Family as a Trap: The Other Side of Family Agriculture

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Abstract

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) declared 2014 to be the International Year of the Family Farming (AIAF), stating that family farm production is essential to maintain global food security; that family farming produces diversified nutrition, uses natural resources, and sustainably, boosts local economies. The FAO also stated that if women had equal access to the means of production: land, education, and access to credit, among others, they might increase global agricultural production to feed more than 150 million hungry people in the world. We present evaluation results of a development project focused on women, whose purpose was to promote changes in gender relations and contribute to creating egalitarian social relations in the rural areas. The research focused on the Dom HelderCâmara project (DHCP), which was held in agrarian reform settlements and rural villages, of Cariris, in Paraíba, Brazil.

Keywords: Gender, empowerment; development projects; family farming, Brazil

1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a socio-anthropological survey " Cracks in the Everyday Life, Breaks in History", conducted between 2009 and 2011, whose objective was to examine whether the insertion of women in development projects aimed at the family farm in northeastern Brazil, to promote gender equality, can engender changes in traditional gender relations, while promoting female empowerment. We performed a qualitative investigation of rural settlements in the Cariri region, of the state of Paraíba, which benefited from the governmental actions of the Dom HelderCâmara Project (DHCP).

The research examined following questions: Do programs for family farming, such as the DHCP, promote changes in the sexual division of labor? Are changes produced in gender roles, or are family conflicts created? Do the activities developed by the project create new characters in the field? Do they have the potential to generate new cultural practices? What impacts do the projects have in promoting citizenship, autonomy, equity, and women's empowerment?

If these projects might transform the lives of women, we want to know to what extent they influenced the everyday sphere, if women gained more autonomy (the ability to manage their own lives), to break with the intricate network of relationships that places them in the subordinate position. Women are forced to bargain for the most elementary of rights, such as having a voice in decisions, to work or to study, assurance of physical integrity, and the right to come and go.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) declared 2014 to be the International Year of Family Farming (AIAF), stating that such production is essential to maintain global food security, this, considering that the family farm produces a varied diet, uses natural resources sustainably and drives local economies. In Brazil, family farming is responsible for 70 % of the food consumed in the country, and this scenario is not exclusively Brazilian. Data from the Banco do Nordeste shows that family agriculture is responsible for 82.9 % of employment for field labor in the region

In 2011, the FAO report on "The State of Food and Agriculture," predicted that if women had equal access to the means of production: land, education, and access to credit, among others, they could increase agricultural production providing food for more than 150 million hungry people in the world. For this to happen, women need to be valued, and no longer seen as mere helpers, but as having a significant role in the organizational process, since they are in possession of know-how, that has the potential to increase production.

During long droughts in the semi-arid northeastern Brazil, productive family gardens are true oases, which result from the work of women who do invisible tasks, around the domestic space, which are not normally considered work, even though they often ensure the supply of food for the entire family during times of drought. This frequent experience needs to be re-appreciated, highlighting women's work on the family farm, and without having their participation diluted within the "family farming " scenario.

Even without autonomy over the use of the land, and with little or no access to credit, and no specific technical knowledge, they invigorate family production, and generate income, while preserving agro-biodiversity. However, when these tasks are added every day to the normal domestic workload, it creates an "overworked" burdened condition, but without the social recognition.

Public policies have the objective of promoting women's empowerment and ensuring alternative sources of income for the rural areas. Yet from the perspective of feminist theory, when assessing a project focused on gender relations, the most relevant factor is whether the project has reorganized gender roles and sexual division of labor, as well as securing more power and rights for women. In the feminist analysis, investigation of gender inequalities has a place of privilege because it seeks those silences "hidden in the corners of conversations." It does not consider the dynamics between the sexes as purely statistical, because even in oppressive and unfavorable contexts, agency itself still exists, whether individual or collective, and this same agency promotes breaks in the constricting social structure.

In the case of the DHCP, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUL), the goal is to promote gender equality through income generating projects in family agriculture, which is seen as vital to economic security and to political, social, cultural, and environmental stability.

Public policies for family farming consider the gradual reduction of state involvement in the economy arising from the modernization (with a view to the market) of rural production. The DHCP supports and encourages different productive activities such as the production of chickens, goats, organic gardens, worm farming, and agro-ecological market-fairs.

Our research was conducted in three settlements (Santa Catarina, Novo Mundo and SerroteAgudo) and two rural villages (Tingui and Porções). The methodology was based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. We selected locations based on indications from feminist non-governmental organizations already active in the region; SerroteAgudo, (where projects unfolded with ease); Novo Mundo, (the area found most difficult to work by NGOs); and Santa Catarina, (the most consolidated settlement of the region, with the most infrastructure). In the course of the fieldwork, we found two rural villages; Tingui, already benefited by the DHCP project, and Porções, a fishing community on the edge of the reservoir of the same name, which has not received any intervention projects or actions, and does not count on them. Thus, Porções served as a control group for comparing the perceptions and behaviors of the women, where there had been interventions by the DHCP, and feminist NGO activity.

Throughout the year 2009, more than 100 semi-structured interviews in 5 locations were carried out with identified leaders, mobilizers (facilitators) of the projects, and the recipients. The interviewees were women participants in the varying PDHC projects, (including those who had left the project), and women from the control group. Through interviewing, we were able to find other recipients, using the "snowball" method, in which each interviewee suggests other names.

The NGO partners were directly observed in their field performance, and we interviewed a representative of the NGO "Vínculos." In the final stages of the research, we also conducted a workshop that brought together twenty-five women to close the study with a free exchange of ideas, involving the researchers and the women under study.

The DHCP proposes that mainstreaming of gender, ethnicity, and generation is applied in all project actions. To accomplish this goal, the DHCP made partnerships with two feminist NGOs: the "Centro de Referência da Mulher 8 de Março" (CRM8M) whose main objectives are to combat domestic and sexual violence, and to promote women's health thru prevention and education; and with the Feminist Collective "CunhãColetivoFeminista", a feminist organization that acts in strengthening urban and rural women's movements in health, sexual and reproductive rights, and citizenship. These women's organizations have worked since the 1990's, for defense of women's rights, and for gender equity in Paraíba.

The feminist NGOs started their actions in Cariri in 2003, in 15 settlements and 18 family farming communities. Among the actions were: the elaboration of two diagnoses of the socioeconomic reality facing women in this region, training of DHCP technicians, extensionists, and social mobilizers to guarantee gender mainstreaming in all activities, and women's workshops on organization, work, and violence.

One of the stated goals of the DHCP, as indicated, and itemized in its agenda, is to promote gender equality thru the empowerment of women, including them in positions of power or decision.

2. Empowerment in Brazilian Rural Area

A long trajectory separates the initial development projects for women, from empowerment. Since the 1990s, empowerment has been pursued by development projects, fomenting agencies, and international organizations. However, it is one thing to embrace a theory; it is another to apply it; not always is it performed in a successful manner. We intend to demonstrate how, in practice, the DHCP handled the intricate issue of women's empowerment during the project's development.

In the context of international cooperation, Esther Boserup (1970) described a scenario in which half of the population was excluded from development projects. Subsequently, the International Year of the Woman (1975) gave visibility to the exclusion of women in projects. This led international agencies to recast their policies and to elaborate "Women in Development" (WID), in order to insert women in socioeconomic development. The WID was based on the idea that it was necessary to integrate women into development, and access would be thru projects involving women's employment and income. However, the WID did not suggest structural changes in economic projects, and as such, it was called the "Add Women and Stir" policy.

The decade of the 1980's brought the concept of gender, born in academia, to the projects of the cooperation agencies, substantially altering the structure of development projects for women. The insertion of the gender concept reveals clearly, the weakness of the economist stance as adopted in the fight against gender inequality. Adopting the concept of gender it becomes clear that the origin of inequality goes far beyond the economic sphere; it is embedded in the cultural practices that permeate all dimensions of existence.

New development projects have been formatted using the gender approach, Gender and Development (GAD), which prioritizes the transformation of women's positions in society, and the redistribution of power between the sexes. GAD put empowerment in the feminist agenda, focusing on the democratization of gender relations.
Gita Sen, and Caren Grown introduced the notion of empowerment, as collective action towards solving problems in the local context. From this concept, they developed new strategies and methods to create the political mobilization which empowers women, and changes society (Sen and Grown, 1988.)

In the view of GAD, it is to unveil the structures and processes that place women at a disadvantage, and to dismantle them in order to empower women. In WID policy, the focus was to develop policies that meet immediate needs, which is inherently much less problematic than to provoke permanent change in women's lives. From the perspective of GAD, the focus is to end the subordination of women through empowerment.

Jo Rowlands (1997) added to the concept of empowerment the notion that it isn't only providing a role in the decision making process, but making it such that women begin to see themselves as agents, capable to act, to decide, and to change.

Jane Parpart (2002) attributes to empowerment, the capacity to subvert power relations, either within the institutions, or within the material and discursive contexts. Thus, individual empowerment happens within institutions and discursive practices through the acquisition of skills, awareness, and decision-making power. Here, empowerment is a twofold being; process, and outcome. While the process is fluid and unpredictable, the outcome can be measured from the achievements attained.

We understand that gender equality starts with the discovery of one's own ability to exercise an effective role in the process of change. Empowerment brings awareness of one's role as agent. For this reason, the need to deconstruct cultural values that place women as lacking the capacity for action and decision. To reach the empowerment of women who are caught in subaltern imposing contexts, the role of external community agents, such as the feminist NGOs is important.

3. Profile of Women in the Cariris Settlements

The Cariris are located in the "polygonal droughts" of the Northeast, a semiarid region characterized by high temperatures, little thermal variation, and scarce, erratic rainfall, which is concentrated in the winter. Despite the scarcity of water resources, the region has a large water storage capacity in its many reservoirs, placing it among, the regions with the highest rates of damming in the world. Our research was conducted in Western Cariri in Paraíba, an area which covers seventeen counties.

In selected areas, the rural villages of Porções and Tingui, the settlements of Santa Catarina, in Monteiro (320 families), Novo Mundo), in Camalaú (87 families), and SerroteAgudo, in Sumé (86 families), we observed that despite the distinguished history of each settlement, setting aside the peculiarities of each, they have many aspects in common.

In all of the communities, the family is the basic unit of production; and the main income generating activities are subsistence farming, the planting of temporary crops, predominantly corn, and beans, and the rearing of small livestock, especially goats. This income is supplemented by providing services (hired labor) such as bricklaying etc., a situation of "pluriactivity." Most of the settlers receive benefits from the Federal Government, either a Family Allowance, a school pension, or retirement. The women do crafts work in their free time, with renaissance lace as, an example of generating additional income.

From the interviews with women beneficiaries of the DHCP projects, we observed a profile: among them 58% were between 26-45 years old, 83% were married, 53% had not completed primary education, 7% had completed elementary school, 10% had completed high school, 11% were taking supplementary courses, and a full 19% of them declared themselves illiterate. One reason for the abandonment of studies was marriage during studies before the age of eighteen. As to the number of children, 50% of the total said they had one or two children, a minority reported having between three and five children, and an even smaller percentage between six and ten children, 11 % did not have children. These figures confirm that the trend of falling birth rates in the country also happens in the rural areas. Also noteworthy is that 66 % of the interviewees were covered by the "BolsaFamília" (Family Allowance).

Completing the interviews, we held a workshop with twenty-five womenin Monteiro, a principal city in the region. The workshop had the following objectives: 1) to promote a debate, and to learn their impressions about the role of women in rural areas, about domestic violence, and about changes in traditional gender relations/roles, 2) to promote the exchange of opinions and experiences between them.

We divided the work into three integrated moments for objectives and themes: a focus group, free time (for spontaneous interaction among participants), and exhibition of movies, photographs, pictures and news stories to encourage the women to express their views on the issues presented.

During the focus groups, we present statistical data from "Monitoring Crimes Against Women in Paraíba" (2008 and 2009), conducted by the NGO CRM8M. We then ran the movie "AcordaRaimundo! Acorda" (Wake up Raimundo! Wake up), produced by the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE). This film has served well as a motivator of debate and discussion in feminist movements, it is about the inversion of traditional gender roles in society, and emphasizes the daily lives of women living under machismo and violence. The film stimulates reflection on the construction of masculinity and gender roles. After the exhibition, we placed pictures of men (performing tasks traditionally identified as feminine), on the walls to start the workshop discussions.

With this method, we aimed to provide an opportunity for the women to express their views by addressing hypothetical situations, thus treating (indirectly), their reality. We adopted this strategy considering that it might be easier for people, in general to talk about the lives of others than to talk about themselves, especially when dealing with personal issues.

Encouraged by the movie, images, and news, a debate brought commentary and impressions; feelings were revealed and reflections promoted. The women recounted experiences with violence, fighting, and betrayals; but they also talked about marital relationships based on respect, and on negotiation of conflicts. They shared their views, and getting emotionally involved with the cases presented they revealed their own dilemmas.

We observed that six years of NGO interventions, had brought the understanding that violence is neither "normal" nor acceptable, however they did not seem to connect the roots of violence, to the difference in power between the sexes. The reactions to the news stories on gender violence were of outrage, but the motives of the crimes were attributed: to an "absence" of God in the heart", to fate, or to meanness, as disassociated from the general context of gender violence, they treated the cases as isolated, and not as a symptom of a social phenomenon.

4. The Family Farm as Crop Salvation

In the Agrarian Reform Project, family farming historically appears as the agent of modernization in rural areas. Family farming is understood as "where management, ownership and most of the work comes from individuals with mutual ties of blood or marriage" (ABRAMOVAY, 1997, p. 3).

The center of the current debate today is for Brazilian society to see the agrarian reform settlements, not as spaces of conflict, but as spaces of food production, and generation of employment and income. This is the great contemporary challenge.

In the official discourse, a productive, modern and competitive country needs to have a more balanced and democratized agrarian structure. However, despite its importance, the Agrarian Reform programs distribute lots in settlements that are precarious, lacking infrastructure such as roads, communication, and access to essential goods and services.

Family farming is characterized by a plurality of activities that guarantee both social and economic reproduction within the family unit, and whose stability comes from kinship relations. For Schneider (2003), "pluriactivity occurs not only in relation to the allocation of the labor force, but also to aspects concerning gender and the family hierarchy" (Schneider, 2003, p. 101). To this, Stropasolas (2004) adds that in family farming, "the entire organization of the work process is biased against women [...] and this consists as a truly secular trait of familial production worldwide "(Stropasolas, 2004, p. 254).

Portella and Silva (2006) find that in the rural family, women live a situation of marked disadvantage, embedded in a culture that divides roles, responsibilities, and values, male and female, in a rigid and hierarchical way. There is no collective planning among family members to define production; the head of the family is the one that controls the work of the women and children. In this sense, family farming is structured by the hierarchical relationship between male and female, between adult and child, the father figure is the one with power of decision; family farming is a place of familial/domestic oppression, experienced as "normal" (Portella and Silva, 2006, p. 132).

Women are shut out of the public sphere, and are contained in isolation typical to the nature of their activities, the majority confined to the house or the yard. The centrality of power in the figure of the father, coupled with the condition of isolation, permeates and characterizes the condition of our nation's rural families, and creates situations where the law, justice, and rights are subordinates. In this research, we proposed to investigate the fissures caused by the new conflicts, and new behaviors that might implode this authoritarian and oppressive family structure.

According to Debert (2006), we currently see a process of "re-privatization" that renews the role of the family in policy issues. In the current public policies, the family is not seen as the traditional, patriarchal family, but now appears in the discourse of social programs as a privileged institution, the "kingdom of protection and affection" with the potential to solve social problems. There is no individual's pension; the core of social programs is the family.

"The principal characteristic of family relationships is hierarchy; here there is no one equal to another. It is an institution permeated with conflicts of gender, generation, and limited resources. Feminism was very critical of all this, the vision of the family as an institution capable of creating social harmony, completely non-feminist, and apolitical to a struggle that sought to transform women into persons (with rights) of law. It is a quasi-religious, charitable ideology, it joins to Human Rights. It's an unfortunate backlash" (DEBERT, 2006, p. 116)

Gender sensitive policies start from a recognition that men and women participate unequally in the development process. Often their needs, interests, and priorities are different, and sometimes conflicting.

Guijt and Shah discuss in The Myth of Community (1998), such traps are faced by development projects, when they incorporate the concept of community understood as an organic and monolithic whole. For these authors, since the 1970s, a politically homogeneous and ideal theoretical model of local cultural participation has been in the creating, and has acted as a counterpoint to impersonal and deteriorated institutions. This model could meet the real needs of the people with all sides represented, if based on grassroots participation through decision forums.

The ideal of community suggests that plans and actions will meet the needs of the whole. Any lack of fairness, oppressive social hierarchies, and discriminations are omitted. This is because emphasis is given to cooperation and harmony of the imagined community (Guijit and Shah, 1998).

Neither communities nor families can be thought of as homogeneous groups. If gender studies fall into the trap of the ideal community, they will end up by obliterating gender differences. Instead of thinking in terms of homogeneity and harmony, the debate needs to be replaced by a more complex vision that acknowledges the multiple conflicts of interest that permeate and define families and communities. Otherwise, the projects run the risk of legitimizing the very processes and social relations that perpetuate inequality.

5. *From the Backyard to the World: The Straying of Empowerment*

"The combination of productive and reproductive activities, and the long working hours of rural women, effectively makes them the busiest people in the world "(FAO: 1993, p.37).

Although power and income should be so structured as to ensure effective political empowerment of women, we found that this was not perceived by the participants as the difference between the DHCP, geared toward productive activities, and the feminist NGOs, seeking to promote gender equity. In other words, the women considered the programs homogeneously, and warm up only slightly to the feminist proposals and actions. They attended the meetings for planning and monitoring of productive projects, as well as the meetings for discussion of topics related to gender, as coordinated by the feminist NGOs, (which they say that they find both important and interesting, but that they did not bring immediate and concrete returns to their families). The point is that the ideas of individuality and autonomy (so dear to the feminist political agenda) are not a concern for the mother figure in the traditional model, or rural family, she doesn´t see herself as an autonomous being but as a part of a family.

"Who did the shopping was me, but who did the paying was him. Who balanced the accounts was me, but who paid them was him. [...] After I became separated, it was me that went to work, and received the money... knowing what I needed to know, or not..." (Flor de Cacto, settlement of Santa Catarina, Monteiro, PB).

The above statement demonstrates how gender relations in families of settlements work. There are women who decide on how to use the household income, but it is the husbands who hold the money. The control that the husbands have, showed up clearly during the interviews, when they (the husbands), often stood close by, listening to the testimonials and supplementing the answers. This caused embarrassment for the women. We explained that it was the women and DHCP projects that were the focus of our research, but the men saw themselves as "family spokespersons," and as such, they were legitimized, including so by their wives, for whom they spoke.
An important fact is that (in the DHCP projects) some of the women gave up their participation because of their husbands, as only one person from each family was allowed. Those who chose to participate, told us of arduous domestic negotiations to participate in meetings. But they felt it was worth it, because of the technical and gender issues, and they described the meetings as spaces of sociability, social mobilization and the exchange of experiences.

"Before we began meeting in the Dom Helder project, we were very still, could barely talk, we were embarrassed when the people began to arrive. [...] Yet after we began to attend the meetings, we learned to talk more, it was very good, and to have more income". (Flor da Caatinga, Serrote Agudo, PB).

It is unclear to what extent they benefited from the information on rights, citizenship and development, but they did perceive the meetings with NGO feminists as differentiated from DHCP meetings. In meetings with NGO feminists the women claimed to have gained a voice and were heard, and they learned about their rights and the "Maria da Penha Law" (violence against women). They armed themselves with this knowledge, and thus had direct impacts on their settlements, as they began to denounce the perpetrators and insist on legal action. They also confirmed that the number of cases of assaults had decreased since the informational workshops.

However, many husbands did not allow their wives to participate in the meetings; they only opened up to their participation when they realized it was an activity for financial return, as in the agro-ecological market fairs or on exchange trips. Control and monitoring are not easily perceived as forms of domination, because they are often disguised as concern, care, caution, or jealousy, or as expressions of love.

The living condition of rural women is marked by excessive labor, tasks, and "obligations" that involve the sphere of production, and reproduction. Family farming is structured out of collective and voluntary family work, obtained through non-economic ties, stamped by an affection that obscures the exploitation. Apparently, everyone works for the good of all; however, this common logic naturally hides many disadvantages for women.

The extra labor in the Cariris stems from rural labor that always seems to extend into leisure time. In fact, work, and free time are deeply embedded in the settlements, and reveal a very clear distinction between the sexes. Basically, the work done by women occurs domestically, in food preparation, cleaning, and child care, these in addition to the extra work of the plantation; handling animals, gardens and fishing. Free time is lived as resting, visiting relatives, and neighbors; as church, literacy classes, or some television, but is also used to increase income in the crafts of crochet and Renaissance lace embroidery, or the resale of cosmetics, jewelry, and clothing. Here, beyond gender, a generational distinction occurs because the unmarried feminine youths, although taking part in the household chores, also take time for fun. They dance "forró" and even play football, until getting married. One interviewee, who participated in rodeos, rode horseback (dropping steers to the ground), but this activity ended with her marriage.

For Portella (2006), without this arrangement, without the "women's work," unseen and unappreciated, family farms would not survive. It is this same labor, which ensures both the continuity and reproduction of the existing inequalities. But the burden has serious consequences, including for health; because they accumulate multiple tasks from childhood. We observed that the use of the daughter's labor was the only way to free the mothers from the housework, if they wanted to participate in the community or union activities, thus the cycle reproduces, and undermines the education and leisure of the girls.

The idea that the family farming model only survives, thanks to feminine "surplus labor" excludes the possibility of composing the family model in some alternative template, yet the power remains concentrated in the male figure.

Studies of Lewis (2009), Komter and Knijn (2004) on family models demonstrate that family democratization eliminates a number of gender and intergenerational conflicts, this happens when there is equity in the distribution of power, and a greater solidarity between the sexes and between generations. Thinking about the modification of traditional family models, we ask whether the structure of family farms might change, if work arrangements and tasks were distributed equally, and without prejudice or gender discrimination.

In the workshops and the focus groups, the women of the Cariris assumed their condition of exploitation, but did not relate sexual division of labor to oppression and inequality, or identify it as the source. They rather naturalized their condition as "normal," the way things are. In fact, they were indignant with photos of men ironing, vacuuming the floor, and criticized women who led their men to do these tasks.

6. Final Considerations: Neither Holy Day, Nor Holiday

The development projects, implemented in the area since 2003, have failed to secure gender equality and have not built alternative relationships between the sexes; they also have not implemented a new model of sexual division of labor. However, they have launched the roots of "in couple" negotiations for greater feminine autonomy and have had the power to reduce the number of domestic violence cases.

We did not investigate further the sexual division that was already normalized in the lives of the women; perhaps the younger generations will question the unequal division of labor and free time. But our respondents continued to affirm that "a man's help" in the housework is always welcome, yet they see domestic housework as their duty, 'women's work', even when driven to work also in the fields or in the backyard gardening.

 "A woman cannot yell at the man. She should stay at home taking care of the children and waiting for her husband." (Angico, Porções, PB)

"Where are the women of these homes that are not there?! They should be there alongside of their men. The obligation of the woman is at home, taking care of the kitchen, the chickens, the yard..." (Florde Algaroba, Santa Catarina, after seeing the film).

For the female family farmers, work and life coexist in the same space as the housework, and the taking care of the garden, and the livestock. Additionally, there is participation in productive activity outside of the house, in the plantations, with or without her husband, in market-places, and fishing. They live a threefold work-day that starts before sunrise and ends in front of the television, embroidering renaissance lace. Despite this, all such activity is considered as only auxiliary to the 'true' worker, mere obligation, it is never understood as work that must be remunerated. The condition of rural women was synthesized by Maravilha, in a single sentence:

[...] and we have neither holy day, nor holiday; it's as nonstop as the cricket's racket. (Flor de Maravilha, Novo Mundo).

For Paulilo (1987), the agricultural work that is considered light, suitable for women, has nothing of easy or light. Here, light conveys the idea of what is socially devalued, without the prestige that surrounds the male, income providing labor. The woman working on the farm weeding, planting, or harvesting, regardless of the lightness of the task, even when it is performed in conjunction with men, is seen as a merely "help". The reverse is true, the man within the house who is willing to wash a dish, is helping, because house chores are not his obligation. Nevertheless, this is not a working logic; the woman cannot refuse to "help" her husband on the farm, without causing conflicts. "Light" work, and compulsory help demarcate the territory of female labor.

For Moser (1993), women have difficulty performing these gender roles, balancing income-generating activities with household labor, because a women's time is limited, it cannot be treatedas an elastic resource. Thus, if there is no reallocation of tasks, a new sexual division of labor, the development project ends up further burdening the already great load of rural women.

Our investigation confirms the present diagnosis that these State funded programs maintain the precarious character of welfare-state actions, unable to extend to the rural residents full citizenship rights, such as health, education, justice, and security. The reality of rural communities in the Northeast is of scarcity, not always of food and water, but of democracy, social justice, and equality. Poverty in the semi-arid region no longer translates only into hunger or thirst, these yes, minimally mitigated, but into scarcity of access to the goods and services needed in this area, and for which residents are eagerly waiting.

Another serious problem we found was the mismatch between simpler income generating projects, and political mobilization projects that pretend to confer empowerment and autonomy to women.

In promoting gender equity, the partnerships with NGOs have expanded and diversified to ensure democratization of gender relation mainstreaming. But in the case of the DHCP, this interdisciplinary partnership was not always peaceful or fruitful. Gender is seen as a single item among many to be developed by the extensionist technicians who are concerned, first and foremost, with actions that promote modernization in the field, and technologies, but not empowerment strategies for women. They tend to believe that gender is a social theme, having nothing to do with the technical goals. The alleged mainstreaming never happens; employment and income projects ultimately do not contemplate gender roles because they do not see them as a priority. The orientations are quietly ignored for religious reasons or because of political bias.

The extensionists are practicing something akin to the WID methodology, aiming to amplify production. They organize specific groups of women and conduct experiments such as the Mandala agro-ecological projects, and various sewing and embroidery projects. Among the partners, there are those who refuse to address gender aspects in order to avoid conflicts that undermine the family structures, these are usually those linked to the churches. And finally, there are the partners who represent social movements and organizations, yet claim that to inserting gender into the "work" would create division, weakening the struggle in the field.

However, these areas of conflict are not limited to disinterest, or to misapprehension of the gender equality goals, there are also tensions related to the distribution of resources. The feminist NGOs claim to have been delegitimized by the DHCP technicians numerous times during the meetings and visits. The actions of the feminist NGOs in the Caririsare caught between the agency's structure and actions. The feminist NGOs have tried to practice GAD, but find themselves alone, facing the obstacles of the field, yet with a lack of cooperation from partner NGOs.

Because of all this, the women beneficiaries of the projects remain perplexed. Actions that should appear as unified come off as antitheses, and this ends up compromising the effectiveness of both. The role of the feminists, as linked to the program extensionist technicians, has been a point of confusion. Also, the technicians' negative postures towards the feminist agenda compromise the organization's proposed actions, which might have impacted the daily lives of the families, by minimizing gender inequality in division of tasks, and the organization of domestic life.

For the DHCP project, the importance was assigned to entrepreneurship and promoting self-reliance, to actions that alleviate poverty, and to complement the already insufficient state action. The actions developed by DHCP partner entities ensure that the family farm structure remains untouched; it was elected as the principal agent for modernization, and its structure must be maintained to avoid compromising the backbone of both public policies and agribusiness, there is no transformation.

During the development of our research, we found women inserted in both successful and failing projects, and conclude that with respect to gender relations, the DHCP drafted a timid proposal. While this implies that differences remain, they have been reduced. Eliminating the inequalities regarding access to goods, resources, and the law, and conferring to women the full status of citizenship implies eliminating all forms of sexual discrimination.

The requirement that the DHCP project insert gender equality into their actions came from IFAD (FAO), and it is neither a commitment, nor an attempt to change gender relations in the field, or to eliminate gender inequality. Such a commitment really only exists within the Secretariat for Women's Policies, it does not affect, (or have a minimum of penetration into) government actions of other sectors. As for some external demand, a requirement of one of the projects funders, what we saw was the poorly articulated grafting of the gender question onto the productivity actions, causing a series of misunderstandings between the PDHC managers and the NGO partners. Separating the actions of feminist NGOs, the attitude of the other partners revealed a secular Brazilian mode of operation called "para inglesver" a sort of window dressing, where actions are taken on the level of appearances, to satisfy the requirements, when in fact, they do not.

Feminist NGOs had difficulties in dialogues with project managers and, due to their urban origins and experience, generally limited to urban realities, they were little prepared for immersion in the rural universe, full of nuances, and requiring an anthropological interpretation to understand their networks of signs and symbols. Despite the success of their actions, as already demonstrated, the feminist NGOs oscillated between the demand for productive projects and the feminist agenda. They failed to perform within the GAD framework, and kept the model of women's workshops, which is considered an old and by-passed method. The GAD perspective is quite critical of all this. The goal is not to organize men, but to engage them in the gender debate, reviewing attitudes, and behaviors with the other gender. Of course, this does not preclude or invalidate the existence of specific spaces for women to discuss issues relevant to them as proposed in the NGO workshops

But the work done by the feminist NGOs was positively evaluated by the participants who claim to have adopted new behaviors after attending the workshops, managing to reduce abuse and violence, as one of the women commented, she was 'dedonkeyed' (stopped being a donkey, as said by one of the settlers) they learned to speak with strangers, and to express their ideas.It is the beginning on the path that could culminate in empowering these women.

To get the feeling of self-importance, to raise self-esteem in a culture that devalues women, especially the poor, rural, black, or mestizo is important. However, this is not enough to be considered empowered, or as stated in the DHCP project "to ensure inclusion for women in the spheres of social and political organization". We did not find this in the Cariris women.

The workshop and focus groups became a thermometer, measuring the permanence and reproduction of traditional gender relations.

The women's indignation at seeing sex roles reversed, suggests that empowerment is still a distant objective, and consider that they educate their daughters to reproduce these gender roles. Alternative behaviors or different sexual orientation do not appear, they are veiled and denied, even by women considered " empowered " with regard to organization and political participation. The union leadership told us that a lesbian couple actually intended to live in the settlement, but they were not accepted, because they would be taking the place of a 'family'. Another observed limitation is with the exercise of citizenship. The women begin to be informed about the laws that protect them, and the rights they have, but they lack infrastructure for exercising this citizenship. There are no Women's Police Stations, or medical services for cases of sexual violence, there are no institutions capable of carrying forward the demands springing from these women. This was a source of extreme frustration for the NGOs: "we have nowhere to send them." True remediation of these problems is beyond the powers of the projects and needs to be articulated in the state government.

Finally, we noted the existence of a certain authoritarianism that permeates some DHCP actions in the discourse of technical knowledge. This authoritarianism contaminates the different spheres that reproduce patterns of behavior. At the top was INCRA, requiring that the production be made in division of lots (the parcels to be located alongside the larger plantations), this despite the desire of residents to keep to their small farms in the usual format. The larger plantation, due to its distance from the dwellings, excludes the women from productive home based activities, which includes farming, gardening, raising livestock, and agro-ecological Mandala for their own consumption or to sell on a small scale. This is different from cotton cultivation, which provides the more significant income.

In practice, demands such as that of the parceling, reinforce traditional roles and sexual division of labor, yet at the same time, in its discourse, INCRA supports projects to empower women, and tries to reduce inequalities between the sexes. Practice and theory cannot always be reconciled in a single government policy.

According to Shimanski and Souza (2007), imposing on the settlers is not the exclusive prerogative of the INCRA technicians, but is also found in the social movements such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadoressem Terra (MST), (Landless Workers Movement). For the MST, as well as for the INCRA technicians, the ideal for a settlement is all members live in a collective space "the rural village" or agricultural community: to ensure social interaction, and meetings, and to facilitate installation of the basic settlement infrastructure. Yet as shown by Caniello andDuqué (2006), this is a fallacious argument that hides the real reason: breaking rural or peasant isolationism, supposedly determined by the way they work. We understand that these notions, drawn from elementary Marxism, suggest that farmers are pre-modern, and pre-capitalist, and therefore, susceptible to conservative and not revolutionary thought.

The same positioning is reproduced in the attitude of the extensionist technicians in view of the actions of the neighborhood association president when manipulating the meeting to ensure appointments to executive positions. The legislation preserves the autonomy of the settlers in making decisions about the settlement, but ignores gender bias during the distribution of decision-making power at association meetings. On these occasions, we perceived that the women kept quiet, in the kitchen, preparing meals. Also we noticed the absence of information concerning the legislation, and the lack of local experience in conference organization, the "bureaucratic " unpreparedness of the settlers, which paved the way for the "mediators", of the social movements, the labor movements, sectors of the church, NGO's and government agents to "guide" the decisions of the settlement.

Women's empowerment (in this case) involves dismantling the structure on which the family farming model is based. It is the result of reconstructing relations between people on new bases, those of partnership, fairness, and democracy, and where people are valued as individuals, regardless of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, or any other social stigma that places one at a hierarchical disadvantage.

Therefore, the question of sexual division of labor is the greatest challenge to be overcome. Gender inequality is still very entrenched and naturalized in these women. It needs to be deconstructed such that the rural woman becomes aware that she has rights worth fighting for, basic rights such as health and education, but also against sexist cultural oppression that constricts and limits her talents and creativity.

Exercising leadership is a strategy for achieving gender equality and equal access to the means of production, but also for achieving recognition as essential for food sovereignty. For this, the challenge of sexist culture needs to be overcome in order to organize and participate in positions of power and decision. But the rural woman will only occupy these spaces of power when she understands that she can occupy this, or any space, for being empowered.

7. References

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