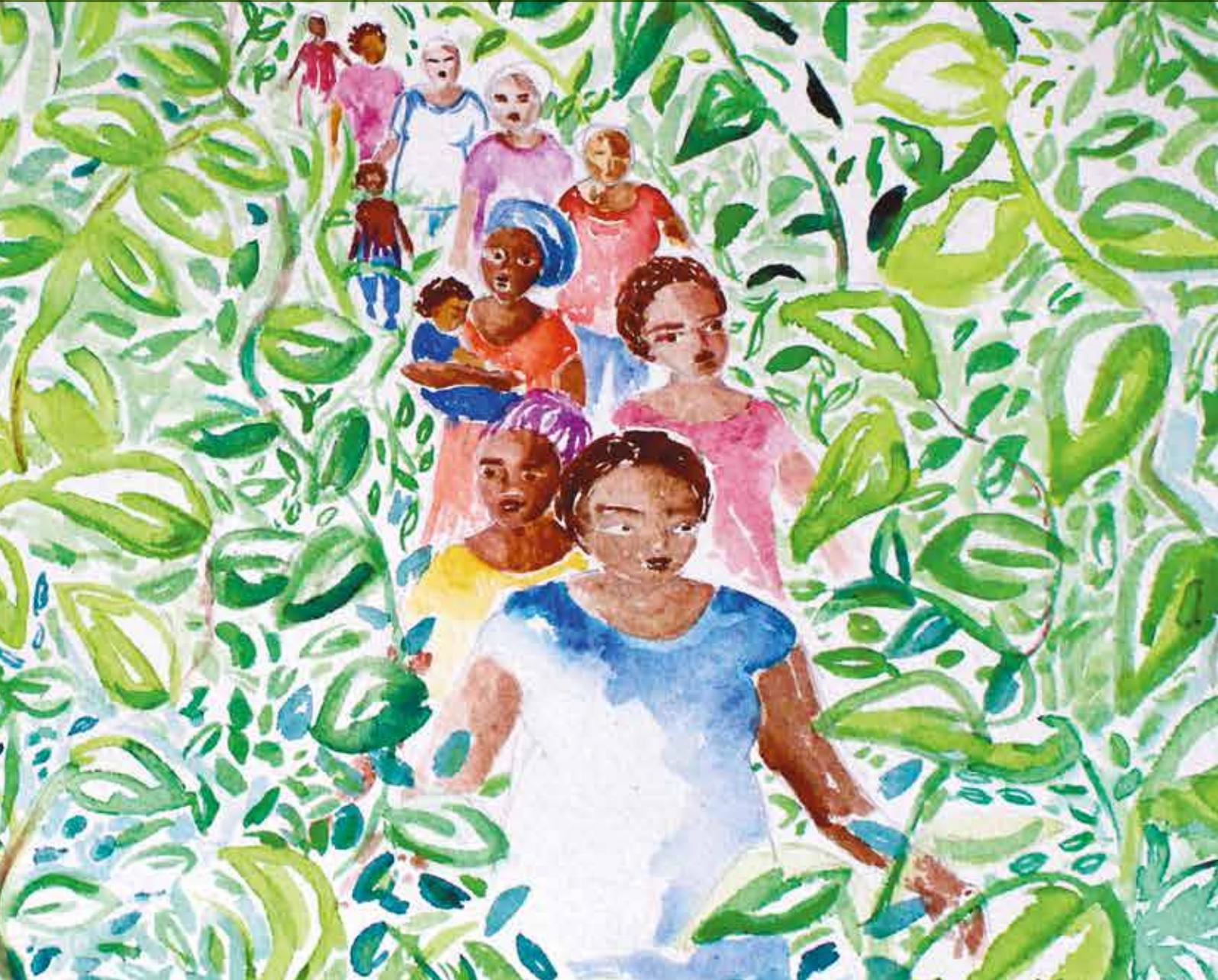


FEMINIST PRACTICES FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE



WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AND AGROECOLOGY
IN THE VALE DO RIBEIRA REGION

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São Paulo, 2018



Feminist Practices for Economic Change
Women's autonomy and agroecology in the Vale do Ribeira region

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FOREWORD

In 1998, *Sempreviva Organização Feminista* (SOF, Sempreviva Feminist Organisation) published a book entitled “*Gênero e agricultura familiar*” (Gender and family farming), which tells the story of a process of collective construction of knowledge that involved rural women from autonomous women’s movements, the trade union movement and NGOs working on agroecology. This seed grew and bore fruit. From reflections on descriptive concepts such as “gender” and “family farming”, we have advanced towards the affirmation of alternative political positions: “feminism”, “food sovereignty” and “agroecology”¹¹.

We have shared this journey with numerous sisters, many of which are active in the *Grupo de Trabalho (GT) de Mulheres da Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia* (ANA, the Women’s Working Group of the National Agroecology Coalition) or the *Rede Economia e Feminismo* (REF, Economy and Feminism Network). Together, we participated in the collective construction of public policies to strengthen women’s economic autonomy in rural areas. One result of this was the public calls for tenders for *Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural* (ATER, Technical Assistance and Rural Extension) services in agroecology and for women launched by the *Diretoria de Políticas para as Mulheres Rurais do extinto Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário* (DPMR/MDA, the Department of Policies for Rural Women of the now extinct Ministry of Agrarian Development). We felt impelled to respond to the public call for *ATER Mulheres* (ATER Women) in the Vale do Ribeira – a region where we have helped build the World March of Women and policies to combat violence against women. While im-

plementing the ATER programme, we followed the principles of the collective construction of knowledge – a fundamental characteristic of our feminism and agroecology²².

SOF began to work in the region in 2009 to create the conditions necessary to ensure women’s effective access to policies in the territories. From December 2015 to March 2017, we worked with ATER Women to provide technical assistance based on agroecological practices to 240 women family farmers, artisanal fishermen and quilombola and indigenous women from 13 municipalities. Through this process, we created or strengthened 15 women’s groups.

When we arrived in Vale do Ribeira, we were met with a lot of skepticism – a reaction that is common in regions that are rich in nature and cultural diversity and poor in terms of infrastructure. We often heard, “it’s just another project”. Most project initiatives in the region are related to infrastructure and follow the same scheme – one that does not listen to what the communities want to do and does not provide them support when difficulties begin to appear. We had the challenge of distinguishing our work from this type of action.

Little by little, we worked to build relations of trust with the women and spark their interest in opportunities of growth. Our actions were guided by the goal of promoting the self-organisation of women in groups in their communities; the recognition of the work that they do and the knowledge that they already have; the dialogue of knowledge and reflecting collectively on different kinds of challenges that range from the infestation of snails to the closure of rural schools.

1. For a report on this process, see Nobre 2013.

2. For a discussion on the construction of agroecological knowledge based on the debate held by REF, see <http://www.sof.org.br/2018/02/26/sintese-2014>



To respond to each group's demands, we innovated to find ways to deal with issues related to production, sales and political participation.

We deepened the analysis on our work with women farmers through an action-research project carried out together with the *Institut de Recherche pour le Développement* (IRD, Institute of research for development) from France and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) from Geneva, Switzerland. This research is part of the "Feminist Analysis of Social and Solidarity Economy Practices: Views from Latin America and India" project. Its goal was to examine how experiences in solidarity economy can or cannot go beyond the traditional view on what labour is and what production is in order to conceive other ways of organising the production of life. In the Vale do Ribeira region, the study helped us reflect on how to end the fragmentation of the subject (mother, wife, woman farmer), go beyond the specialisation of organisations (sales, territorial rights and food security), and build concrete alternatives on the ground. These reflections continue to be pursued in the framework of the project entitled "The Feminist and Solidarity Economy: actions to strengthen women's economic autonomy" being executed in partnership with men and women researchers from the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). The *Associação Mulheres e Economia Solidária* (Ame-sol, Association of Women in the Solidarity Economy) is also participating in the project.

In March 2017, SOF continued its work in the Vale do Ribeira area via a training programme organised together with Christian Aid and the support of the British Council's Newton Fund. The programme was organised into three thematic areas: women's personal and collective

autonomy, agroecological practices, and the social construction of markets.

Between April and December 2017, 63 activities were held, which brought together two or more communities or women farmers' groups and participants of consumer groups. A large seminar "The Feminist and Solidarity Economy: Redesigning the territory" (<http://www.sof.org.br/2017/10/24/desafios-alternativas-e-organizacao-das-mulheres-do-vale-do-ribeira-sao-debatidos-em-seminario-e-feira/>) and a four-day training programme (<http://www.sof.org.br/2017/11/27/mulheres-do-vale-do-ribeira-participam-de-formacao-sobre-economia-feminista-e-agroecologia/>) were also held. A total of 238 women and 29 men participated in this process.

In this publication, we share the results of this process. We begin with an introduction to the context of the region and the principles that guide us. We then present the methodological practices we used to build rural women's autonomy and agroecology.

We thank the family farmer, *quilombola*, indigenous and *caiçara* women from the Vale do Ribeira region for taking this journey with us. We also express our gratitude to our sisters and brothers from the solidarity consumer groups who are building roads to help share food and autonomy. We also thank our sisters from the education and research institutions involved, the *GT de Mulheres da ANA* (Women's WG of the National Agroecology Coalition) and the World March of Women who, in each of their areas of action, are liberating territories, one square metre at a time.

As semprevivas



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Located in the southern-most part of the state of São Paulo, the Vale do Ribeira region is the largest remaining stretch of Atlantic forest in Brazil. The presence of numerous “traditional” communities contributes to the conservation of this area. The region is home to 24 Guarani indigenous communities, 66 quilombola¹ communities and 7,037 family farms run by local peasant communities (*caipiras*), traditional fisherfolk communities (*caiçaras*) and migrants from Brazil’s big cities. The latter are often the children of peasants who had been expelled from their lands and forced to migrate to urban areas in the past and who are now moving back to rural areas.

The Vale do Ribeira covers an area of close to 18,000 square kilometres, divided up into 25 municipalities: Apiaí, Barra do Chapéu, Barra do Turvo, Cajati, Cananéia, Eldorado, Iguape, Ilha Comprida, Iporanga, Itaóca, Itapirapuá Paulista, Itariri, Jacupiranga, Juquiá, Juitituba, Miracatu, Pariquera-Açu, Pedro de Toledo, Peruíbe, Registro, Ribeira, Ribeirão Branco, São Lourenço da Serra, Sete Barras and Tapiraí. According to the Demographic Census of 2010, it has a population of 443,231 inhabitants, of which close to 26% live in rural areas. 50.2% of its inhabitants are men and 49.8% are women (IBGE, 2014).

A BIT OF HISTORY

In 1969, during the military dictatorship - a period in which the country was governed in an authoritarian, violent and undemocratic way - the Jacupiranga State Park was created in the region. Covering an area of 150,000 hectares spread out over six municipalities, one could find numerous



traditional communities who had already been living there for decades, migrant farmers who had settled in the region and cattle ranchers. According to conservation rules, farming was not allowed within the park’s area.

In 1970, the rural guerrilla group led by Carlos Lamarca, the *Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária* (VPR, Popular Revolutionary Vanguard), settled in the region, where it was strongly repressed by the state. Land conflicts due to uncertainty about the boundaries between areas, the overlap with areas of the park, land grabbing, and illegal logging and juçara palm tree extraction intensified during the dictatorship. Some elements persist even today and tension levels vary.

In the mid-1980s, the end of the military dictatorship put the struggle for land reform and the right to land back on the political agenda. Land conflicts escalated in the region with the assassination of farmers by hired gunmen and the criminalisation of traditional practices of growing crops and forest management. During this period, trade unions, associations and social pastoral committees in the region mobilised and became increasingly combative, which led to the establishment an agenda of negotiations of with public authorities. The 1980s was also a period of growing real estate speculation in the region, as land prices rose due to the improvements to the highways that cut across the region and the park, such as the Regis Bittencourt freeway (BR-116).

1. According to the Brazilian Anthropology Association, the term “quilombo” refers to “every rural black community that regroups descendants of slaves who engage in subsistence agriculture and whose cultural manifestations have strong ties with the past”.

Then, in the 1990s, large corporations sought to build hydroelectric dams in the Vale do Ribeira region. The attempt to construct the Tijuco Alto hydroelectric dam was one such case. The Tijuco Alto proposal was only defeated in 2018² after nearly 30 years of struggle by the communities in the region, coordinated by the *Movimento dos Ameaçados por Barragens do Vale do Ribeira* (MOAB, Movement of People Threatened by Dams in the Vale do Ribeira) and *Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens* (MAB, Movement of People affected by Dams).

In 2008, the Jacupiranga Mosaic of Conservation Units (Jacupiranga Mosaic) was created. Covering an area of 234,000 hectares, the Mosaic contains three parks, five sustainable development reserves (RDS), four environmental protection areas (APA) and two extractivist reserves (Resex). While the creation of the Jacupiranga Mosaic and the establishment of channels of dialogue with the affected communities reduced tensions, they did not resolve all of the problems. Some families who remained within the areas of the park question the boundaries that were set.

Throughout the 2000s, especially from 2003 on, after the election of a popular democratic government, some advances were made in the region. Various public programmes and policies were implemented with the goal of fighting inequalities, guaranteeing citizens' rights and strengthening the organisation of production and family farming, while promoting an approach based on sustainable development and solidarity.

Despite the publication of Decree no. 4887 on November 20, 2003, which regulates the procedure for the identification, recognition, delimitation, demarcation and titling of land occupied by heirs of quilombo communities, this issue con-

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTED OR STRENGTHENED BETWEEN 2003 AND 2016

- The obligation in the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (PNAE, or the National School Feeding Programme) to gradually purchase the products of family farmers
- *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (PAA, or Food Acquisition Programme)
- *Programa Nacional de Documentação da Trabalhadora Rural* (National Programme for the Documentation of Rural Women Workers)
- Special credit for women – Pronaf Women
- Sectoral Technical Assistance for Women
- *Programa de Organização Produtiva para as Mulheres Rurais* (Productive Organisation Programme for Rural Women)
- Creation of a special type of loans for women in the agrarian reform called “*Apoio Mulher*” or “Support Women”
- Right to register as the main beneficiary in programmes such as Bolsa Família (Family Allowance), *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House, My Life) and the guaranteed income programme, *Garantia Safra* (Harvest Guarantee)
- Inclusion of specific objectives for rural women in several national plans such as *Plano Brasil Sem Miséria* (BSM, the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan), *Plano de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* (Plansan, the Food and Nutritional Security Plan) and *Plano de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica* (Planapo, the Agroecology and Organic Production Plan), as well as agreed goals for the *Plano Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres* (PNPM, the National Plan of Policies for Women) and *Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável e Solidário* (PNDRSS, the National Plan on Sustainable Rural Development and Solidarity).

2. <https://g1.globo.com/sp/santos-regiao/noticia/justica-declara-extinta-concessao-para-usina-no-vale-do-ribeira-sp.ghtml>



tinues to be a source of tension for the majority of quilombo communities in the region, as the process of giving them the titles to their land has still not been finalised.

It was also in 2003 that laws, government bodies and specific programmes began to be adopted to promote women's economic autonomy, such as the public tender for ATER for women based on agroecology. Another important element was the changes made to public policy so that women could register as landowners, and not merely as spouses. These policies gave women the right to be the leaders and direct beneficiaries of several programmes and policies designed to promote their productive inclusion.

SCENARIOS AND CHALLENGES AFTER THE COUP IN BRAZIL

In May 2016, the disruption of the Brazilian institutional order by the parliamentary coup paved the way for major changes to all existing policies aimed at reducing social inequalities. The Ministry of Agrarian Development was eliminated and abruptly reduced to an institution with less political weight, a limited budget and a run by much smaller staff. Policies related to women's rights were also eliminated or shrunk to minimum operational levels, and no new public calls for tender for ATER for women have been issued since. Solidarity economy policies executed by the *Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária* (SENAES, the National Solidarity Economy Secretariat) were also drastically cut. Furthermore, by passing Constitutional Amendment 55/241 of December 2016, the federal government imposed a 20-year cap on public expenditure, whose immediate consequences were major cuts to spending on social programmes.

The women of farming and quilombola communities in the Vale do Ribeira region have felt the



RESISTANCE TO AGROCHEMICALS

- Women face many challenges in the struggle to defend their territories, their work and their autonomy. In the Vale do Ribeira region, the fight for land, food sovereignty and agroecological production have to deal with the contamination of food and water by agrochemicals. They also confront transnational agribusiness corporations that dominate the food industry and control everything from seeds to the sale of processed food. Two examples of this in the Vale do Ribeira region follow below.
- In the municipality of Eldorado, indigenous territories such as the Takuari village are surrounded by conservation areas and large banana plantations. Indigenous women affirm that they are affected every day by the aerial spraying of agrochemicals that contaminate their territories, crops and their bodies.
- Agribusiness also takes advantage of the sexual division of labour. In banana monocultures, also located in Eldorado, corporations hire women for wages that are 30% lower to inject agrochemicals into banana trees using syringes. Taking advantage of the fact that women are more dexterous, these corporations expose the women to Furadan – a toxic chemical used in banana plantations banned in countries of the European Union and Canada



IN DEFENCE OF OUR RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND A LIFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE

- The women of the Vale do Ribeira also fight for a life free from sexist violence. Sexist violence is violence from which women suffer because they are women. In places where there is a lot of conflict and where private actors attempt to establish control over and appropriate territories, violence against women is yet another tool of intimidation. There are numerous reports of aggression, domestic violence and feminicides, as well as sexual exploitation, especially along the highways.
- Even though the state should be adopting public policies to promote women's autonomy, it only acts to control them. The trust needed for women to feel safe enough to report situations of violence and accompany the progress of the legal proceedings is compromised in the current context. For women to feel stronger and present their complaints to the state, relations of trust must be built in the communities. For this to happen, the fight to defend territories – land, water and biodiversity – and the traditional and peasant communities' own forms of management must also incorporate the slogan “for a territory free from violence against women”.

impacts of the institutional breakdown. Besides the discontinuation of the ATER programme, the *Bolsa Família* national conditional cash transfer programme also suffered cuts. Moreover, the legal recognition of quilombola communities' land rights was challenged through a legal claim filed by a right-wing party that questioned the constitutionality of the legal recognition. This claim was later defeated in the Federal Supreme Court (STF).

During the previous popular government administrations, *Bolsa Família* direct transfers were seen as a basic income to be complemented by programmes offering incentives for productive inclusion. Now, municipal social workers have the job of controlling women farmers' activities while searching for evidence to show that the women are making sufficient income so they can be excluded from the programme. This creates tension in the lives of women who are both mothers and farmers and contributes to the fragmentation of their identity.

Since 2016, agrarian and environmental conflicts in the Vale do Ribeira region have escalated once again due to the recent approval of laws that facilitate the privatisation of the management of natural parks and promote financialisation mechanisms, such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity initiative (*Economia dos Ecossistemas e da Diversidade – Projeto TEEB*). One of these mechanisms, known as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation), uses areas in Vale do Ribeira as environmental compensation for the degradation of areas from the same biome in other parts of the country, as established by the Brazilian Forestry Code approved in 2012, despite strong opposition. These mechanisms integrate the “green economy” concept and seek to establish large financial corporations' control over nature, instead of ensuring that the population living in the region is the one to benefit.

REDD

- REDD is the abbreviation for “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation”, a compensation mechanism geared toward forests. As deforestation releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the idea of REDD is to maintain a carbon stock by keeping the forest standing.
- There are three types of REDD. The first is directly related to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation and degradation. The second, REDD+, also includes the conservation and sustainable management of forests, which refers mainly to reforestation. Finally, REDD++ involves agriculture based on a “good practices” approach. This includes, for instance, bans on the use of fire, which often results in the criminalisation of the quilombola communities’ traditional farming practices.
- It is worth recalling that the majority of forest areas are concentrated in tropical and developing countries. Thus, REDD is a strategy that clearly forces the problems of the countries of the North onto the countries of the South and interferes with their sovereignty. In the territories, contracts are signed with communities and peoples who often do not have the deeds to their land, which ends up obstructing the land titling process further.
- The contracts are signed for periods of anywhere from 30 to 99 years. Many attempts have been made to coopt leaders and divide communities, often by promising employment and income generating opportunities. But when communities sign on to REDD, what normally happens is they lose access to that area. What is more, the few jobs that exist are those of forest rangers.

TEEB AND PAYMENT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- TEEB is the acronym for The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity initiative. It is based on the idea that nature performs “services”, such as pollination by insects and birds, the beauty of landscapes or protecting the quality of water. TEEB puts a price on these “services” provided by nature in a controversial way. To do so, calculations are used that separate “use values”, such as food or wood, from “non-use values”, such as a forest in which no people live or a spring.
- The basis for putting a price on nature is the comparison between the costs of preserving and the costs of exploiting an environment. The calculation goes something like this: how much would it cost, for example, for a company to continue polluting water with its mining activities and treat this water afterwards? And how much would this company save if it were to preserve hydrographic basins instead of polluting them? Another example is pollination: if bees did not pollinate plants, how much would companies spend to do it? They then calculate what generates more profit and come to the conclusion that it is more profitable to preserve than to destroy. This creates a market for preservation.
- This proposal is being implemented in Brazil through *Pagamento por Serviços Ambientais* (PSA, or Payment for Environmental Services, PES) mechanisms. PSA projects are generally funded by governments and involve private institutions, such as corporations and NGOs, often international ones. Payments are made to the owners of the land or the population who lives on it. They are long-term projects, which can last from 15 to 40 or 60 years.



THE PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS THAT GUIDE US





ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-CLASSIST FEMINISM

Feminism is the women's movement that fights to change the world and women's lives. Women have waged long, hard battles to win rights in Brazil and all over the world. This is true of the right to work, to education and to vote, as well as the right to a retirement pension for rural women, to land ownership and public policies to combat violence against women. In centuries past, black women played a fundamental role in the fight to end slavery, and in Latin America, women actively participated in their countries' struggle for independence.

Feminism in Brazil today is fighting to defend the rights being destroyed since the coup d'état in 2016. As we continue to fight for retirement pensions and for the expansion and guaranteed access for all women, the coup government is working to restrict access and reduce pensions, and to eliminate this right altogether. We are also resisting the labour reform and cutbacks to health and education, as we know that these measures increase the burden on women who are responsible for care work. And we are fighting for an end to violence against women – a reality we are forced to deal with from the time we are children up to and throughout our adult lives. Patriarchy uses violence as a tool.

For us, patriarchy is the system in which men – individually or collectively – exert power and control over women's bodies, work and sexuality. Our society is not only patriarchal, but also extremely racist. Racism structures social relations in Brazil, which has been over-exploiting the labour of the black population and using violence as a means of control since the time of slavery. Capitalism is both racist and patriarchal. It is a system that incorporates these forms of domination and inequalities. Without them, it cannot survive.

ORGANISED WOMEN: THE PATH TO AUTONOMY

Feminism invests in the self-organisation of women in order to build a strong movement that is present everywhere. Self-organisation is when women unite in women-only groups or in spaces created specifically for women in mixed movements – that is, movements of both women and men, such as the trade union movement. This principle and this practice are fundamental for women's training, which uses their experiences and concrete lessons learned as a basis. Problems that limit our autonomy over our time, our work and production, our bodies, sexuality and other decisions about our lives are some of the issues discussed by women's groups. Thus, feminism transforms difficulties that many women experience in similar ways but in isolation into political issues.

In these spaces where women meet to debate and participate in training activities, the knowledge, stories, practices and forms of resistance that they share help them recognise women as women. Through these exchanges, we come to understand that there are many



similarities in the oppression from which we suffer as women in patriarchal societies, such as Brazilian society, despite the differences in the way that this oppression is expressed.

In the World March of Women, for example, we seek to recognise the diversity and inequalities among women and avoid treating our struggles and gender inequality merely as issues of identity. With the diversity of women as a basis, we seek to build joint actions to globally combat the current order of domination and oppression and establish a political plan for change. The challenge is to involve a large number of women, each with her own life story and experience in activism, while promoting interaction and mutual learning and based on this, build a new synthesis and starting points for the quest to build the utopia that we want.

Women's self-organising goes beyond building women-only spaces. It has to do with the collective construction of women as political subjects and defining priorities for their demands and the ways to make them heard. It is within self-organised spaces that women build their political agendas, strategies and forms of action.

One of the concrete gains from these processes is the fact that women become the leaders of not only their struggles, but also their own lives. This is why their husbands often begin to question their participation and the fact that they are away from home so often. This reaffirms what feminism has been saying for many decades: "the personal is political". The majority of women receive encouragement to continue participating, a ride to and from activities and attention from their sisters. Their participation also reinforces the idea that these spaces

are already bringing changes to their lives and advances in winning rights and policies. Thus, solidarity among women is also strengthened through the processes of self-organisation.

WOMEN IN MOVEMENT

The feminism we build as the World March of Women combines new practices with the construction of a strong social movement and the elaboration of theories and proposals based on women's experiences and struggles. It is through these collective actions that we, women, will have the strength to revolutionise society, build new social relations and overcome all mechanisms that perpetuate oppression.

Two principles guide us in this process: our self-organisation into an autonomous women's movement made up of women-only groups and women's groups in mixed movements; and the construction of alliances with other social movements engaged in the fight for change. We want to build a common project in which we learn from other struggles and broaden our agenda, but also where feminism is established as an integral part of social movements' struggles. We are committed to building a strong rural and urban grassroots movement based on feminist practice to ensure that the struggles of the left are anti-patriarchal, anti-racist and anti-capitalist.

Our feminism is full of aspirations and ambitions: after all, we want to change the world! This poses challenges for us daily. One of the main ones, which we discuss throughout this publication, is to succeed in connecting our resistance and local struggles to the broader processes that are responsible for inequalities all over the world. For example, what we are

seeing in Brazil is that women who fight to defend their territories are up against: the power of transnational corporations - mainly from the mining and agribusiness sectors; the power of the state, via the police or the judiciary that favours the elites and increasingly criminalises the peoples' struggles; violence against women, which is used in conflicts to humiliate women or discourage them from fighting; and often, men who defend a development model that promises jobs, but only generates pollution and exploitation and expels people from their land. Furthermore, when we face sexist violence, we realise that having economic and personal autonomy is fundamental for women to leave situations of abuse. We have also learned that when we say no to the model based on domination and abuse, we open up paths and opportunities to build the society we want. For example, on the contrary of agribusiness and its use of toxic chemicals, we are building agroecology and forms of trade based on solidarity.

From the experience of this feminism, which is activist, lived daily and involves a variety of women – rural, black, urban, farmers, indigenous, young and women workers in general – we can affirm that our struggle transforms communities and society and our individual way of being in the world. It also changes how each one of us understands what it means to be a woman and our relationship with our bodies, sexuality and work. By taking action, women break the chains that sexism and racism impose on their behaviour, maternity and decisions. They are increasingly being encouraged to unite to occupy spaces, speak in public and defend their demands for rights.

In practice, our struggle confirms what we already know from our life experience: we, diverse and working women, have no place in this racist and patriarchal capitalist system and there is no space for all of us to be free and equal. We want equality not for a few, but for all women. In other words, what we need to end inequality is structural change. Therefore, feminism positions itself as part of the struggles to build another society based on equality, justice and freedom. That is why the slogan that motivates us to continue is: “we will continue on the march until we are all free”.

FEMINIST ECONOMICS: LIFE IN THE CENTRE OF THE ECONOMY

Providing care, cleaning the home, washing clothes, producing food, preparing meals, attending to hygiene and feelings, building relationships and ties: all of this and much more is part of the production of life. In other words, life is only possible thanks to a lot of work done continuously, every day.

The point of departure of feminist economics is that the production of life cannot be reduced to numbers and formulas, such as the ones presented normally by white men in suits on the television news. Feminism questions the dominant conception of the economy, which considers that only a small part of the activities necessary to produce life and keep society going are important. The dominant economy only considers activities carried out on the market that involve wage labour, the buying and selling of products and the logic of profit. This excludes a whole range of activi-



ties, work and relations that are not monetised and do not involve the exchange of money, but without which the economy cannot function, nor can life be reproduced daily. The majority of these activities are carried out by women in the domestic sphere or in community spaces.

Feminist economics puts societies' capacity to ensure quality of life at the centre of its analyses and debates. Therefore, it considers that all the activities that are necessary to sustain life are part of the economy. Based on these analyses and debates, feminist economics has inspired many proposals and new ways of organising the economy that put the principles of equality, the redistribution of tasks, solidarity and reciprocity into practice.

MUCH MORE THAN THE MARKET

When we look at the economic activities of rural women, it is obvious that the economy is much more than what is sold on the market. In addition to producing goods for the market, it involves practices such as donations, exchanges and production for self-consumption. The time spent on and motivations for doing each one of these are different. Producing for their family's own consumption, exchanges and donations focuses on valuing the quality of the products, which has to do with quality of life and healthy food. Money, on the other hand, is necessary to cover the costs of life, such as energy, transportation and housing, for example. However, we must keep in mind that we live in a society that fabricates a growing number of needs.

Women must have access to markets and income to gain economic autonomy. Yet, economic autonomy is more than that: it also in-



volves having the guaranteed right to public services, such as health care and education. In the context of the recent coup and elimination of rights, however, it is increasingly difficult to have access to these services, which generates more costs. Economic autonomy also involves the capacity to make decisions on the use of one's time and resources and to put these decisions into practice. Often, resistance from the men in the community is an obstacle that women must face when trying to implement their decisions. Discussions on production and the search for an individual and collective balance between what is produced for self-consumption and what is to be sold to local and institutional markets or to consumers groups are part of this ongoing process to build economic autonomy and put into practice the principles of feminist economics.

WORK: THE BASIS FOR SUSTAINING LIFE

Guaranteeing a life with dignity demands, on a daily basis, the energy, time and capacities of the ones who carry out all the activities necessary for life. Therefore, based on feminist economics, we affirm that this entire set of activities must be considered work. In capitalist and patriarchal society, however, the work that women do in the garden and to care for small

animals is seen as an extension of their domestic chores, since most of these activities are done for self-consumption and are not remunerated. The self-organisation of rural women has contributed to the recognition of these activities as work that is fundamental for sustaining life.

One of the ways the capitalist and patriarchal system devalues women's work is to make it appear natural, as if they do all this work out of love. We know, however, that while we might like to cook, it is very difficult to find someone who loves to be the first to wake up in the morning and the last to go to sleep and to spend the entire day cleaning, ironing, washing and peeling, with no time to be with the people they like, rest or decide what they want to do with their free time.

Women transit between the home, the yard or the market – that is, between spaces of production and reproduction. Women also develop the capacity to multi-task and they are always concerned about the people who depend on them, especially those who demand more care and constant attention due to their age or health reasons.

This is the result of the sexual division of labour, which separates and hierarchises the work of women and men. It attributes the responsibility for domestic and care work only to women, which they must assume on top of the work they do that is considered productive and generates monetary income. In addition to defining how the daily life of families and communities is organised, this basis of gender inequalities is reflected in the lack of state recognition for women's work. This, in turn, limits their access to public policies and the in-

frastructure needed to guarantee better conditions for their production.

Women acquire the skills needed to do domestic and care work; we are not born knowing how to do all of this. Thus, men can also learn to do domestic chores and take care of people in order to redistribute the work. Much remains to be done – both with men in the families and communities and in society through public policies – to turn this redistribution of work into a reality. One example is policies to socialise care for children, such as day care, which are still very limited in rural areas.

To understand how the economy functions as a whole, feminist economics grounds its analysis in daily life. This puts us in a better position to question the political and economic decisions made in municipalities, the region, the entire country and even internationally. Recognising the inequalities that structure people's time and work, we question the attempts to reform the welfare system in Brazil, which aim to force women, black women and men and the working class, especially in rural areas, to work their entire lives with no guaranteed right to a retirement pension. We also mobilise women to fight against trade agreements that favour big transnational corporations and eliminate the possibility of providing institutional support for sales through government purchases or support programmes for family and peasant farming.

| AGROECOLOGY

Agroecology is the “application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and



management of sustainable agroecosystems” (Gliessman apud Siliprandi, 2015). The word “agroecological” comes from Latin and when we break it down, it means:

AGRO = agriculture, ECO = place/home/environment, LOGICO = study.

The study of this place, this environment or this home of ours is linked to everything in it.

When we study ecological principles, we learn that nature is cyclical: the by-product from one process becomes the raw material for another. This happens at a certain pace, which has been gradually changing over thousands of years. We also learn that nature has limits: there are resources that are not renewable, such as oil and other minerals, and others that are renewable, but that are limited due to the speed at which the Earth regenerates them.

For example, we can push water sources to the limit when we pollute them or use enormous and potentially ever-greater amounts of water. Similarly, numerous animal and plant species became extinct due to the unbridled exploitation of nature.

The question is, then, how can we practice a kind of agriculture that is integrated into nature’s cycles and, at the same time, ensures that people have access to nutritional and healthy food that is part of their food culture. Agroecology offers some lessons that help answer this question.

BALANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Plant health depends on the balance of nutrients in the soil. This balance is the result of the presence of macronutrients – such as nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) – and micronutrients. Micronutrients are found in na-



ture in specific amounts. If there is a lack of one of them, the others will not be absorbed.

Plants also interact among themselves: “companion plants” help each other to grow. But there are also plants that produce toxins that inhibit the growth of others. The process in which one organism influences another is called allelopathy.

Biological systems evolve together with the communities that live in them and there is no way to separate them. “We would not have the subjectivity that we do if we did not use the material culture we use; we would not have the material culture we use if we did not have the subjectivity that we have” (Hernando, apud Herrero, 2014).

Traditional communities – such as peasant, indigenous, *quilombola* or *caçara* communities – are the ones with the best understanding of this relationship, which they developed through observation and trial-and-error. This knowledge is part of their culture, which they

pass on from one generation to the next. That is why the regions where they live are the most biodiverse. Socio-biodiversity is the term that describes this relationship between the knowledge of human social cultures and the biodiversity of animal, vegetable and mineral species of the environment in which they live.

Agroecology is a transition process that aims to achieve balanced and, thus, sustainable systems. Plants that grow too quickly and suppress others or too many ants or slugs that cause damage are seen as symptoms of an imbalance that must be corrected.

DIVERSITY AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

One way to restore balance to an ecosystem is to re-establish its diversity. This can be done by adopting agroforestry systems, which combine plants already present in the area with others that have been introduced, while taking advantage of the stages of regeneration of clearing in a forest, or planting a new forest on pastureland.

Farms, quilombo or settlement's gradual achievement of self-sufficiency is another part of the agro-ecological transition. Self-sufficiency is the capacity to produce, independently from the market, enough for one's own consumption and to guarantee the stability of the unit of production over the generations.

Seeds and seedlings selected according to one's own criteria, such as hardiness and taste, and adapted to the place where they are planted produce better than seeds bought in farm supply stores.

Soil fertility can be restored by using compost made from the waste of a process – such as harvest leftovers and animal manure and urine – which

is turned into raw material once again. Another option is green manure, which is when plants that fix nitrogen are incorporated into the soil.

However, self-sufficiency must not give the false impression that the agroecological transition can be made in one unit of production only. This unit may be contaminated by agrochemicals, aerial spraying, pollution in the bodies of water and underground water or cross-pollination with genetically modified varieties. This is why one of the fundamentals of agroecology is the struggle for land, which includes the fight for agrarian reform, the recognition of traditional peoples' territories and urban reform that includes spaces for agriculture in cities.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE COLLECTIVELY

Another basic principle of agroecology is that knowledge is built collectively through exchanges of knowledge and dialogue. In this process, it is important to recognise the leading role that traditional peoples, especially women, play in keeping these practices alive and in constantly improving them.

A close relationship exists between agroecology and the kind of agriculture that women practice. Traditionally, women are the ones who select, store and trade seeds. Their yards - where they combine planting a garden, an orchard and edible, medicinal and decorative plants with raising small animals - are a perfect place for experiments and are full of diversity. In Zona da Mata in the state of Minas Gerais, the *Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas da Zona da Mata* (CTA-ZM, Centre of Alternative Technologies - Zona da Mata) counted as



many as 118 vegetable species from 51 botanical families and five animal species in the backyard of woman farmer Lia Caetano de Acaiaca alone. Lia's backyard is a little over 2,400 m².

GENDER EQUALITY

Agroecology offers solid bases for constructing gender equality: since it allows for different uses of space and time, people can combine productive and reproductive activities. By doing so, in principle, this breaks with the sexual division of labour that separates these activities and establishes hierarchies between them. However, in the construction of the agroecological movement, this equality is not always a given.

Many women organised in agroecological movements are reclaiming their political leadership, which has implications for the forms of organisation adopted in the movement. For example, centralised structures for seed production tend to involve less women than the ones where seeds are kept and exchanged in the communities.

Much of women farmers, extractivists and artisanal fisherwomen's knowledge is lost because they are not seen as individuals with their own projects, desires and will. Thus, in their day-to-day lives, they challenge the myth of the happy family in which the father represents everyone's interests. Women's attitudes towards nature and humanity are the result of a political choice and not the fact that they are a mother, were born a woman and are supposedly close to nature by essence.

Agroecological women farmers have to deal with conflicts in their families and communities in order to be able to produce in an area



without it being contaminated by agrochemicals coming from their neighbours' crops. They constantly seek to balance work and production for self-consumption and for sales. They understand that access to monetary income is essential for their economic autonomy and present proposals on public policies that support commercialisation. Their intention is not to sell free-range chickens in order to buy frozen chicken. Their goal is to ensure that they and the people close to them eat the good quality products that they produce. Their economic analysis is extremely refined, as they take into account not only monetary aspects, but also the fact that their children do not get sick.

They value their yards, but they do not want to be limited to them: they want to propose other ways of managing the territory where they live and work with their family and their community. To do so, they develop experiences in collective production groups to manage larger areas together. Sometimes, these areas are a bit far from their homes, which creates the need for them to renegotiate their domestic work so they can spend time away from home. Managing to get some time away from home is a victory that they highly value. It allows them to concentrate and dedicate more time and energy to productive work, without always having to stop to – as they say – “keep an eye on the kids”.

“Feminism dialogues with agroecology because both movements fight for a more just society. We cannot construct agroecology as long as gender inequality exists. Unfortunately, even our comrades in the struggle for agroecology often do not understand the importance of feminism for achieving equality.”

“There is no point producing without poisonous chemicals and then going home and being beat up by your husband. If agroecology fights for a life with dignity, then all rights have to be equal. Poison is a kind of violence against the land, the plants, our health. And sexism is poison in the families. That is why it is important for us to build collectively, while introducing feminism into the dialogue in the family.”

“It’s nonsense to say that sexism is a cultural thing and that it’s impossible to change. Agroecology has already deconstructed many ways of planting that are harmful to the soil and wants to deconstruct many more, for example. Therefore, we must deconstruct sexism. Yes, bad culture must be changed!”

Women’s reflections from the “Without feminism, there is no agroecology” workshop held during the 3rd National Agroecology Meeting in Juazeiro, Bahia in 2014 (GT de mulheres da ANA /Women’s WG of the National Agroecology Coalition , 2015)

| SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

The solidarity economy is a different way of organising economic relations in society. To understand it, we must first comprehend how the capitalist economy functions, which is hegemonic in the world today – that is, the model that dominates society and appears ‘natural’ or the only one that can possibly work.

The capitalist way of organising the economy is based on the private ownership of the means of production and the appropriation of the wealth that is generated by human labour by the few. In rural areas, the means of production are land and the equipment used.

There are other ways of organising the economy, but the hegemonic system makes them invisible. This is the case of producing for one’s own consumption and domestic work, which – like the state – capitalism views as “inefficient” or “backwards”.

In many communities, however, reciprocity is the basis for organising the economy. One person donates her products or time working in the hope that she will receive the equivalent in products or time from other people.

This shows that the capitalist enterprise – which is driven by the quest for ever-greater profits and competition with others – is not the only way of organising the economy. Eco-



conomic relations in the home, public services, associations and communities are organised according to other rationales. That said, these other ways have their problems too. For example, in a family situation, a father may impose his decisions on his wife and children. Similarly, public servants' actions may be marred by their prejudices towards black or poor people. There are even situations where to earn what a man makes in one day, a woman must work two.

In other words, even alternative ways of organising the economy can be permeated by patriarchal or racist prejudices and contaminated by the way the capitalist economy works. It is precisely because capitalism is hegemonic that it appears as if it were an ideal to follow, or the place where we are all striving to get to.

For other ways of organising the economy to overcome the injustices of class, race and gender, all people involved must be determined to end them. That is precisely what the solidarity economy proposes to do.

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY ENTERPRISES

In Brazil, solidarity economy initiatives are called “*Empreendimentos de Economia Solidária*” (EES) or “solidarity economy enterprises”. EES's are not organised only to involve people who are poor, vulnerable or living with limitations and therefore, have difficulty integrating into the formal labour market. They involve these people and many others who are willing to build alternative ways of organising the economy.

A solidarity economy enterprise, therefore, is not meant to be complementary or useful to capitalist companies. Agents who recruit



workers in the agricultural sector – often using fraud or deception – are called “*gatos*” in many places in Brazil. They help the sugarcane plant or farm that hires them to evade labour inspections. They often do so by creating cooperatives in order to conceal employment ties and pay less benefits, wages and taxes. This kind of cooperative is called a “*coopergato*”.

Coopergatos are not part of the solidarity economy, as the goal of the solidarity economy is to be counter-hegemonic, change the way the economy is organised based on real possibilities and create spaces of freedom and experimentation.

One of the main characteristics of the solidarity economy is self-management.

Self-management involves collective ownership or possession of the means of production (land, buildings and equipment), defining standards and agreements on how to function collectively, transparency and the democratic participation of all people involved in decisions. It also implies that the people involved are aware of the importance of their own work and that of others and know what the best way to carry it out is.

In the solidarity economy field, one finds activities ranging from production (such as family farmers' cooperatives, recuperated fac-

- The Senaes' database, the National Solidarity Economy Information System (SIES), was set up in 2004. In the three national surveys it carried out to establish the EES's profile, it identified 33,518 enterprises with 1,423,631 members. The majority of the EESs are in rural areas (almost 55%) and 55% of the participants are family farmers. The majority of the EESs identified are legally registered (nearly 70%), mostly as associations. Of their members, 43.6% are women and 56.4% are men (SENAES, 2013).
- According to data systematised in 2005, women are predominant in smaller enterprises: they were 63% of the participants in EESs with up to 10 members, whereas men were 66% of participants of EESs with more than 50 members (SENAES, 2006). The fact that women participate more in groups that are smaller, often informal and function on an intermittent basis raises the possibility that the groups they are part of have yet to be recognised as EESs.
- A survey conducted by *Sempreviva Organização Feminista* (SOF, Sempreviva Feminist Organisation) and *Centro Feminista 8 de Março* (CF-8, Feminist Centre March 8) identified 972 women's production groups in the Citizen Territories in which they worked between 2009 and 2013. This number is much higher than the 267 that the national mapping by Senaes identified in the same areas (Butto and others, 2014).

tories or seamstress cooperatives) and services (community kitchens, elderly caregivers' cooperatives, cultural activities, conscious consumer groups and solid waste recycling) to financing (credit cooperatives, revolving funds and solidarity currency initiatives, among others) and trade (solidarity economy fairs).

WOMEN IN THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Women are the majority of the people who participate in the EES, but they are not always visible. In the registry of the *Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária* (Senaes, National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy), they did not appear as the majority due to their limited presence in family farmers' cooperatives, where often the adult male of the family is the member or counted as a member.

Productive groups in which more or all participants are women tend to be smaller, informal and operate on an intermittent basis. They are less likely to continue operating over time due to the tensions that women face when trying to reconcile care for their home and family with activities to earn money.

Women do not assess their participation in EESs based only on their financial return. They value other aspects, such as the lessons learned, interaction with others and the opportunities to address issues such as domestic violence or reproductive health. In general, EES participants feel stronger, valued and have higher self-esteem thanks to the recognition of their knowledge and their capacity to innovate with limited resources.

The solidarity economy can be counter-hegemonic when it seeks, in dialogue with the feminist economy, to overcome the sexual division of labour and to strengthen women's autonomy. Often, the initiatives proposed for women are related to "feminine" activities (hairdressing, sewing or food processing) and organised so that they can reconcile them with their care responsibilities (work done in the home, part time).



THE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF FEMINIST MANAGEMENT

- **Non-bureaucratic ways of functioning**, which allow power to be shared horizontally among team members. This way of functioning has the following characteristics:

 - | consensus decision-making;
 - | a division of labour that gives equal recognition to all functions and values task rotation instead of specialisation of members in certain functions;
 - | mechanisms for integrating new people;
 - | sharing of information to prevent the development of vertical power relations;
 - | the non-hierarchical constitution of space;
 - | mechanisms for reconciling efficiency with people's well-being, and the rational with the emotional (for example, including a point on the agenda of a team meeting to discuss how everyone is doing).
- **Concern with members' places and roles in the organisation**

This involves, for example, organising working groups as alternative spaces of power; building a supportive environment that fosters mutual help and solidarity among members; and creating ties based on availability, listening, complicity and mutual respect.
- **Work relationships that are characterised by:**

 - | workers' control over the work process;
 - | work relations that recognise the contribution of each member and that everyone has the possibility of being heard, taking initiative and using their creativity;
 - | non-specialisation and equal working conditions, salaries and benefits.

Source: *The experience of women's centres in Quebec*, quoted in Nobre, 2017.



What is important is not the activity per se, but rather what they seek to achieve:

- | Are the women encouraged to enter non-traditional fields of work? For example, fix the hair dryer, the sewing machine or the blender when they break? Or negotiate prices with suppliers?

- | Is the paid activity seen merely as something that is complementary or useful to them as mothers and wives – roles that are, in fact, treated as priorities?

- | In mixed enterprises, are women encouraged to carry out tasks in all areas of work, or are the patterns of capitalist enterprises being reproduced? In capitalist enterprises, women tend to be concentrated in activities that demand fine motor skills, greater finger dexterity and concentration; they also often pay them less for their work.

The sexual division of labour in society today puts the responsibility for caring for the home and the family on the women. Solidarity economy initiatives are still reproducing this division: for example, only a few organise extracurricular activities for children as part of their operations. Solidarity enterprises that provide care for children, the ill and the elderly and that involve them as whole individuals – and not as clients or objects of assistance – are also rare. There are some experiences, however, where the social en-

terprises involve the people they care for in the preparation of meals, for example.

IN SOLIDARITY AND FEMINIST

Self-management can be strengthened in dialogue with feminism by avoiding the fragmentation of women into separate and contradictory subjectivities – mothers, spouses, workers – and by establishing agreements that fortify them as full subjects.

This includes, for example, rejecting domestic violence. Some settlements and networks of food producers and consumers have managed to include in their collective agreements concrete actions to reject violence, which can even lead to the abuser's suspension or exclusion.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MARKETS

The market is the place or the way goods and services are passed on from the people who produce them to whoever needs or wants to consume them. It is also one way of circulating the products: whoever has money or makes the best offer is the one who buys them. Supply is the amount of a given product that is available to consumers at a given price. Demand is the quantity of a given product that consumers want to buy at a certain price.

According to capitalist economics, which is the dominant school of thought, there is an invisible hand in the market that regulates supply and demand; in other words, the market is self-regulated. Capitalist economics is the set of theories studied in universities, commented on in the media and that guides governments'

- Transnational corporations are companies that have headquarters in one country – generally the more industrialised ones, such as the United States, Japan and countries in Europe – and that set up operations in other, poorer countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia with the goal of reducing production costs and maximising profit. To do so, they pressure governments to obtain partial or total tax exemptions. Even though they are responsible for numerous violations of environmental, social and labour laws, these corporations go unpunished due to the lack of international legal frameworks to punish their actions.
- Social movements and non-governmental organisations from around the world are resisting the advances of transnational corporations on two fronts: denouncing and resisting them in their territories, and negotiating a binding treaty in the framework of the United Nations (UN) that imposes international legal obligations in cases of human rights violations.

economic policies, such as the ones to control interest rates or set minimum wage, for example. According to this school of economics, when free from interference, the market adjusts on its own to work in a way that benefits both the buyer and the producer.

One has only to look at the retail food market to see that this is not true. What drives capitalist enterprises is the search for profit and not the goal of ensuring people are eating well. In Brazil, over half of this market is controlled by four transnational corporations: Casino, Carrefour, Wal Mart and Ceconsud. US-based Wal Mart is the largest retail food corporation in the world, with over 11,000 stores in 27 countries.



In its country of origin, where it controls close to 15% of the retail market, it has been sued several times for discriminating against women when hiring or promoting employees and for failing to respect workers' rights. Furthermore, it imposes prices, volume requirements and rate of production on farmers.

The concentration of the food market in the hands of a few transnational corporations is a trend that is now emerging in the organic market: Unilever recently bought the Brazilian company *Mãe Terra*. Increasingly concentrated, these corporations have much more power than farmers do when it comes to defining the terms of sale. They also have a lot of power over the population in cities, where they establish a sales model based on large hypermarkets that are practically only accessible by car and that require government investment in infrastructure.

Questioning this reality and the idea that puts the market at the centre of the economy in a way that is completely disconnected from the social relations in which it is inserted is the first step to the social construction of markets. The market is not the only way to circulate products or make them available to people. Production for self-consumption, exchanges or donations based on relations of reciprocity are alternative economic forms, as is redistribution, which is the action that the state takes when it charges taxes and, for example, offers education and health services to the entire population.

The idea that everyone is equal in the market must also be contested. It is quite the opposite: the relations of inequality that exist in society – between women and men, black and white people, employees and bosses – also exist in the



market and are created by it. This is the case, for example, of the labour market that remunerates women and black people differently.

When we begin to question the myths of the dominant economy, thinking of other ways of circulating goods and services while taking measures to reduce the inequalities that exist becomes possible. By doing so, we will be able to build a social market that values the work invested in production and that allows for diversified and conscious consumption.

SHORT CIRCUITS

Short circuits are ones that bring the people who produce as close as possible to the ones who consume. An example of the opposite – a long circuit – is when fruit grown in Brazil's north-eastern region is sold in Europe. To reach European consumers while still fresh, it must be sent by plane. Fuel costs are high and the reference price for that kind of fruit begins to be set by the buyers' market. As a result, this kind of fruit becomes so expensive that the salaried woman worker who picked and packaged it can no longer eat it. The fruit is only affordable in Europe because the environmental and social costs of production and transportation are not calculated into the price.



In short circuits, besides geographical proximity, another important factor is direct sales – that is, sales from the producer directly to the buyer, or with few intermediaries. Here, fuel costs are lower, products are fresher and people's diets are better suited to the area because the products are local and seasonal and respond to the needs that our body has during that particular season.

RELATIONS OF TRUST

In social markets, it is fundamental to build relations of trust that are as direct as possible, as in the case of farmers' markets, for example. This has important lessons for producers and the people who buy their products. People who live in the city may have become alienated from what they eat – that is, they leave it up to others to tell them what is good or tasty. As a result, people often need to learn what to eat all over again and try new textures and flavours, such as food with a bitter taste.

Just as there is a standard of beauty imposed on women, there is also a strict standard of beauty for food. In both cases, it is said that these standards are related to health, even though this is not true. The product's visual ap-

pearance is not what is most important. An apparently good food product – one that is shiny and uniform in size – may be full of chemicals that will undoubtedly do us harm in the medium term.

REDUCING INEQUALITIES

A socially constructed market is also a factor that increases resilience – that is, the capacity to overcome problems. This goes for both the people who produce food and who watch as climate variations make their prices or the quality and quantity of their products fall, and the people who consume them, who may go through moments of temporarily loss of income due to unemployment or illness.

Public purchases, for example, use list prices and in the case of the Food Acquisition Programme (PAA), the food is distributed to social assistance facilities. Many consumers groups also use price lists agreed upon by producers and consumers or establish special prices for members in specific situations. For example, one consumer group from Santo André, São Paulo decided not to charge university workers employed by outsourced companies the membership fee. Another case is the Community Sustained Agriculture (CSA) system in which people commit to making fixed monthly payments. This allows women farmers to organise their production and spending on both production and domestic activities.

To build markets that reduce inequalities, it is important to establish collective processes. They help with everything from resolving logistic issues – such as transportation and storage, whose cost decreases as the volume



of products increases – to creating the conditions needed to support people in situations of greater vulnerability. This construction process may be carried out as the independent initiative of social movements and organisations or in collaboration with public authorities.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AUTONOMY AND SELF-ESTEEM

In our experience in working with rural women from the Vale do Ribeira region, our main motive was not to support their inclusion in the market as it is organised today in order to generate income, but rather to help build their economic autonomy. One road to achieving this is to establish the women's control over access to markets and their income, which is based on:

1. Organising collectively to increase women's sales capacity and power to negotiate.
2. The diversification of sales venues to avoid dependency on only a few clients.
3. Improve access to key information (prices, amounts, sales conditions) to avoid dependency on intermediaries.”

(Hillenkamp and Nobre, 2016)

Solidarity markets were created together with the women farmers and quilombola women from Barra do Turvo by setting up the direct sale of their products to the “Quitandoca” store and consumer groups in the Greater São Paulo region and Registro. In Itaoca and Peruíbe, support for the women farmers' participation in the public bidding process for the PAA and PNAE programmes contributed to the creation of these markets.



The women farmers involved in the process valued the recognition given to the products they produced and the variety they had. They were also pleased that they found a market for products they had never imagined that people would pay for, such as turmeric or yam-manioc. Valuing their products valorises their work and ultimately makes them value themselves.

These processes advance at a pace that respects the women's possibilities and limits. On one hand, this puts them at ease in relation to mixed processes, where women and men participate, which they do not fully understand. On the other hand, however, it may allow them to remain in a comfort zone that restricts the group's and their own individual growth.

“The challenges to promoting women's economic autonomy can be summed up in three areas: production, sales and the organisation of women. In light of this, it is fundamental that we strengthen the sales strategies that articulate self-consumption, donations, exchanges, markets and consumer groups with the expansion of access to institutional market policies so that women have greater possibilities of controlling their own work.” (SOF, 2016)



**METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICES:
LESSONS FROM THE FIELD**



WOMEN'S AUTONOMY

Building personal, political and economic autonomy requires reflecting on our own experiences and understanding how class, gender and racial inequalities are manifested in concrete terms.

The activities and exercises registered in this part of the book show how we work on these issues with women's groups from the Vale do Ribeira region.

| TIME: THE CLOCK EXERCISE

In the clock exercise, we ask participants to write down everything they do and everything the men in their family do over a 24-hour period. This exercise has been around for many years and used in various groups. The results always reveal what official time use surveys indicate: women work longer hours and dedicate more hours to domestic and care work than men. They are the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed. If the family needs more income, women will make snacks to sell, wash clothes for others and increase their activities.

This exercise allows us to observe how women's time is regulated by their dependents' care needs. When their children are of school age, the time they have to go to a meeting or take a course is defined by the school bus schedule. If there are elderly or sick people in the family, they organise their time so they can guarantee that meals are served on time and that they are always available. It is rare that their husbands go to work in the field without having the breakfast that the women prepare first or taking the lunch that the women pre-



pare with them. This is why women who participate in the training sessions love to sing a slightly different version of a popular song that has been altered to go like this:

“Acorda Maria Bonita, levanta a hora que quiser, que o dia já vem raiando e o marido já fez café” (Sing, pretty Mary, get up whenever you want. The sun is coming up and your husband has already made breakfast.)

Reflecting on the use of time is central to the feminist economy. The time and logic of the market aim to increase profit in total disregard for the time and the logic of life. In this contradiction, women's time is the variable that is adjusted. To illustrate this, in the publication *“Para entender a economia feminista. E colocar a lógica da vida em primeiro lugar”* (Understanding the feminist economy: and putting the logic of life first), SOF presented an updated version of the traditional image from Mali of “the woman with a thousand arms”. Women farmers from the Borborema region in the state of Paraíba used the image in street theatre to



TO REFLECT ON THE USE OF TIME, WE LOOK AT:

■ Time for market work

This is the time we dedicate to producing the goods or services that we use to make a living. Generally, these activities are remunerated, but they can also be done for our own benefit, such as growing food. In this category, we must include the time it takes us to go to and from work.

■ Time for domestic and care work

This is the time that we spend on cleaning, cooking, managing, getting supplies for and organising the home. It is also the time dedicated to the care, protection, well-being, eating, education and health of the people who live in the home.

■ Time for personal needs

This is the time spent on activities such as sleeping, eating and personal hygiene.

■ Time for civil participation

This is the time that we invest in activities for our own personal growth, such as studies, political participation and volunteer work.

■ Leisure and free time

This is the time that we dedicate to having fun and resting, out of our own free will, or to simply doing nothing.

Source: SOF, 2015.

talk about how domestic work should be shared by everyone in the home.

Looking at the clock and the intense pace of women's work every day helps us understand just how unjust the sexual division of labour that structures many societies in the world is.

SPACE: DRAWING THE UNIT OF PRODUCTION

The way women experience space can be analysed from the viewpoint of the community in which they live or the house and the farm where they live and work. To reflect on the community, participants worked in groups to build a model, using modelling clay or cardboard, and identified where they and their partners live and the routes that they take.

This exercise shines light on the lack of infrastructure – such as water, electricity and schools – in their communities and how the priorities for installing the infrastructure are influenced by gender (SOF, 2006). Electricity, for example, leads women to think of items that reduce their workload, such as washing machines or refrigerators to preserve their food in. Streetlights make them feel safer. The men, on the other hand, might think of the motor of equipment that decreases their workload, or lighting for a soccer field.

Women's ability to move freely about is also an issue. Several women told about how their husbands were opposed to them studying, as it meant that they would have to go to the city every night. It is frowned upon when girls are out at night, standing at a certain spot where they can get a phone or internet signal, but boys do not have the same problem.

The *Programa de Formação em Feminismo e Agroecologia do Grupo de Trabalho de Mulheres da Articulação Nacional* (Training Programme in Feminism and Agroecology of the Women's Working Group of the National Agroecology Coalition) combined this activity with the map of socio-biodiversity used by agroecological organisations.



In this programme, the exercise with the socio-biodiversity map began with participants drawing the unit of production where the women live and highlighting their houses, yards, fields and all the biodiversity in these spaces. The map helped the women value rural spaces and the work that is done there more, and develop a clearer view of the spaces and their actions.

“When I went to draw the map, I thought, ‘What am I going to put on it? I don’t have anything.’”

At first, the drawings did not contain many items. However, as the women were encouraged to include more about the biodiversity in their area, they began to add medicinal plants, unconventional edible plants, flowers and wild animals, among other elements.

The maps were used again in a second activity during which the following questions were asked: where are the women and the men on the property? How many men and how many women work in each of the spaces drawn on the map? The goal is to use the map to show how the sexual division of labour works in their daily lives.

Using the map again also allowed the women to compare what they had remembered the first time to what they recalled later, this time

with a more analytical view on their unit of production. The women then took home the seedlings and seeds they had exchanged during the activities, which allowed them to increase the diversity in their yards.

“If I were to draw this map today, there’ll be a lot to put on it.”

OUR BODIES

The majority of women farmers who are active in SOF have already participated in exercises that enable them to reflect on how their gender identity and the sexual division of labour has been constructed over their lifetime. In the “Feminist Economy and Agroecology” course, our bodies served as a basis for the debate on gender relations.

The pressure is so high that many of us end up becoming alienated from our bodies.

According to the dictionary, the word ‘alienate’ means to transfer control or ownership to another person and to become separate or withdraw. In other words, we do not recognise ourselves when we look in the mirror.

Some women are so unhappy with their bodies that they no longer notice if their body is healthy or not. They leave it up to their doctor to say if they are well or not, or up to their husband or boyfriend if they are pretty or not.

To reconcile ourselves with our bodies, we must stop and take a look at ourselves.

During a training session, depending on the number of participants and the time and space available, we can do individual drawings



of our own bodies and highlight what we like and do not like. Participants can also model their bodies in modelling clay. Another option is to draw the outline of one woman's body collectively and then identify what we like and what we do not like about our own bodies.

When we asked the women how they felt during the exercise, they responded that *"it's difficult to talk about ourselves, talking about oneself is a bit complicated"*, and *"I realized that I don't notice myself much"*. Answers can vary from expressing a certain detachment – *"there's nothing that I like and don't like. If I'm healthy, that's good enough"* – to holding each one of us responsible for not being in shape or saying that we are lazy. Deeper questions also start to appear: *"I asked myself, 'I don't like this, but why don't I like this?'"*

THE IMPOSITION OF PATTERNS OF BEAUTY

Discontent with our body has to do with patterns that associate femininity and beauty to being thin and eternal youth. In the comments from various groups, the body part that women say they are the most uncomfortable with is the belly, which is often seen as a sign of being overweight or accumulated fat.

Obesity is a complex issue. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of cases of obesity and being overweight is growing: in 2015, they affected 23% and 58% of the population, respectively. The reason is the shift towards eating over processed food that contains excess fat, sugar and salt. The percentage of women with obesity is greater than that of men, and in more than 20 countries, the difference is greater than 10 percentage points

(FAO, 2016). In our voracious consumer society, eating and buying become compulsive acts that alleviate our pains and dilemmas. But even though obesity is a symptom of our way of life, it is seen as a "problem" and an "individual problem".

Feminist activists made us think about how the ideal weight is defined as a universal standard that does not take into account different situations, and how the obsession with being thin is a terrible way to control women. Women who take time to reflect on the issue often recall situations of suffering, where they felt excluded and rejected, and stopped going to the beach and wearing the clothes they want to wear (Novaes, 2010).

In our workshops, women linked their dislike of certain parts of their body to episodes where these parts were the target of assault. They also shared accounts of situations of risk, such as diets that tell women not to eat and that leave them more vulnerable to alcohol, for example, or that weaken our immune system.

The standards or pressure imposed on women also varies if we are black or workers. When we think about how our relationship to our body has changed over the years, many of us mention how our nose, our big hips or our hair used to bother us. Awareness about what it is like to be a black woman makes us look in the mirror differently.

Even so, the beauty industry tries to capture our experiences by developing variations of the same pattern. Beautiful black women are supposedly the ones who are similar to white women, with thin noses and who "tame their curly hair". Wearing their hair naturally is a strong act

of affirmation for all black women. After a few days, even when we have not yet discussed this issue, it is great to see women in the training sessions letting their hair down, going out in the rain or into the ocean, free from the fear of ruining the hair that they had straightened.

Several women also mention in our activities that they do not like their muscular calves. They see women who work out at the gym try to define their calf muscles positively. For women farmers, however, it is different: strong legs, arms and hands are the result of working in the field. And in our society, manual labour is seen as inferior and a man's job. For many, it is as though the woman has to work in the field because her husband cannot handle it on his own.

This leads us to talk about hands: the hands that use the hoe and the machete, that offer affection, wash clothes and produce things for sustenance, but that according to the patterns of beauty imposed on us, should remain immobile to stay smooth and to protect our long, perfectly manicured nails.

OUR BODIES, OUR STORIES

Many of the women who participate in the movements today are very proud to be black and affirm that the colour of their skin and hair and their body shape are the living expression of their ancestry. A Guarani sister said, *"being alive as we are now is in itself an act of resistance"*.

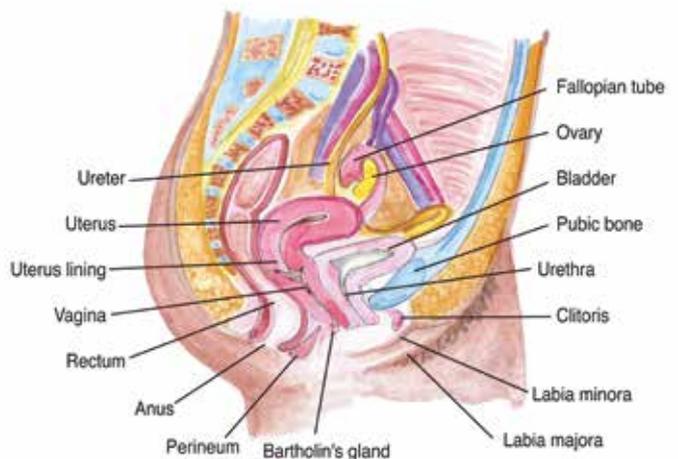
White women farmers also recalled aspects of their body that remind them of members of their family: *"I have the same shape of face as my grandmother, whom I liked a lot"*, or *"they say I look just like my dad, but I don't think I do, maybe because I don't like him that much"*.

Our scars also tell our story. *"My belly is full of stretch marks, but that's because I had four children"*. Others are bothered by scars that make them remember an unpleasant situation. We talked about how it might be better to look at the situation they experienced differently to overcome it, instead of wanting to erase the scar.

The work we do also leaves marks on our bodies. In farm work, as well as in other professions, we may suffer accidents or develop back problems. This issue brings up discussions on how to avoid accidents, our posture, overexertion at work and the tools we can use to make the work easier and have more time to take care of ourselves.

TABOOS AND MYSTERIES

When we sat to talk about our bodies, we realised that there are still parts of it that are secret even to ourselves. Even for young women who learned about the reproductive system at school, it seems like something that is external to our bodies, like a precise machine. We drew the reproductive system together and tried to understand the reproductive cycle.



We began to discuss contraceptive methods and how it is increasingly common for doctors to prescribe methods that put the responsibility entirely on the women and take away their autonomy to make decisions. This includes hormonal methods such as injections and implants, often used with the excuse that there is no risk of the woman forgetting (as with the pill) or having to negotiate with her partner (in the case of condoms). Yet, almost nothing is said about the risks they pose to women's health, much less how condoms also protect them from sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS. Sometimes, young women look for information on their own and read on the internet about the side effects of hormonal methods but are unable to get their partner to use condoms and end up with an unwanted pregnancy.

The vagina as both mystery and pleasure was one topic that we only began to discuss. When women talk about the matter, in most cases, they still describe sex with men almost as an obligation or a problem.

The freedom to enjoy one's sexuality with whomever one likes appeared when we watched the video "*Mulheres rurais em movimento*" ("Rural women in movement"), by the Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais do Nordeste (MMTR-NE, Rural Women's Workers Movement of the Northeast) together. In the video, a woman farmer gives her account of how the movement's support was important for her to assume her relationship with another woman in public. The interaction with lesbian women who share their experiences freely helps to dismantle prejudices. "*It's so nice to be free and to*

A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF OUR OWN BODIES ALLOWS US TO DETOXICATE OURSELVES FROM THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM THAT...

- imposes a rigid standard of beauty that is impossible to attain and that consumes a large part of our energy, time and money. It also leads us to compare ourselves to one another, creating a separation between us
- defines our bodies based on what is appealing to others and what we imagine that others – men – expect of us, and not out of consideration for ourselves or how we define them ourselves
- disciplines and models our bodies for motherhood and the work that they delegate to us, whether at home, in the field, in business or in the factory: rapid and agile hands, capacity to stay standing for hours and flexibility.

Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 2003

be who we really are. What is important is that each one of us is happy".

We discussed menstruation and how even today, young women are embarrassed to say that they have their period and how so many suffer from menstrual pains and experience them as a hassle. Two participants in the course shared positive experiences that filled our imaginations. One said that she would get very angry when she used to get her period and had a lot of cramps. It was impossible to tell what caused what: if the anger caused the cramps or vice versa. She began to participate in discussions with women, some with a positive approach to being a woman. This made her change the way she relates to her menstruation and, when she did, the cramps stopped.

Another woman talked about her relationship with menstruation and how her body changed when she began using a menstrual

cup. When she tried it, she began to understand how the vaginal canal functions, that it has muscles and is less sensitive. She also discovered that we lose less blood than what sanitary napkins make us believe, as the blood spreads around on the napkins.

In some lines of agroecology, menstrual blood is used as fertiliser for the plants in the garden, as it contains nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Thinking about these things has already made us see menstruation as part of life, and not as something dirty, smelly or as useless bleeding.

BODIES, MACHINES AND INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE

The beauty pattern imposed on society makes women homogeneous – all with the same hair, eyebrows and nails. Singularity – each person's unique way of being – is no longer seen as something positive and what begins to be valued is being the same as everyone else, no matter how much needs to be added or how much interference is needed to fit this model.

This process is similar to that of industrial agriculture, which imposes the idea that plants must be homogenous. Therefore, soybean pods, for example, must be all the same height to facilitate the work of a combine harvester. The sorrow that we feel when we see monocultures is the same one we feel when we see several women trapped in the model that the fashion industry imposes on us.

Industrial agriculture uses external inputs, such as chemical fertilisers and agrochemicals to reduce nature's growth, reproduction and regeneration cycles and thus, raise the produc-

tivity of an area. This process is similar to the negation of the body's cycles, which hides the need to rest to allow the body to regenerate and imposes the idea that the body must always be young and available for production.

Science and technology, which are focussed on raising productivity using chemical inputs, want to control both agriculture and our bodies. It is no coincidence that the transnational corporations that produce genetically modified seeds, chemical fertilisers and toxic chemicals also own pharmaceutical companies that produce the synthetic hormones used during menopause and contraceptive methods such as injections and implants.

SELF-CARE PRACTICES

During our training sessions, we organised some activities involving the body – first individually, such as self-massages and stretching, and then in pairs, in groups of three or more, until we reached the level of the entire group. Reflecting on this, several self-care actions emerged when we went to share our agroecological practices.

In agroecology, we develop practices that give us autonomy from markets and men. We do not have to buy all the supplies we need because we use a lot of what we have on our own farm. We also do not depend on our partners to put in and take care of the garden or the animals. It is not that we want to do everything alone. It is very good to be able to count on the collaboration of the people who live with us, such as our husbands and children. But it is frustrating when they keep putting things off or are willing to help only if we do things their



way. It is even more frustrating to not be able to carry out a plan because we do not feel capable of doing so by ourselves.

When we share self-care practices, we also share recipes for natural cosmetics. Again, we follow the same rationale that seeks to increase our autonomy from the markets: we do not need to buy a series of products; instead, we can use what we have in our backyards. We also seek our autonomy from men, as our standard is no longer a man's point of view or opinion, but rather what makes us feel good, comfortable and relaxed.

COMBATting VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women farmers' groups were organised with SOF's support with the goal of implementing or sharing agroecological practices and developing channels for the direct sale of their products. However, just the fact of bringing the women together was enough for the situations of violence that they experienced to surface or for women victims to go to them for their support.

The groups became spaces for taking women in and empowering them. In one of the groups, they noticed how one of their members was depressed because of things her husband would constantly say to discredit her work and ideas. When she stopped going, the women did not give up: they went to visit her once, twice, three times to motivate her to participate again. In another group, the women included in the products they offer to consumer groups the herbs produced by a neighbour who thought that she did not have anything to offer and that her herbs were worth nothing.



“No more flying pots and pans at home.”

For the women farmers, participating in this training-organising process increased their self-confidence. This, in turn, altered their relationship with their partners, as they stopped allowing themselves to be humiliated and abused.

Violence against women is structural in our society: we all change our behaviour and limit our own mobility for fear of violence. Even so, every situation is unique and, in groups, women can think of ways to deal with concrete cases. Sometimes, it is enough to have a space where women can go to be heard without being judged. Violence happens when a woman is treated as a “thing”; to overcome this, then, she must regain her confidence in herself as a person.

In our training workshops, we seek to comprehend the reasons for violence against women and how to organise to address it. The guide by SOF entitled *“Mulheres em luta por uma vida sem violência”* (Women in the strug-

RELAXING FOOT BATH

Ingredients

Mint leaves, hot water, 2 or 3 slices of orange and lavender

Instructions

Boil water, pour it into a basin, add the mint, orange and lavender, and place your feet in the basin. Our feet contain approximately 70,000 nerve endings that are linked to each organ of the body. This means that relaxing one's feet can enhance one's well-being and the treatment of pain and/or injury, regardless of what area of the body is hurting.

RAISED GARDEN BEDS

This garden bed can be built with the trunks of banana trees or bamboo. Lay the pieces of banana trunks down in a line one beside the other to form a layer, and then cover with dry leaves, ashes from a wood stove, cow manure, chicken manure and soil. Repeat the layers until the bed is one machete blade high (approximately 35-40 cm). When finished, cover with hay and/or dry leaves and plant your seedlings. Not only will this garden bed produce well, it will also facilitate your work and help your back, as there is no need to bend down. It also retains moisture.

gle for a life without violence) helps understand the causes of sexist violence and how it is manifested. The exercise of presenting the results of the discussion in the format of a radio or TV programme allows women to share their experiences, analyse them in a broader context and identify ways to deal with the problem.

Women farmers highlighted that to leave a violent situation, it is important that women lose their fear of taking action. This fear is often rooted in the fear of not being able to sustain their children without their husband around, or that the man will not be jailed as a result of the complaint that they file and he will come back to hurt the woman even worse or threaten her family.

Women have a strong fear of no longer being able to farm because of losing their land or because they cannot do it alone. This is why in one of the courses, on the feminist economy and agroecology, participants highly valued the fact that the exchange activity was held on the farm of a woman who lives alone with her adolescent son. She shared the challenges and joys of managing the farm on her own, working with agroforestry and beekeeping without having to hire other workers. Thanks to the working bee held during the programme, she was able to plant a mandala garden, as she had been planning to do for years.

There is also concern about the situations of violence against young women and girls. Many mothers face the dilemma between allowing their daughters go out to have fun and be free and the fear that these moments of fun will put them at risk. In the groups, we discussed how we can protect one another and take special care when one of us is in a situation of greater vulnerability. Some examples are when a woman has to walk a long way by herself at night to go home or when a woman drinks more than usual, among others.

When we discussed this, we asked ourselves if we were once again placing the responsibility for the risk of suffering from violence on the women instead of stopping the acts of abusers.

One participant of the "Feminist Economy and Agroecology" course compared this situation to the agroecological transition. When we begin to work with farmers who use industrial agricultural packages (genetically modified seeds, chemical



fertilisers, herbicides and other toxic chemicals), we start slowly by proposing an area to test other methods or drawing their attention to what women are producing in their yards, without chemicals.

This experience leads male farmers to start perceiving things differently and even weeding makes sense to them again. Similarly, our collective self-protection can be part of a transition to show what it is like to live a life free from violence in a society that is still hegemonically patriarchal.

| AUTONOMOUS COMMUNICATION NETWORKS*

Technology has the potential to reduce distances and improve people's quality of life. At the same time, it is hemmed in by economic and government interests. The principle of net neutrality establishes that all data transmitted via the internet must be treated the same, regardless of its origin, type or destination.

Though constantly under threat, this principle guarantees that all users are supposedly free to navigate on the internet. Despite this, access to the world wide web is clearly unequal in socioeconomic terms. Only 54% of Brazilian households have internet connections, the majority of which are in urban areas (59%) and in classes A (98%) and B (91%). Only 23% of class D/E households are connected to the internet, whereas for homes in rural areas, this number reaches 26%. These data reveal the discrimination towards peripheral and rural communities, which is driven by financial interests.

What can change this situation?

Some groups working with open source technologies have identified one way: develop "autonomous networks" or "community networks".

COMMUNITY NETWORKS

A community communications network is an alternative communications infrastructure built collectively by the people. The goal is to resolve communication problems in a given territory by either installing internet access there or providing useful local services to strengthen communications within the area. With autonomous networks, it becomes possible for people living far from one another, for example, to communicate via voice calls without a telephone line.

Normally, this initiative is carried out by an association or a group of residents. As it is an alternative communications model, there is no ready-made formula. In general, there are three elements that make an infrastructure autonomous:

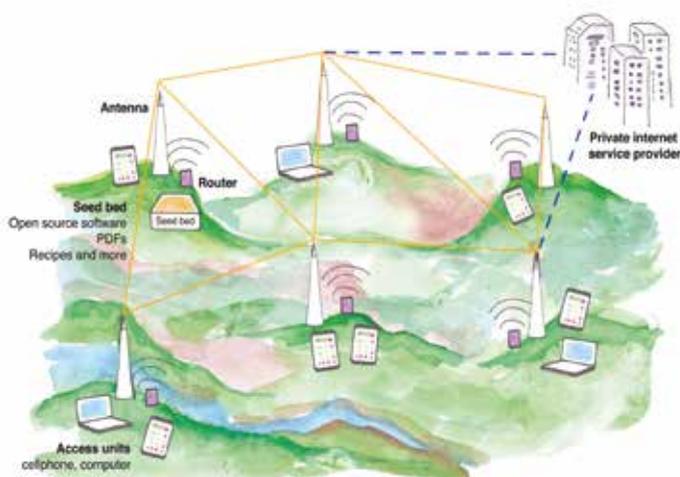
- | Distributed infrastructure: expansion is possible from any given point; there is no central point that controls the rest.

- | Collective decisions: the process must be collective and voluntary.

- | Autonomous: the community must appropriate the knowledge it needs to maintain its network and services without the support of companies.

In the Vale do Ribeira region, we took the very first steps towards building this autonomy

*Text elaborated by Carla Jancz, from Actantes and Maria Lab.



Telecommunicating with the world requires having parts of the infrastructure in place, such as fibre optic and telephone cables, satellites, long distance antennas and signal transmitters. Until the 1990s, the communications network in Brazil belonged to the state and, therefore, was public. However, it was around that time that it was privatised – that is, sold to a few private corporations who now control a large part of the network. With community networks, we can create our own internal communication structures that greatly facilitate our work. But for this structure to be in contact with the rest of the world, one has to pay an internet service provider.

in communications by holding IT workshops as part of the “Building capacities and sharing experiences for an inclusive economy” project, with the support of the British Council’s Newton Fund. In this initial visit, a network technician carried out a general analysis of the territory and talked with the women about the possibility of installing an autonomous network that would deliver internet to the area in the future.

All the participants were very excited about having access to the internet and other means of communication, as it will facilitate communication between producers and consumers, thus helping to sell the agroecological products grown by family farming women.

To give an idea of the benefits that this would bring, without this communications network, to send the list of products available to São Paulo, women farmers from the Terra Seca and do Cedro quilombola communities have to walk 30 km to the centre of the town of Barra do Turvo to get a phone signal.

The women want autonomous communications networks not only because they will boost their sales, but also because they offer education and leisure opportunities to everyone in the region.

However, installing them does not happen overnight. The first step is to identify who in the territory is interested and willing to pass on knowledge on this technology to their neighbours. Therefore, it is a question of establishing a collaborative community-based process, and not one from outside.

WHAT ABOUT THE CONNECTION TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE AREA?

Unfortunately, there is no magic solution. Whenever someone wants to connect to the internet, she or he will have to sign a contract with a telecommunications company. In these cases, the community can exercise its autonomy by acting as an intermediary for the hiring of this service and deciding how to divide the costs fairly. For example, a community may choose to establish one internet connection



that serves the entire neighbourhood and decide if the signal stays open for everyone to use or if access is limited to the residents who are sharing the costs. This will make the service more affordable.

WORKING ON SELF-MANAGEMENT: THE BASKET EXERCISE

The functioning of the women's groups with whom we work is governed by the principle of self-management – that is, equal participation, with no hierarchy, of all members of the group in decisions on the activities to be carried out and equal sharing of tasks and responsibilities.

This method of functioning is constantly marked by challenges, such as reconciling the different stages that the women are in – some are just beginning to take interest in organising collectively, whereas others have already taken on many responsibilities – and inequalities related to education levels or access to resources, to name a few.

Various elements are involved in the groups' daily routine: preparations for plant-

ing, harvesting and delivering their produce to consumer groups in São Paulo, and concerns with bad road conditions and the quality of water in the neighbourhood. Another issue is the fact that some women do not possess the government certificate called the “DAP” (*Declaração de Aptidão ao Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar*, or ‘Declaration of Aptitude’ for the National Programme to Strengthen Family Farming) and/or are not legally registered to issue farm receipts, among others.

In this process of building, maturing and organising, the groups go through difficulties and moments where they must make choices, which end up generating phases of “collective melancholy”. During these times, positive actions are noticed less, and a certain level of paralysis sets in.

In times like this, activities that create moments for collective reflection allow the group to look at the problems it is facing and define solutions to them. In the Vale do Ribeira region, with the support of IRD, we did this by organising the basket exercise, which combines focus group methods with practical exercises.



In focus groups, a list of questions elaborated beforehand was used so that the women would talk about the history of the group, their perspectives, challenges and dreams. They also addressed organisational issues and how to deal with the group to resolve either sales issues or problems in their neighbourhood.

During the focus groups, when the women talked about certain issues, they realised that they shared the same problems – not only material ones, but also concerns about the youth and the violence in their communities and the territory.

THE BASKET: IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS

The basket exercise was proposed when we realised that a lot of information and issues were becoming matters of constant concern that women were losing sleep over.

The first step of this activity was to identify the problems that the women felt were important to deal with at the time.

The second step was to make a basket. It could be big and used to carry a lot of things, or small or an ideal size so that all of them could carry some of the weight. The basket

could be carried by several women or by only a few, and made from the materials available to them, such as natural fibres, that are able to stand some weight.

When ready, we asked the groups to look at the basket and put in only what they wanted to carry. The group then had to decide the way they were going to carry it, what to carry and how to carry the information that came up as they went through the list of questions. This activity allowed the group to revisit the origin of the problems and how they developed and to identify aspects they were unable to resolve and the people and relevant facts that were important in the group's evolution over time.

DIVISION OF TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

One common theme in all the groups was the organisation of the group. They observed that some tasks were centralised in the hands of only a few women, such as keeping a record of the products sold or issuing farm receipts. Others only took care of communicating with consumer groups, as not all of them own a cell phone and it is a time-consuming task due to the poor phone signal in the region or because they must walk several kilometres to inform the others of the information that they receive.

Based on this, they decided that they should divide the tasks up equally, which meant buying cell phones, and share knowledge on how to organise sales, keep records and issue farm receipts.

Other issues placed in the basket were related to the integration of new women into the group and the negative impacts of the husbands' participation in the meetings instead of



the women. The participants noted that a male presence ended up interfering in the way problems were looked at and understood. When issues on self-management were put into the basket, the women showed that they were willing to accept other people from the neighbourhood in the group, especially women who say that “they don’t have time for meetings”. Many said that they had gone through that phase, or felt incapable of accompanying the group because of their lack of either time or training. They also stated that they noticed a difference in their lives when they began to dedicate more time to their groups.

Therefore, holding more meetings, addressing the issues that stop women from leaving their homes and establishing rules to facilitate the active presence of all women were some of the actions identified to overcome these problems and achieve horizontal and equal participation. The participants in mixed organisations stated that they would make an effort to stay informed of all the issues raised in their organisations to be able to participate in collective decision-making.

OTHER BASKETS

This effort to choose what to put into the basket allowed the women to identify new baskets and the people or bodies responsible for them. One was the municipality, which implements and manages the PAA programme and basic sanitation infrastructure. They also identified SOF to help train women on how to use smartphones to access the internet and spreadsheets to organise information on products, prices and sales.

The basket exercise helped the Rosas do Vale group from the Córrego da Onça neighbourhood to organise their demands for infrastructure: roads, public transportation schedules, water supply and the construction of a community centre for courses, leisure activities for children and youth, and appointments with municipal social workers. They took these demands to the mayor’s office and the women were satisfied with the possibility of change: “Everything was fresh in our minds. It was really good to have presented the problems to the mayor because he has never come here and now he knows everything”.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUPS

- quality of water in the neighbourhood and the need to treat the greywater that goes from the houses into the rivers
- sexism in mixed organisations in which the men say that women should not deal with certain issues, such as land titles
- threats that the government food purchasing programme (PAA) will be terminated
- need for land to grow food
- access to ways and places to sell their produce
- difficulties in gaining access to public transportation and health
- lack of technical assistance from an agroecological approach

SOLUTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- how to formally register the organisation
- use of biodigestor septic tanks in their backyards to treat the family’s wastewater

FEMINIST AGROECOLOGICAL PRACTICES



Feminist agroecological practices are activities related to agriculture that guarantee that women have greater autonomy.

Autonomy refers to women's capacity to choose when making decisions on their bodies, the use of their time and in the spheres of reproduction and care and production. Autonomy also involves having the opportunity to engage in political participation – for example, attend meetings and speak and be heard in organisations. As explained in the first part of the book, agroecology's understanding of agriculture is based on an integrated approach that seeks balance and diversity and to recuperate the collective traditional knowledge that the communities have built based on their experiences.

Women are involved in practically all the activities carried out in rural areas. This includes taking care of small and large animals, milking cows or goats, sowing and harvesting grains and fruit, guaranteeing the production

of food for self-consumption and creating markets to sell their products.

Agroecological practices allows us to go beyond the so-called “sexual division of labour”, which separates the work we do throughout our lives between “women's work”, which is theoretically “easier”, and “men's work”, which is “harder” or “intellectual”. One of the ways to overcome the sexual division of labour is to link activities that need to be done on the property to activities that bring us pleasure, such as planting or executing other daily tasks.

When we rethink the division or rotation of tasks in the home or in the fields based on autonomy, domestic work such as taking care of the children, meals and housecleaning become a responsibility of all members of the family, and not just the women or their daughters. Another result is the increase in the quality of the work done to produce vegetables, fruit and animal products, as the women start to have more time to dedicate to other tasks, and not just domestic chores.



THE COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION AND THE EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE

During the training sessions, we worked on developing these practices through exchanges of experiences. To develop another way of looking at nature, we began the exchanges by walking through yards and fields together and sharing observations. In relation to the soil, participants were invited to view it as a living organism and understand that a good soil structure is fundamental for aeration, drainage and the transportation of macro and micronutrients. The presence of indicator plants, such as beggar ticks and sida, or the presence of termite or anthills means that the soil is dry, poor and compacted.

Observing the relief of the land reveals the watercourses and where water sources are located and thus, the best place to build reservoirs and contour lines and install gravity-fed irrigation systems. We discussed the importance of keeping the soil covered to prevent excessive water loss and the growth of invasive plants, such as brachiaria, which reduces the work to hoe and helps avoid the use of herbicides.

Activities on how to produce one's own seeds and seedlings for a variety of species, especially native varieties, plus natural sprays and homeopathy were also held with the goal of reducing the use of external inputs, fostering the regeneration of the agricultural system and increasing women's autonomy from the market. Participants were shown how to improve the fertility of the soil with resources from their own farms used as green manure crops and in biofertilisers and compost.

RAISED GARDEN BEDS THE REASONS WHY WE USE THEM:

- Less back pain
- More space for carrots to grow
- As they are deeper, there is more space for organic material to decompose and therefore, more nutrients
- Increases women's independence from their husbands because they use light materials, such as bamboo
- Reduces hoeing

PRACTICES TO INCREASE WOMEN'S AUTONOMY

The women's experiences also help us to think about how to improve our concrete practices. One example is the raised garden beds.

The use of permanent beds made from bamboo or wood eliminates the need to remake the beds every time one plants – work that is usually done with the help of a woman's husband whenever he has time and is willing to help his wife. With raised beds, women, the ones who in most cases are responsible for the garden, can plant their annual crops in the same beds. They only need to do maintenance when the bamboo or wood decomposes. Thus, our observation of the women's practices and the exchanges of traditional knowledge in the women's groups led us to develop the best techniques for resolving the problem at hand.

It is also possible to make better use of the structures of the house, such as where the chicken coop is built, for example. Why not put it closer to the garden? Doing so eliminates the job of carrying fertilizer from one side of



the yard to the other. Another alternative is to get the chickens to help hoe and fertilise the garden beds.

Another activity was to look for tools that facilitate women's work. For example, curved pruning saws, which are bendable and light, are perfect for pruning a tree without a lot of effort. They can be used to prune branches of up to 15 cm thick, without the need for large and heavy saws. This enables women to bring wood home whenever it runs out, instead of waiting for their sons or their husband to come home and get it for them. This kind of saw is particularly useful in agroforestry systems in which pruning is used to open clearings in order to plant grains and fruit.

| BASIC SANITATION ALTERNATIVES

Another important task was to find sanitation alternatives that protect food, water and people

from contamination. Women from the Esperança group from Barra do Turvo studied several systems before deciding to install biodigester septic tanks built with plastic barrels that can be acquired a very affordable price. The first one was set up during a working bee held with *Horta di Gueto*, one of the groups participating in the direct sales to consumer groups and that works to build closer ties between people from the country and the periphery.

Nowadays, there are many alternatives for caring for water and soil. A simple grease trap installed on the drain of the kitchen or bathroom sink and connected to a box with gravel, sand and charcoal functions as a water filter and removes most of the impurities in the water; water from the washing machine can also be filtered by connecting the pipe to the box. Grey water (i.e. water that does not come from the toilet, such as water from the kitchen or bathroom sink, the shower and clothes washer) can be treated and reused to fertilise orchards. It can also channelled into a banana circle or a root zone, where we use plants with large leaves or that prefer marshy areas. The roots also function like a filter, absorb the water and return it to the air and use the nutrients present in the water being treated.

NUTRIENTS	SOURCES
N – Nitrogen: responsible for bringing proteins and greater vitality to plants	Fresh cow, chicken or pig manure
P – Phosphorus: responsible for plant growth, and other processes	Powder made from urucum seeds, bone meal, composted fish remains
K – Potassium: boosts the flow of nutrients	Ashes from a wood stove, banana tree trunk
B – Boron: helps with fruit formation	Sap of banana trees
Mn – Manganese: helps control fungi and viruses	
Zn – Zinc: helps plants absorb nutrients	



AGROECOLOGICAL LOG BOOKS

The agroecological log book is an instrument that gives visibility to the work done by women in their yards and fields and helps promote their autonomy. It is a simple notebook with four columns on each page in which they enter information on where the production went: what was sold, what was donated, what was exchanged and what they themselves consumed.

We accompanied the implementation of their use by a group of 27 women from the Vale do Ribeira region as part of “The systematisation of rural women’s production and a look at productive backyards in Brazil” project carried in partnership with the *Instituto Federal de Matão* (Federal Institute of Matão), in São Paulo, and the *Grupo de Trabalho (GT) de Mulheres da Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia* (ANA, the Women’s Working Group of the National Agroecology Coalition).

We began the work with the socio-biodiversity map exercise: the women drew their backyards and illustrated the use of the spaces. After drawing and presenting their map, they were asked to write on a paper how the work and tasks in the unit of production were divided up between men and women.

When all the women shared their results, we were able to observe and discuss the sexual division of labour that is produced in rural areas. Their drawings show the men weeding and working out in the field and the women working near the house in the garden. Others showed the women taking care of the garden and the chickens while the men stayed with the cows and the corral. Some women farmers also showed that they sometimes do a bit of both, when help is needed: “he helps me in the kitchen when I need it and I help him in the field”. The division of labour and the allocation of roles only became

clearer, though, when they all shared their experiences: “I thought that we helped each other out at home, but it is clear how women are left with only the domestic chores and if the woman is not at home, the man does not do them on his own initiative”.

Next, the women shared experiences and perceptions on the use of the log books. Many said that they had had doubts about what to write down and how to set prices and explained why many of them had not recorded anything in the “exchange” column. Furthermore, all of them, without exception, spoke of moments of embarrassment and intimidation that they had experienced when they began the systematisation process: many said that their children and husbands would tell them that what they were doing was foolish. Being embarrassed about showing their annotations was another issue frequently raised and many asked their children or grandchildren to write the notes for them. Other embarrassing and confusing situations were related to the lack of references on the prices, weights and measurements of what was sold, produced or donated. Even so, all affirmed that the habit of organising information in the agroecological log book ended up giving them a better understanding of the reality in which they live.

| LESSONS LEARNED

During the “Feminist Economy and Agroecology” course held in Peruibe in November 2017, we took a moment to share information from the log books. We proposed a methodology called “gira-gira” or “going around the wheel”: the women form two circles, one inside the other, with the women on the outside circle facing in and the women in the inside circle facing the



AFTER “GOING AROUND THE WHEEL”, THE WOMEN SHARED WHAT THEY HAD HEARD...

- The log book helped them realise that they produce more than they thought they did.
- They were able to visualise their production and estimate what they could sell without lacking anything for their own consumption.
- They gained a better understanding of the growing seasons for the different varieties they plant.
- They realised that they save a lot of money by planting for their own consumption in their backyards, as they stop spending money in the market. They also have a greater variety of food to eat.
- The log book was a useful tool, which allowed them to obtain the “DAP” certificate (*Declaração de Aptidão ao Pronaf - Programa Nacional da Agricultura Familiar*, or Declaration of Aptitude for the National Programme to Strengthen Family Farming).
- After showing her log book to her husband, one woman farmer managed to convince him to build the fence that she had needed for a long time because he realised that she had been working and earning money for their home.

women in the outer circle. They are to line up one in front of the other. Women in the inside circle give their response to the first question to the woman standing in front of them (they all talk at the same time). When it comes time for the next question, the women on the inside circle take a step to the left until they are in front of a different woman from the outside circle. They tell their response to the second question to the woman in front of them and take another step left. They repeat this until all the questions are answered. The questions used were:

1. What lessons have you learned from writing things down in the agroecological log book?
2. What difficulties have you had?
3. Open question by the women who are listening

“I started to see that it’s worth something and that a lot of people don’t plant what I do, and I began to offer or ask for something in exchange.”

As only a few women from the groups that SOF is supporting are using the log books, every opportunity we have with the women, we present this tool. The women farmers are always curious to start writing things down and understand how it works. This was the case of a woman farmer in Apiaí, São Paulo, who began writing her annotations in the log book and then taught her daughters to write in it as well. It also led other women farmers to decide to begin selling some products in their own neighbourhoods.

Many women farmers mentioned the importance of producing better quality products without using agrochemicals, which is the reason why they produce for their own consumption.



This perception emerged when, as they were filling out the log book, they found it easy to put the sale price, but difficult to put amounts in the “consumed” category. They justified this by explaining that it is not possible to put a price on what they produce to eat at home.

Similarly, the “exchanged” columns were always the emptiest. When questioned on the absence of annotations in this column, the women explained that there is food that they give away and food that they receive, and not simultaneous exchanges per se: “today, I picked chayote and gave a bag of them to my neighbour. I know she will give me things from her garden when she has something”.

| MORE AUTONOMY FOR WOMEN

The first systematisation carried out by CTA Zona da Mata (MG) in 2014 showed the large biodiversity of vegetable and animal species in the women’s backyards. In addition to defining and quantifying their production as indicators of food security for the units of production, the log books proved to be a tool to help guarantee women farmers’ autonomy in relation to their work and productive space.

One woman farmer from the state of Minas Gerais said that she shows her log book with her annotations to her husband every time he says that “she doesn’t do anything”. Another woman shared her difficult experience with her husband in relation to her work in the yard: it began with him teasing her that the garden would not produce anything, which then escalated into him threatening to destroy her garden beds. When the woman farmer realised that the garden was viable, the woman farmer proposed dividing up the use of the space and the management of their



resources with her husband. From then on, she began to distinguish between her own economic activity and that of the family. This process led to the establishment of two economies in this home: one whose source was wage labour and the other, her production in the yard. The economy related to the production in the yard marks the moment when the woman farmer’s identity in the family changed, as she gained greater visibility and autonomy. In addition to the four columns in the log book, she includes annotations on all the money spent on the production costs of her garden, the money used for the home and the money lent to her children and husband in their daily lives. According to this woman farmer, these annotations allow her to have greater control over expenses, know what the money is being used for and have greater clarity on the income that is generated.

The agroecological log book includes not only monetary relations, but also the contributions of the feminist economy, as it links domestic work and reproduction to the concept of an economy centred on the sustainability of life, and not merely on market relations (Carasco, 2012). This can be seen in the different accounts on and experiences with its use, which give visibility and increase awareness on the work that women do and promote the creation of strategies for productive self-organisation.

SALES



There is always a demand on rural women to earn income from their products, especially when they produce an abundance of them, as in the case of the quilombola communities in Barra do Turvo. The women from the Cedro and Terra Seca quilombola communities were the first to challenge us to create a direct sales mechanism. This process began in 2016 with sales to the Quitandoca store in São Paulo. Today, it involves consumer groups from São Paulo, Santo André, Diadema and Taboão da Serra (ComerAtivamente [EatActively], CCRU - Coletivo de Consumo Rural Urbano [Urban-Rural Consumers Group], Horta di Gueto, CAUS - Conexão Agroecológica Urbana Social [Social Urban Agroecological Connection], SOF – Sempre Viva Feminist Organisation) and the Gaspar Garcia Centre's Programa Reviravolta (Turnaround Programme) that works with solid waste recyclers (catadores).

The number of women farmers' groups has also increased. In addition to the women from Cedro and Terra Seca, which now call themselves “*As Perobas*”, there are the “*As Margaridas*” (The Daisies) group from the In-

daiatuba neighbourhood; the women's group “*Esperança*” (Hope) from the Bela Vista neighbourhood; women from the *Viveiro Comunitário de mudas do Bairro Rio Vermelho* (Community seedling greenhouse from the Rio Vermelho neighbourhood) and a woman who represents the *Centro de Envolvimento Agroflorestal Felipe Moreira* (Felipe Moreira centre of involvement in agroforestry) and the “*Rosas do Vale*” (Rosas of the Vale) women's group from the Córrego da Onça neighbourhood. A woman beekeeper who is a member of the Vale Orgânico Social Control Organisation and the *Associação da Feira da Agricultura Familiar de Pariquera-Açu* (the Family Farming Market Association of Pariquera-Açu) also participates. Moreover, there are still many women farmers' groups from these and other municipalities who want to join in the process.

In our search for partnerships that could help ensure the viability of sales, we managed to obtain the support of the Barra do Turvo municipality, which agreed to provide a truck and a driver once every two weeks or once a month, depending on the volume of sales.

WEAVING THE WEB OF CONSUMER GROUPS

This collective effort aims to build close relationships between producers and consumers based on fair prices for family farmers' products and the principles of feminism, agroecology, solidarity economy and food sovereignty. This means that the sales must adapt to the products the women have at the moment, while seeking at the same time to meet the challenges of



gradually including all women farmers and increasing the variety of products. The sales process gives visibility to women's production in agriculture, promotes their autonomy through their appropriation of the income from sales and provides incentives for their self-organisation to ensure that the initiative continues even after project end and that it does not rely on outside funding.

Trust between consumer groups and women farmers regarding the agroecological products is built through visits, dialogue among women farmers, the groups' organising process, working bees, conversation circles, exchanges of experiences and SOF's technical support. The women are not required to officially certify their production as organic.

Some women farmers may come into conflict with their husbands who use herbicides and other toxic chemicals in areas under their responsibility and pressure the women to do the same. We seek to strengthen the women so that they can resist aggression from men and to prevent the women from being excluded definitively from the process.

Women are beginning to come to agreements with their husbands and children on the division of labour in the family. It is important for the women to be involved in production and decision-making processes and for everyone's work to be valued and the income distributed equally.

ON THE ROAD TO ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

When women start making their own money, a series of changes begins: they buy things for their children and for themselves and con-

tribute to groceries. Others save up what they earn to pay for small renovations or repairs in their homes, invest in equipment to process the food they produce and buy cell phones and a washing machine, which facilitate their work and help them save time. At home, in their relationship with their family, they begin to value their work more and have more freedom to participate in the meetings. The men start staying at home with the children and assuming the responsibility of preparing a meal – something that they very rarely did before.

TRAINING: GOING BEYOND THEORY

It was in practice that we realised just how complex this innovative experience with a direct sales mechanism is. The challenge consisted of organising the production of, on average, 30 women farmers from five different groups, with a variety of approximately 95 fresh food items and 87 handmade processed food products, not to mention aromatic and medicinal plants. This also involved organising the orders in a way that generates a similar average income for each woman farmer. The orders vary significantly in size – from 0.2 kg to boxes of 21 kg – and have to be picked up from a depot with limited space.

Fluctuations in participation and the different pasts and levels of experience with sales of both women farmers and consumers were additional elements that had to be taken into account when organising logistics. In our meetings, we also discussed the values that bring us together, the realities of our places of origin and practical issues related to the various stages of the commercialisation process.

Training sessions were held for both women farmers and consumer groups together, or sometimes in spaces with only the women farmers, or yet other times in the community or with representatives from the groups. The goal was to understand all of the work involved, from the organisation of food production to defining what elements compose the price of the products, the level of sales needed to make it feasible to pay for shipping, communications, the packaging and the transportation of the food items so that they retain their quality until delivery, bureaucratic requirements, collective management, the division of tasks inside the group and the establishment of collective agreements on how to function. One of the fundamental activities in this process was the “Sales Game”.

RECORDING OUR PRINCIPLES

One outcome from the process of reflecting on sales was the elaboration of the document entitled “*Princípios e orientações para nosso trabalho comum*” (Principles and guidelines for our collective work). The document systematised who the groups participating in the initiative were, their principles and way of functioning, among other aspects. Some points highlighted in the document are self-consumption, maintaining short food supply chains and the diversity of sales channels.

We want more and more women and men workers who live in the city to consume a variety of good quality food at affordable prices.

SELF-CONSUMPTION

- Producing food for one's own consumption must come before all market relations and guarantee the health of the people involved in food production. Therefore, the first point the groups agreed upon was to give priority to producing for their own consumption. The women always emphasised the principle of not taking food off the table to sell it: for example, they should not sell 1 kg of beans for R\$4 and then turn around and pay R\$5 for it in the supermarket.

Agroecological food production that not only does not use toxic chemicals or chemical fertiliser, but is also diverse and aims to use local inputs (green manure crops, composting, native seeds and natural pesticides and biofertilisers) and to balance the agro-ecosystem.

Women farmers and quilombola communities must appropriate the entire process, which must function according to the schedule that they define and guarantee that they have all the information they need to make decisions collectively and among themselves. The goal is to value the women's work and knowledge and to constantly increase their autonomy in sales and life.

Strengthening the autonomy of the women in the sales process fertilizes the struggle for an equal division of labour and income generation that supports their active participation in local organisations (associations and cooperatives) and ensures their quality of life based on healthy human relationships and having quality food to eat, which contributes to reducing violence against women in rural areas.



EMPHASIS ON SHORT SALES CIRCUITS

- In one of the activities, we made a drawing of all the steps involved in selling the products for each type of sales channel: local weekly fair, *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (PAA, Food Acquisition Programme), the Quitandoca store or markets held in distant municipalities. Based on our analysis of the drawing, we concluded that shorter sales circuits offer fairer prices for the products and affordable prices to consumers.
- Furthermore, it was clear that the amount and quality of work involved in each of the channels were different. For example, selling directly to consumers is more work than selling through a cooperative or to the PAA programme, since in the latter cases, there is a person who performs certain tasks as intermediaries, such as, for example, filling out orders, organising logistics and issuing farme receipt.

OTHER CHANNELS: FAIRS AND INSTITUTIONAL MARKETS

Besides the network of consumer groups, the training sessions on sales also worked on other channels, such as fairs – both local and thematic (agroecology, solidarity and feminist economy and agrarian reform, among others) – and institutional markets. The latter includes government food purchases through the PAA and PNAE public tenders.

In relation to these markets, the women's groups noted that despite the precarious management of the institutional markets, they continue to be one of the main sources of income generation for families in the region. The concern about whether they will be continued



A DIVERSITY OF SALES CHANNELS

- Another idea that emerged is that it is not safe to depend on only one sales channel. When seeking greater autonomy, it is better to work with more than one market because if one fails, other options exist. One example is what is happening right now in Brazil with the gradual elimination of the PAA programme by the coup government and its threats to cut the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (PNAE, or the National School Feeding Programme).

or not is leading the women to think of and invest in other ways of accessing markets, such as solidarity fairs or consumer groups.

MARKETS: CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES

Weekly markets are spaces where family farmers traditionally sell their products. In the territory of the Vale do Ribeira, they are common in bigger cities, such as Curitiba in the state of Paraná and Registro and Cajati in São Paulo. However, women farmers have various difficulties in participating in them.

In light of this situation, some women's groups identified paths for building more autonomous ways to gain access to markets.

CHALLENGES

- Obtaining a permanent spot in the markets due to the low number of markets that exist;
- Offering their products at prices that can compete with those of producers who use conventional production methods and have larger areas and more products;
- Poor public road infrastructure or precarious or absent public transportation, which makes transporting products difficult;
- The overload of domestic or care work, which the women give priority to, making it impossible for them to maintain a constant and regular presence in the markets or engage in other forms of commercialisation that require leaving the home;
- Sexism: even for the women who participate in the sales process, the men in the family continue to control decisions on production and the use of money.

Some examples are the *União de Mulheres Agricultoras de Peruíbe e Miracatu* (UMA, Union of Women Farmers from Peruíbe and Miracatu) group, which began to organise their production and managed to go through the municipal administration to get a permanent spot in the municipal market; *União de Agricultoras Agroecológicas de Itaoca* (UAAI, the Union of Agroecological Women's Farmers from Itaoca), who mobilised to establish a market in the evening; and the *Córrego da Onça* women's group, who set up a stand in their neighbourhood to sell their products. The women's self-organisation generated a series of benefits that are listed in the table below.

PARTICIPATION IN MARKETS OUTSIDE OF THE VALE DO RIBEIRA REGION

To give continuity to the experiences, we encouraged the women farmers to participate in events and activities outside the territory of the Vale do Ribeira. These events included eight markets outside the region, such as the feminist and solidarity economy markets organised together with Amesol (Associação das Mulheres na Economia Solidária, or the Association of Women in the Solidarity Economy), which brought rural women and urban craftswomen together.

For the women participants, these markets proved to be valuable spaces for learning more about sales, including ways to display their products, how to level prices and other ways to present and offer them. The events also influenced the self-organisation of the groups thanks to the division of tasks, the organisation of the cash flow, rotation of members and the beginning of a process of participating in decision-making spaces and sales management.

Amesol contributed with its experience in self-management and organising fairs: when people want to purchase items, they are given a voucher with the amount and the name of the enterprise or group. They take the ticket to the only cash register there, pay and then pick up their products. Some women take turns doing the accounting and distributing the money from sales to the respective groups. This is important for strengthening solidarity and self-governance among women not only be-



BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN MARKETS AND OF WOMEN'S SELF-ORGANISATION

- More sales opportunities, as the women can take turns to ensure that their stand in the market stays open every weekend and to divide the work and tasks among themselves.
- Learning practical things, such as how to negotiate prices and offer and present their products to consumers.
- Moments for socialising and finding new business opportunities.
- Less worries about taking caring of the children since the “whole family accompanies” the women at work.
- Women are strengthened by both the higher number of meetings and a better distribution of the work involved in planning production, processing products and helping each other transport them.
- Increase in the women’s political participation through their involvement in spaces such as the market’s managing committee and meetings with public authorities, from the municipal office on agriculture and other bodies related to the organisation of the group’s production.
- A collective space for their work and to hold leisure and training activities.
- Proof that it is possible to eat well, without chemicals, and avoid wasting food by processing it before it spoils and to have new products at home (cookies, jellies, jams, etc.).
- Visualise other mechanisms to develop an economy that functions based on solidarity, donations and exchanges.



cause of the trust it generates, but also because it facilitates the use of credit and debit card machines and cash for sales, as well as settling accounts and exchanges. In these events, many conversation circles are held in which women farmers share their experiences and take note of the things that they have in common with women working in urban enterprises and of the elements that are specific to women in rural areas.

ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONAL MARKETS: PAA, PNAE AND GOVERNMENT PURCHASES

The primary objective of institutional markets is to buy family farmers’ products to supply food to municipal schools and social assistance facilities through two main programmes: *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (PAA, or the Food Acquisition Programme) and *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (PNAE, National School Feeding Programme).

These programmes stimulated the process of organising and legally registering numerous

family farming associations and cooperatives. They also had a focus on the inclusion of the produce that women grow in their backyards and fields and on food harvesting and processing. Resolution n°. 44 of 2011 of the PAA management group established a higher number of points for organisations in which at least 40% of members are women.

Even though the statistics confirm that there is a significant number of women participating in the programmes, the moments and spaces where management decisions are made continue to be dominated by the men in the associations and cooperatives. When questioned on certain delivery procedures for the PAA, the women had difficulty responding or doubts on the information that had been passed on to them. Some complain of being excluded from the management of the associations or cooperatives. Even so, they confirm that they participate in assemblies and meetings, but have difficulties understanding the organisation's reports during the meetings. According to the women's accounts, men's actions that discourage women from taking part are reducing the time they have to talk when they begin their intervention during meetings and giving the men priority and the women less time to use the cooperative's machines and equipment.

After the coup d'état in May 2016, some women farmers expressed their fear that the PAA and PNAE would be discontinued. This could result in the loss of surplus production and of the women's economic autonomy, as it would eliminate a source of income that, even though payment is sometime delayed, is guaranteed.

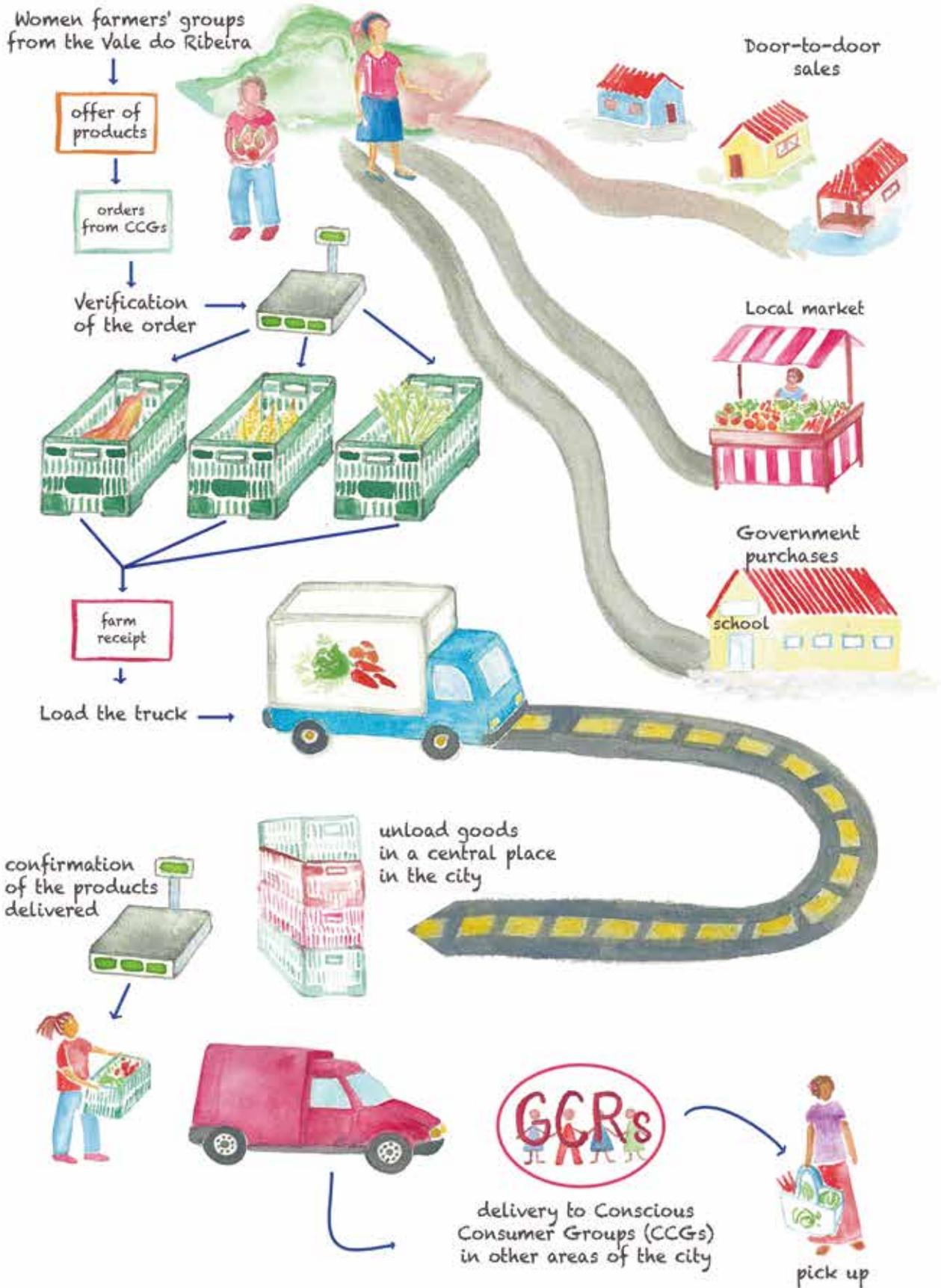
Aware of the need to strengthen the women's groups' income generation capacities, SOF encouraged some groups to participate in government tenders processes. This was the case of the groups in the municipalities of Itaoca and Peruíbe in São Paulo. Some of the women from Peruíbe who wanted to sell their bread to the school lunch programme set up a family farming association in the neighbourhood where they live and submitted a bid to the public tender process to offer their products. They succeeded in entering the round of price negotiations and offering their bread for a just price that would remunerate the group for its work, arguing that they could not compete with companies with industrialised and standardised production and offer their products for a price that bears no relation to family farmers' reality and productive capacity.

As for the women from the UAAI group, they used their annotations in the agroecological log books to offer products to the PAA. The group took the initiative of holding a meeting with women from the neighbourhood who were interested in participating. Together, they planned their production for a one-year period and divided up the amount received from the PAA equally. SOF helped with the workshop on the elaboration of projects and the members of the group took turns collecting documents and entering them into an online system.

In 2017, the federal government reduced the PAA's budget 66% in comparison to the 2016 year. The projects of many organisations that had already been integrated into the public tenders system were not approved. This justifies the concerns of the women from the quilombola community in Barra do Turvo mentioned earlier



Sales Routes



and the fact that the UAAI's proposal was not approved in 2017. Despite the dismantling of these programmes, these experiences have served to strengthen the groups in their respective regions, both in their relations with public authorities and within the association to which they belong. The lessons learned from their participation in institutional markets show that they now have a different way of seeing themselves, taking action and changing situations in spaces that are traditionally dominated by men.

| PARTICIPATORY CERTIFICATION PROCESSES

Certification is the process that guarantees that a given food item was produced agroecologically, without the use of chemicals. When producers and consumers know one another personally, trust in the quality of the products is established through their direct relationship. When relationships are more distant, trust is created by using a seal or label that confirms that the product is organic or made by family farmers or quilombola communities.

When we began to understand how the organic certification process works, we found that the system that adapts the best to the reality of the women's groups in the Vale do Ribeira region was to establish a “*Organização de Controle Social para a Venda Direta*” (OCS), or Social Control Organisation for Direct Sales.

The OCS system was created precisely so that family, quilombola and indigenous women and men farmers could sell their products directly to consumers in markets and fairs, consumer groups, as organic food baskets or to

institutional markets such as the PNAE (National School Feeding Programme) or the PAA (Food Acquisition Programme).

The OCS can be formed by a formal (association) or informal group, as is the case of the women's groups with whom SOF works. The tasks involved in running an OCS are planned and carried out by the members. Priority is given to transparency in production and fair trade relations based on solidarity.

This method of social control can be adapted to the reality of each group. After registering the group with the Ministry of Agriculture, OCS members have certain obligations, including the one to keep up-to-date information on the unit of production, such as:

- | an estimate of annual production;
- | the execution of the organic management plan;
- | compliance with social control procedures signed by the group, which include visits or working bees and
- | a record of the activities and meetings held.

PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS

In Participatory Guarantee Systems (*Sistemas Participativos de Garantia, SPG*), operationalisation is more bureaucratic. SPGs are designed for farmers who sell to third parties and therefore, require the certified organic seal. They unite producers and other people interested in setting up the system, as well as a Participatory Conformity Assessment Organisation (Organismo Participativo de Avaliação da Conformidade, OPAC). OPACs are companies or other legal entities that assume the legal responsibility for evaluating if produc-



tion is following the regulations and technical norms on organic production.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

It is very common that in mixed groups that work with OCSs and SPGs, women are not involved in decision-making spaces or visits. When they are present, they are often taking care of activities related to domestic and care work, such as preparing meals for the visits. It is thus fundamental to holding a discussion on how gender relations and the sexual division of labour exclude women and generate inequalities in order to guarantee women's participation in the certification processes.

Women farmers from the Vale do Ribeira region participated in two activities where they were able to exchange with other women farmers involved in certification processes: the Women and SPG seminar organised by *Rede Ecovida* (Ecovida network) and *Centro Ecológico* (Ecological centre), and an exchange organised by the *Instituto Federal do Sul de Minas Gerais* (Federal Institute of the south of Minas Gerais). In both events, women farmers spoke about challenges in gaining access to markets and affirmed that leadership is still predominantly male.

The table below illustrates the difficulties that the women experience in exerting their decision-making power in the family, in production and in the organisation of work, as well as possible paths for change:

Issues on women's autonomy in relation to their work are also influenced by what is and is not paid. Domestic care tasks occupy most of women farmers' time. When women are able to generate income from their work in the yard or the fields, the men in the family immediately begin to take over the women's space by establishing their control over the decisions:

"I wanted to grow palm trees organically, but my husband said I didn't have time to weed and sprayed chemicals on everything."

The women have noted that participatory certification processes help raise the prices of their products (with 30% increases on the price that institutional markets such as the PNAE or PAA pay) and guarantee control over their spaces of production and decisions within the family unit.

Difficulties	Actions necessary to overcome them
Men manage the land.	Strengthen women
Decision-making power is in the hands of men.	Greater participation of women (in SPGs or neighbourhood associations)
Knowledge is concentrated in men	Search for knowledge
Concentration of income in the hands of men	Economic independence (have their own garden)
Physical coercion – violence against women	Women leave the stove to lead the revolution
Sexual division of labour	Male participation in domestic chores

One example of this was given by a women farmer from Apiaí, São Paulo, while she was explaining what motivated her to participate in an OCS:

“I’m not planning to sell the products as organic food; they are for our use at home. But at home, my husband sprays weed killer on everything and if I were to say that I am part of an organic producers group, he would no longer spray it on the things that I plant.”

WITHOUT FEMINISM, THERE IS NO AGROECOLOGY

According to Emma Siliprandi (2015), it is well known that women are the first to defend converting farms to more sustainable models out of concern for people’s health and eating and protecting the environment.

Women are affected by the direct consequences of environmental degradation. For example, it forces them to go further to find water or firewood to prepare meals. When someone gets sick in the family, the burden of care falls on them. In many discussions, women talked about the health problems affecting members of their family caused by direct contact with agrochemicals, such as severe allergic reactions among children, skin problems, infections and pain. Thus, the women’s decision to opt for agroecological practices is motivated primarily by health issues and the search for healthy food.

However, producing agroecologically also favours the expansion of the markets for these products and this is a challenge in the region.

The municipal governments do not allocate resources to purchases of organic products and when purchasing food supplies for institutions, they pay the same price for organic and for conventional food produced with agrochemicals.

Women also criticise the low prices paid for their products in the region, where the offer of conventional products is greater and their prices are lower for consumers at the markets.

“My clients believe me when I say that they’re organic because we’ve known each other for a long time and because the products are tasty, which is different from the ones produced with chemicals. I’ve never been happier with sales! Having the certificate on my car helps increase sales even more to people who are still finding out about organic food and shows that products without chemicals do exist.”

The experiences that involve the women in processes of agroecological production are what gives visibility to their work and guarantees their spaces of production.

OCSs and the agroecological transition led to a new process of reflection and self-organisation for the groups of women farmers with whom SOF works. Thinking of strategies for gaining market access, comparing organic products and production with conventional ones, and discussing the market that we want are some of the issues. These issues offer lessons that increase the possibility of making improvements to our lives.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION BUILDING INDICATORS OF WOMEN'S AUTONOMY*



For Christian Aid, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an essential part of the project management process, as it ensures transparency in the work done, creates opportunities to highlight impacts and, more importantly, stimulates learning processes. Furthermore, monitoring results is an important tool for adapting certain interventions and generates input for making decisions on a given project.

As part of the partnership established for the work done with women in the Vale do Ribeira region with the support of the Newton Fund, and to strengthen exchanges between the two organisations, Christian Aid offered part of its experience with evaluation processes to elaborate together with SOF a monitoring plan specifically for the project. For this,

a workshop on the issue was held during the planning phase, as well as two monitoring visits. We also provided support for the elaboration of indicators that could be used for a monitoring exercise. Based on this experience, we present some reflections here to highlight the experience that the project has accumulated on this issue and to support the continuation of monitoring processes.

In general, establishing indicators during the elaboration phase obliges us to look closely at the intervention's objectives and understand their relevance better. Objectives that are inappropriate, unrealistic or too vague cannot be measured or do not produce results that can be observed within the proposed scope of a project. In the specific case of the Newton Fund, for example, one of the expected outcomes was the "increase in the stability of the pro-

* Text elaborated by Rosana Miranda, Advisor to Christian Aid's Brazil Programme)

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

- Christian Aid defines resilience as the process of developing the abilities of individuals and communities to 'anticipate, organise for and adapt to change' in order to effectively respond to disaster situations, risks or opportunities. Resilience is understood as both a process (steps taken to achieve an end) and a consequence (the end result).

duction systems". Although clearly central to the desired change, a much greater time period would be needed to duly verify it.

Furthermore, looking beyond the life of the project, at a time of intense political disputes marked by growing conservatism, the criminalisation of social movements and the rejection of politics as the driving force for change, the strategic need to shine light on and identify evidence of the impacts of popular and feminist training methods, solidarity economy and agroecology is growing. It is especially crucial to show agroecology's role in the construction of economic and social autonomy. Even though many of the agroecology-based approaches to resilience have the most promising results in terms of adaptation, there is still relatively little research done on them. Resolving this is a challenge in a funding environment where "only what can be measured is done".

There are, however, many challenges to monitoring training processes such as the ones proposed by SOF in the Vale do Ribeira region. In short, how do we monitor the construction of women's autonomy? How do we explore complex processes that have multiple

causes and have been constructed historically using an evaluation process with limited time, scope and resources? How do we avoid taking these processes lightly and suggesting causal relations that do not hold up just to satisfy donors' demands? There is a need to refine monitoring and evaluation techniques so that they take into account non-material and subjective aspects of development projects.

In the specific case of the work done with women farmers from the Vale do Ribeira area, other challenges for carrying out monitoring and evaluation activities exist. One important advance was the information gathering workshops held in the communities in which women identified demands and obstacles. In the absence of a baseline for the project, the systematised information from these meetings provided some direction for the M&E process. Other obstacles also exist in relation to the distances between and difficulties in accessing the communities involved (as well as gaps in communications infrastructure), the project's relatively short duration, the overlap of the tasks of the technicians involved in the execution of the activities and the need to strengthen the monitoring tools and skills available to the technical team.

PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

The experience with the women from the Vale reinforces the need to strengthen - both within and outside the project - participatory M&E tools that take into consideration the lessons learned from a feminist training process. Evaluation processes that focus on the gender



inequalities that contribute to social injustice, question existing research dynamics, examine gender issues and set off processes of change are needed. In this context, it is essential that the monitoring and evaluation processes consider the power asymmetries present in the construction of knowledge to guarantee that the evaluations give sufficient value to women's narratives and experiences.

There are some elements that can be explored to monitor the training processes from a participatory approach.

CONSTRUCT A SYSTEMATIC AND REALISTI CM&E PLAN

Regardless of the approach to monitoring and evaluation adopted, building a plan – even a simple one – during the project's planning phase guarantees greater coherence among the different parts of the intervention, as well as the rigour and transparency of the monitoring process itself. A plan that defines a baseline for at least some key indicators and sets specific times for data collection during the planned activities can integrate M&E into the execution of the project in a more organic way, and reduce the workload when it comes time to prepare reports.

"NO NUMBERS WITHOUT STORIES, NO STORIES WITHOUT NUMBERS"

Challenging the hierarchy of data means proposing that they be given equal importance, without overrating quantitative data at the expense of qualitative ones. There are



different ways of producing and expressing knowledge, and recognising the existing asymmetries among these different ways is an important step for developing tools that capture a broader range of evidence.

ENSURE DIVERSITY IN DATA COLLECTION

Using a variety of qualitative, quantitative and participatory methodologies provides a much more comprehensive overview of the dynamics and changes and values the diversity of perspectives. This includes giving importance to less traditional data collection methods: sometimes, a video of an event or the record from a WhatsApp group's chat are not seen as a means of verification, but they can contain important information on the activities' development and impact. Even though they cannot be analysed statistically, they represent excellent opportunities for collecting qualitative data. In these cases, it is fundamental to obtain the participants' consent beforehand in relation to the dissemination of information.



BEYOND MAPPING

Given that gender-based inequality is systemic and structural, one contribution of a participatory, feminist-based M&E process could be to go beyond documenting women's positions in the contexts in which they live to ask questions about the reasons that put them in these positions. This focus on power dynamics, especially in relation to gender, must guide the whole monitoring process, based on the understanding that M&E is a political activity. It also means that project participants must have a role in describing the processes involved, analysing the results and judging the outcomes of the activities.

THE PROPOSAL ON INDICATORS

Considering the objectives and expect-

ed outcomes of the “Building capacities and sharing experiences for an inclusive economy” project, we proposed some preliminary indicators that can reveal the impacts in the thematic areas of feminist training, technical assistance based on agroecology and sales. The table below includes some of the suggested indicators, which can be used to follow up on the discussion of the monitoring of the project. The indicators seek to throw light on topics such as the increase in the women's income and the diversification of their production, the expansion of this production (for sales and self-consumption), greater autonomy in relation to external inputs and their husband's work, the increase in youth participation, training on the coordination and creation of networks, and the systematisation of traditional knowledge.

The indicators in the table do not, by any means, constitute an exhaustive list. They can be revisited and others can be added. When sufficient data is available, they can illustrate important dimensions of the development of the women's autonomy. The first rounds of data collection could even serve to form the baseline for future comparisons, should the intervention continue. A monitoring plan that combines these indicators and others considered important with regular data collection and the active participation of the women from the groups will undoubtedly generate additional and more systematic inputs that help strengthen this unique experience in building an inclusive economy.



Objective	Result	Potential indicators	Means of verification
OBJECTIVE 1: Train women farmers and traditional communities on the use of agroecological practices and the creation of local markets	Food production is increased by using sustainable practices	Greater variety in the food baskets Increase in the production and distribution of herbal medicines /	Annotations in agroecological log books / Women's reports on self-consumption / List of products offered to consumer groups
	Tradition knowledge of women is systematised	Quantity of materials used to keep a record of traditional knowledge (recipe books, etc.) / Exchange of knowledge among women	Annotations in agroecological log books / List of products offered to consumer groups / Materials produced by the project
	Inputs for agroecological production are produced locally and at a low cost	Production of seedlings / natural sprays / activities on the production of inputs	Reports from activities on the production of inputs / Women's reports on access to inputs
OBJECTIVE 2: Organise training activities that connect the personal empowerment of women to the socioeconomic development of the communities	Increased distribution of and access to healthy food	Number of people involved in consumer groups and group purchases / Contracts with PAA and PNAE	SOF and consumer groups' records / contracts with institutional markets
	Rural women's agency is enhanced.	Confirmed increase in income / Use of income / Women's spaces for organising created or strengthened / Creation of women's networks / Number of working bees held	Balance sheets from the sales process / Women's reports on the increase and use of income / Reports on activities held
	Increased involvement of young women in rural areas and agriculture	Number of young women (15-29) who participate in training activities / Number of young women involved in consumer groups	Reports on project activities / Records of consumer groups
	Mechanisms to combat discrimination and domestic and sexual violence are adopted in the communities	Increase in participants' demand for debates on the issue / Number of times the issue is discussed in the groups / Participation of women from the groups in SOF's campaigns / Support tools developed by the groups	Reports from seminars and other activities / Women's reports on the issue / Records from SOF's campaigns (audio-visual)
	Training programme that combines personal and economic autonomy is systematised in dialogue with partner organisations	Number of activities on the systematisation of knowledge / people involved in the systematisation of knowledge / tools developed (publications, guides, etc.)	Interim report on activities / Feedback from partner organisations
OBJECTIVE 3: Systematise the experience developed in dialogue with the work done by Christian Aid on access to inclusive markets and gender justice in South America	Proposal on new approaches for addressing problems related to the promotion of an inclusive economy, one that combats gender inequalities and meets communities' immediate needs, while contributing to the resolution of similar problems in other regions	Number of activities with regional/international partners / Systematisation materials produced / Exchanges with other partners and organisations	Activities reports / Communications materials / Publications on the project

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