

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Social and solidarity economy and agroecology in family agriculture cooperatives in Brazil as a form of development of sustainable agriculture

We urgently need to rethink solidarity and social economy strategies focused on endogenous development subjects and rural world. Social questions as food sovereignty, right to food, gender equality or small productions viability must be addressed and evaluated, among other reasons, because of their current importance in the political agendas of organisms such as the FAO or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These institutions have been warning for decades about the social and environmental need of turning the goal of food sovereignty into reality.

The concept of Food Sovereignty was defined in 1996 during the FAO Summit on the Right to Food in Rome. There, the *Vía Campesina* movement defined Food Sovereignty as a social and political concept essential to build bridges between the agroecological and social and solidarity economy perspectives. This movement referred to the sovereignty of communities, peoples and consumers in order to decide what to eat, what to produce and how the territorial development must be according to its limitations and endogenous characteristics. This concept proposed a higher visibility for the peasant movement, taking into consideration the lack of attention paid as an intermediary agent in international forums and decision-making spaces on the World Trade Organisation or the development policies of other international institutions.

With the proposal of an agenda focused on concepts (endogenous development, Food Sovereignty), we need located agri-food systems which work from the logics of community economies, social-solidarity economies and caring economies. We consider that our monitoring and researching projects must reflect this need of theoretical and methodological frames. These ones combine inputs from different fields of social and environmental sustainability.

Because of these reasons, this paper aims to understand how the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as well as the Agroecology can contribute to the economic, social, ecological and political sustainability of family agriculture in Brazil. For this purpose, the dimensions and different ways for viability of selected family exploitations will be exposed. The study is about collecting how the ESS and the Agroecology dialogue on many factors related to sustainability in the production system and peasants' organisation.

One of the commonest problems of many SSE experiences is how environmental protection remains at a second stage, if compared to democracy or redistribution issues. Therefore, by adopting Agroecology, the current agroecosystems artificialisation model could be changed. This system would be more suitable for social and ecological reproduction through new proposals of technical, ecological, agronomical and social production. Via this production, a sustainable management of natural resources could be achieved avoiding degradation of the environment.

Another question to deal in this paper is the role developed by the short circuits of commercialisation in the promotion of agroecological strategies conceived at the same time as an answer from the perspective of social and solidarity economy. Short circuits of commercialisation are essential elements, especially for peasants and for the endogenous rural development, in order to link again production and consumption to principles of proximity, reliance, and sustainability. The adoption of short circuits as a strategy for territory sovereignty and a defence is a way of guaranteeing the economic aspects as well as the social ones in Agroecology.

Our case studies are based in representative experiences of different ways of commercialisation in the Northern and Southern regions of Brazil: *Associação dos Agricultores Ecologistas de Ipê y Antonio Prado* (Ecologist Farmers Association of Ipê and Antonio Prado, AECIA) and the *Cooperativa de Irituia* (Cooperative of Irituia). The AECIA is in the Brazilian province of Rio Grande do Sul, Northeast region, in the municipalities of Antonio Prado and Ipê. These present an intermediate level of capitalisation, where the production systems integrate vegetal and animal productions, outlining the conventional and ecological fructiculture (grape, apple, peach), ecological horticulture, dairy cattle, marking livestock, pigs, birds and corn. The Cooperative of Irituia is in the Northern region of Brazil, province of Pará, municipality of Irituia, in the Northeast mesoregion. Its population mainly lives in the rural environment. Its local economy, which is based in agriculture and wood extraction and transformation, is mainly composed of family peasants that practice subsistence farming. Both belong to the tradition of family agriculture in Brazil, but they present a different approach in their ecological, community or economic perspective where they interact.

Regarding the method for the case study, we have applied a qualitative approach through several social research techniques, some of them are explicative (interviews, experts panel), other are more inductive (survey based in three dimensions: Agroecology, New Commons and SSE) and other are more descriptive (secondary sources, interviews to key informers). With all this material, we have made a proposal of social-economic, social-cultural and productive sustainable indicators. In this way, we can test the sustainability approach of these initiatives in the long term.

Results of the research point to the existence of differences between the analysed cooperatives regarding productive, social, political and economic viability, not only from the SSE but also the Agroecology. Because of this, the AECIA offers better values in all the studied items instead of the Cooperative of Irituia. At a theoretical level, this work demonstrates a more complex approach to the short circuits in the agri-food channels. Furthermore, from a common agroecological and SSE point of view, those are introduced as an umbrella for democratisation of our agri-food systems, meanwhile defending the right to food as well as a sustainable and healthful production suitable to the physical and cultural context.

KEYWORDS: Agroecology, Cooperatives, Brazil, Sustainable development, Social and Solidarity Economy.