

# Rural Association: Socio-Economic alternative for family Farmers

Rita R. M. Costa<sup>1</sup>, Denes D. Vieira<sup>2</sup>, Marcia B. Moreira<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UNEB, Brazil

<sup>2,3</sup>UNIVASF, Brazil

Received: 11 Nov 2021,

Received in revised form: 11 Dec 2021,

Accepted: 20 Dec 2021,

Available online: 31 Dec 2021

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**Keywords— Family farming, Rural  
associativism, Sustainable Development.  
Agroecology.**

**Abstract**—This study sought to describe rural associations as a development strategy for the strengthening of settled family farmers, identifying motivations and the influence of their social trajectories on the individual and collective results obtained by the members. The methodology used is descriptive with a quanti-qualitative approach, characterized as a case study. As a data collection instrument, interviews were used using a semi-structured script, informal setting and participant observation. For data treatment, content analysis and mathematical tabulation were used for data analysis. The main result of this study demonstrates associative action as rural development strategies, contributing to new opportunities,

## I. INTRODUCTION

Many challenges have arisen, and many ideas defended in an attempt to establish the promotion of sustainable rural development, from an ecosocial perspective, in an attempt to promote and enable the strengthening of the agrarian sector, contributing to social justice.

The construction of this new scenario under the rural development bias involves environmental issues, such as social inclusion, the production of healthy foods, which should overcome the limited approaches related to economic growth and traditional models aimed exclusively at increasing agricultural productivity.

Thus, family farming seeks to impose itself in the different scenarios presented in the rural environment. Rural producers face several challenges to maintain themselves economically and ensure the sustainability of their production units in an increasingly competitive market, demanding, in addition to quality products, an understanding of how commercial activities work. In this context, family farming rural producers seek ways to

strengthen themselves, deepen bonds and constitute social relationships as viable alternatives that enable the development and sustainability of production units. So, in line with the insertion of public policies, they seek the necessary strengthening in associativism and cooperativism.

The working class's need to organize itself as a process of establishing social order erupts with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Associativism, as well as cooperativism and unionism, are forms of organizations that arose from the resistance and the need to occupy space for conquests of rights, improvements, strengthening, becoming active subjects, actors capable of political, economic, cultural transformations. and social. According to Rech (2000), agricultural associations become an alternative for farmers, with regard to their insertion in local and global markets.

So, through associativism, rural organizations have more strength and representation with the government and society. In light of this, did the research lead to an understanding of the main motivations that farmers had to

form the association? Why do they adopt the principles of Agroecology in their production units? How does the association contribute to the rural development of these farmers?

Thus, this research aimed to describe the role of agricultural associations and analyze their contributions as a strategy for economic and social development, having as reference the experience of the Association of Settlers of the Bela Conquista Farm, in the municipality of Itiúba (BA), Brazil, for being a reference in agroecological production, with recognition for the achievements obtained from the social organization, the challenges faced since the occupation and conquest of its space, committed to the struggle and for contributing to the formation of other groups in the Agrarian Reform.

The article is divided into four sections, starting with this introduction, which contextualizes and gives an overview of the topic. In the next session, the theoretical foundation that supported the research is presented. Subsequently, the methodological procedures used to develop the research are presented. Then, there is the analysis of the results. Finally, the final considerations are presented.

## II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Association is a group of people organized for non-economic purposes, constituted as a legal entity governed by private law, institutionalized and registered in a notary's office. Rural associations become a necessary alternative for rural producers to organize themselves in the search for economically viable alternatives, based on collective actions for the benefit of their members, in a fair and equitable manner.

Associative organizations as legal personality can be constituted in the form of associations or cooperatives, with different objectives, but with the same ideological principle. It is known that this format of collective organization in the Brazilian rural environment has existed since the colonial period, but it was from the 1990s onwards that farmer associations gained a prominent position and conquered space in public policies, in the governmental sphere.

According to Callou & Tauk Santos (2008), the theme started to assume a particular relevance in questions related to associations and solidarity economy, since the public policies directed to the sector prioritize family farmers organized in associations and cooperatives. The 2004 National Policy for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (Pnater), through the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE)

seek to support initiatives aimed at marketing products from family farming and its insertion in the markets. Among Pnater's goals:

*Encourage the construction and consolidation of associative forms that, in addition to creating better forms of competitiveness, generate bonds of solidarity and strengthen the capacity for collective intervention of social actors as protagonists of sustainable rural development processes (BRASIL, 2004).*

According to Furtado's (1974) analysis, the notion of economic development that has been practiced is conceived from the perspective of capital accumulation processes, where technological progress invests in increasing the level of production. While this progress signals economic growth, it is not development. The same thought corroborates Caporal (2009, p. 24).

When dealing with sustainable development, Nascimento (2012) analyzed it under three dimensions: the environmental, which involves producing and consuming in order to ensure that ecosystems can maintain their self-repair or resilience capacity; the economic one, which supposes the increase in the efficiency of production and consumption with a growing economy of natural resources; and eco-efficiency or social, where a sustainable society assumes that all citizens have the minimum necessary for a decent life and that no one absorbs goods, natural and energy resources that are harmful to others. This means eradicating poverty and defining an acceptable standard of inequality, delimiting minimum and maximum limits of access to material goods. In short, it would be to implement the desirable social justice.

From this perspective, Abramovay (2010) admits sustainable development as a process of permanent expansion of the substantive freedoms of individuals under conditions that encourage the maintenance and regeneration of services provided by ecosystems to human societies. In this sense, human cooperation and the way in which subjects act within the scope of this cooperation are determining factors, as societies choose to use the ecosystems on which they depend.

So, the assumption of agroecology emphasizes the importance of interaction of agroecosystems with each other, as this is the only way to improve the quality of crops without sacrificing natural resources, with self-sustainability, valuing rural workers and preserving the environment. According to Pádua (2001), agroecology goes beyond the management of natural resources, configuring itself as a new bias in rural issues that must be able to align values of quality of life, with work enabling

income, a movement of democracy and political emancipation, in the same process.

In light of the above, the research is justified by the changes that have emerged in the rural sphere and the need for dynamics of territorial development has raised the interest in understanding the social relations that organize these economic and social construction transformations in the Associação dos Settlers of the Bela Conquista Farm.

### III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was classified as quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative approach aimed to provide an overview of a given fact, being also classified as descriptive research (GIL, 2010), characterized as a case study, an empirical study that investigates a current phenomenon within its context of reality, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined and in which various sources of evidence are used (YIN, 2005, p. 32).

For data collection, the following research techniques and instruments were applied: semi-structured interviews, informal discussion setting and participant observations. Information was collected to identify the motivations for forming the association, personal and collective motivations, the benefits for members in relation to a certain group of settled rural producers, which aspects of the individual social trajectory contributed to adopting the principles of agroecology

Ludke and André (2007) state that interview techniques are favorable for considering an efficient instrument in data collection, as it allows the immediate and current capture of the desired information, with practically any type of informant and on the most varied topics. Based on this instrument, the interview was chosen here, as it allows for a more detailed understanding of the object of study.

To understand and validate the interpretation of data, in the quantitative approach, the use of mathematical language was used, as percentages to enable better analysis of descriptions and abstract construction of the interviewees' statements for each question raised. The quantitative method is more deductive and part of a larger proposition, based on existing theories (axioms), to ascertain from field data (facts) the hypotheses of interest to the research" (SORDI, 2017, p.77).

Thus, it was possible to resort to the analysis of research already carried out, based on discussions in relation to associative practices, cooperatives, family farming, social capital, local development, by authors such as Schneider (2010), Medeiros (2010), Arruda (2006), Silva (2015), Souza (2017) Singer (2002), in addition to

others who implemented projects based on these theories. As the locus of the research, the Association of Settlers of the Bela Conquista Farm, in the municipality of Itiúba (BA), Brazil, was chosen.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Bela Conquista Settlement is located about 3 km from the seat of the municipality of Itiúba/BA, which is approximately 377 km from Salvador, with a population of 36,113 inhabitants (IBGE - 2013). Founded in 1989 and the production-occupation system was instituted, with about 13 hectares (ha) for each settler and the collective of an area of 112 ha.

His occupation was marked by a trajectory of struggle and resistance. Before the occupation, an Experimental Station of the State of Bahia operated at the site, in the creation of cattle, which was not successful. Thus, after more than 12 years of being exploited by some farmers, landless workers occupied the farm, being evicted with the action of the police within 48 hours, this fact was violently registered in the interviewees' memories.

With the support of the Rural Workers Union (STR), the Diocese of the city of Senhor do Bonfim (BA) and the Pastoral Commission of Terra Centro Norte (CPT) they were fundamental to the conquest of space and regularization of ownership documentation. The initial activities were carried out collectively, without the use of pesticides, maintained with the resources of their own production and despite the difficulties they sought to produce quality products, but they were not enough to invest and support their families. It was through the participation in the free fair in the city that they gradually gained respect and recognition.

Even so, the difficulties were numerous and under the guidance of the union and the pastoral, they decided to form the association to have access to public policies. The Bela Conquista Farm Settlement Association, founded on February 2, 1994, has 35 families and currently has 62 families.

The research sample corresponds to 21 families who agreed to participate, including the current President and three other previous presidents.

In data collection, the motivation most cited by respondents was the need for subsistence, given the numerous difficulties faced to maintain their production and provide for their families. After the constitution of the Association, the production that was previously only marketed by the farmers themselves at the city's open market, began to serve, for a period, government projects and programs such as the National School Feeding Plan

(PNAE) and the National Company of Supply (CONAB). Thus, the interviewees were unanimous and agreed that the settlement's associative organization increased political alliances and fundraising.

The Association maintains the creation of cattle and sheep, the sale of which is subject to meeting cash demands, as they are intended to meet the association's eventual or urgent financial needs. Its purpose is to meet the scarcity of monetary resources for investments in fixed assets, maintenance or to help a settler with financial difficulties. Another source of funding is a Collective Market, which has been financed for approximately 12 years by a government project aimed at associations. This project is intended for the acquisition of goods to supply the settled families and to produce working capital.

Understanding the need to diversify its production, the association allocated resources for the implementation of two small agribusinesses: the fruit pulp and yoghurt factory, whose productions were mainly destined to meet the needs of the PNAE; and the Cooperative of the city of Monte Santo (BA), respectively. Thus, the main actions carried out by the association are aimed at improving the physical and economic structure of its members.

Since the beginning, the association has maintained the internal agroecological policy for its cultivation and animal husbandry, as it understands that maintaining production in this standard, in addition to aligning quality of life values, maintains the self-sustainability of the conquered space.

When asked if they heard an increase in articulations for those settled in cooperation networks regardless of the association, 85.71% said no; but, regarding the increase in the strengthening of rural producers from the association, 100% said yes, as the association offered advantages to the settlers, they recognize that through the projects signed they could have an income in addition to that obtained with the fairs, for investments in improvements in housing and production, increased self-esteem and power for personal fulfillment.

In the approach to identifying whether there are conflicts of interest when participating in the association, 70% said yes, as it is a limited group, the number of members to run for management is almost always restricted and it ends up that some family members have more chances, because those closest to the president have more advantages over other members in terms of articulation. However, 100% confirm that all earnings obtained by the association are shared equally.

So, when the question was whether there were personal benefits for whoever was president, 100% said no, proving the collective conscience. The awareness of the collective

space is described in everyone's statements, which state that all decisions related to the association are discussed in advance and always with voting and approval of the best proposal that allows benefits to the collective. It was identified that 75% recognize that their life trajectory, their experiences with the cause, influence the association's decisions.

In order to participate in public notices and comply with their requirements, people from the board of directors may, at some point, take a training and improvement course in the financial area to contribute to the management. At the present date of the survey, they are not participating in any project.

With regard to social relationships, 100% confirmed that the association improved the field of their relationships, becoming more cooperative and participatory in social movements. Understanding the importance of associativism was important to understand that 71.43% of respondents claim to carry out collective actions regardless of the association, the result shows that the social trajectories of these agents enabled a look towards the collective in fact. Therefore, in the participants' statements, the most prominent person was cited by 70% of respondents as one of the former president of the association and one of the founders, for having been one of the greatest articulators in achieving benefits for settled producers.

Another important result pointed out by the research is that the association became a reference in social movements, contributed to the organization of COASB - Central of Community Associations of Occupants and Settlers of the Semi-Arid of Bahia, to provide institutional support to camps and settlements in the region, later contributing to origin of CETA - Movement of Camped and Settled Workers, to which the association is still affiliated. Since its constitution, the associative organization has allowed it to contribute to the conquest of 16 new settlement areas.

Given the above, the research result demonstrates the role and importance of associativism with a broader dimension in cooperation strategies and the immense contributions in the participation in mobilizations of movements aimed at defending the rural space.

## V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The strength of associativism is in cooperation, through the integration of people who commit their individual contributions to the collective, ensuring their own existence. Thus, the Bela Conquista Farm Settlement Association emerged, which became an active agent in

causes aimed at family farming, especially for settled families. Influenced by the individual social trajectory, marked by struggle, but also by achievements, it made it possible to increase ties of sociability and solidarity with other groups, being recognized as the cultural identity of a people who struggle to build opportunities, conquer their space in the countryside and enable its development.

Today, the association has social visibility by residents, municipalities and institutions that recognize it for the quality of its products, defense of agroecology, for its suitability and collective commitment in the pursuit of sustainable development. Therefore, family farmers associated with practicing more sustainable forms of agriculture, keeping their production and property free of chemical products, have become a reference in the agroecology region.

That said, this article sought to describe and analyze the contributions and benefits given by agricultural associations to rural producers, specifically those from settled family farming. Their experiences linked to the association enabled new opportunities, new social relationships through cooperation networks, enabling them to carry out projects, contributing to Sustainable Rural Development.

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