos, M. (2016). Agricultural land-use diversity and forest regeneration potential in human-modified tropical landscapes. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, 230, 210–220.

9. Annex

9.1. Questions for participants of program

Introduction to Interview:

- Thank you for your time. Check if everything is ok, prepared.
- Ask permission to record, explain that it is only for you, which facilitates the work.
- Explain that everything that is said is confidential, that no one else will know about this.
- In the thesis I will not use any names, it will be anonymous.
- Explain what is going to happen today, the 3 fields of interest.
- Then start with the first one >> should help people feel at ease with the topic.
- End with something that allows to be in a good mood (not sad or angry).

1. Own production and market integration (aims to enter in conversation and understand, interviews living situation, work, family etc.)

- What products do you sell, what quantity, when, where, how are prices determined?
- Are you satisfied with this situation? What would you like to change?
- How often do you go to different places to buy food (chajul/zamora/comitan)?
- Are you satisfied with the (food) supply you receive? What could be improved?

2. Successes and problems with Sembrando Vida (at household, ejido and regional level)

- What is your current opinion about the Sembrando Vida project? What do you like about the programme? What do you dislike about it?
- Has the project affected/benefited your household (food consumption, financially, work)?
- How has the programme affected the ejido? Do you have the impression that the project has brought the village closer together, that you help each other more, that you take care of each other, that you meet more people, that the village is better off economically than before, that the food habits have changed, the supply in the shops, that there is more equality between women and men?
- Do you see or know of other effects of the programme in other ejidos of MdC (comparison with other places)?
- What problems do you see in relation to the project? What could be done better?
- What has gone well in the last years since the application/implementation/start? What has not gone well?
- How is your relationship with government representatives/technicians/scholarship holders/other people in your group etc.?

3. Plans for the future (SeVi and in general)

- How do you plan for the future of your farm/plot? Will you try to continue with Sembrando Vida?
- How do you plan to sell your products next year?
- What kind of support would you like to have, from whom (ejido, family, government)? What is the accountability like?
- Are there plans to sell in a cooperative or develop joint marketing/processing (in another ejido)?
- What plans do governments have (idea of distribution centres, money withheld)?
- What would they do if the Sembrando Vida programme does not succeed in two years, and if they pay less or change the conditions?

9.2. Questions for Becarios (Trainees)

1. Personal background situation and work as becario ?

- If I understand that correctly you as becario are not allowed to have sembrando vida ? But do you own or work on the field with you family or with other farmers ? Do you produce products that you sell ? if yes which ? Who and where do you sell them ?
- How did it happened that you became a becario ? When was that, for how long ?
- How would you describe your work as becario ? What are your tasks and responsibilities ?
- What do you like about your job what don't you like ?
- How old are you and where do you live ? If you live with you family, do you have plans to start you own household soon ? I heard that the becarios get payed 2000 pesos per month for one year... How has this payments affected you livelihood ? What do you do with the extra money ? Do you think the payment is enough/fair for the amount of work you have ?
- If you could work longer as becario, would you like to do that ? Why /why not ?

2. Successes and problems with Sembrando Vida (at household, ejido and regional level) > talking about what they can observe and think about the participants

- What is your current opinion about the Sembrando Vida project? What do you like about the programme? What do you dislike about it?
- Has the project affected your household (food consumption, financially, work)?
- How has the programme affected the ejido? Do you have the impression that the project has brought the village closer together, that you help each other more, that you take care of each other, that you meet more people, that the village is better off economically than before, that the food habits have changed, the supply in the shops, that there is more equality between women and men?
- Do you see or know of other effects of the programme in other ejidos of MdC (comparison with other places)?

- What problems do you see in relation to the project? What could be done better?
- What has gone well in the last years since the application/implementation/start? What has not gone well?
- How is your relationship with government representatives/technicians/scholarship holders/other people in your group etc.?

3. Plans for the Future

- How do you plan your future after the job as beacrio? Has it influenced your future plan you had before?
- What do you think will happen with the products from sembrando vida next year and the year after that?
- What will happen to the Sembrando vida plots after the program finished?
- What should the government do in the next two years, to support the farmers?
- If there is a follow-up program what could the government do better?
- Can you give me the contact to the technician /supervisor for an interview? Do you know if he is coming soon?