



Public policy for rural development and social participation

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Summary

This article presents the development strategy adopted at the First National Conference on Sustainable and Participatory Rural Development (CNDRSS). The objective of the conference was to lay the groundwork for a new national, sustainable and participatory rural development policy, adopting a strategic approach that recognized the importance of social actors. As important as the immediate results was the fact that a process designed to mobilize and sensitize the social actors and state entities involved, and ensure that both take part in the development of the policy, was institutionalized. Nearly 30,000 people participated in the initiative by means of 230 territorial, inter-municipal and municipal conferences, as well as other conferences held in Brazil's 26 states and in the Federal District. The national policy proposed by the conference was the result of a prolonged, complex and exhaustive process of social construction. This article also explains the role of IICA's Forum on Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) and highlights the challenges involved in implementing the results of the conference.

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Background

The 1988 Federal Constitution institutionalized the process of democratic opening following a succession of military governments. It also marked the beginning of a new stage of republican organization in Brazil that placed emphasis on political and administrative decentralization and the empowerment of broad sectors of civil society.

Before the 1988 Constitution, parliamentary representation was the only way in which the people could participate in public policies. The election of representatives to legislative and executive posts was the only means of participation open to the people, with elected officials alone responsible for defending society's interests and deciding policy.

With the adoption of the 1988 Federal Constitution, that paradigm was abandoned in favor of a combination of elected representatives and the direct participation of organized society in decision-making processes, through legal and political instruments that allow the people to play a direct role in numerous matters that concern them.

Draft legislation promoted by the people themselves, referendums, municipal and sectoral councils, participatory budgets, conferences and forums for specific segments of society are important tools that civil society uses to bring political

pressure to bear and thereby influence the design and control of public policies.

At the conferences convened by sectoral councils such as those on education, health, environment, nutrition and food security, this new form of organization of the Brazilian State permits specific segments of civil society to help determine and devise public policy. New legislation incorporating the decisions taken at the conferences is then drafted and enacted so that governments can implement them.

The First Conference National on Sustainable and Participatory Rural Development (CNDRSS), convened by the National Council on Sustainable Rural Development (CONDRAF), is just one example of the strategy used to consolidate the new participation



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mechanisms guaranteed by the 1988 Federal Constitution and widely promoted by the Federal Government in recent years. This important form of pluralistic dialogue and social participation is being used to draw up a national policy on sustainable rural development (PNDRS),

based on a series of debates on the issue of sustainable rural development. This is a groundbreaking initiative as far as public policies are concerned and a key element in society's efforts to develop mechanisms for social consensus-building that place emphasis on sustainability, social inclusion, diversity, equality and solidarity in Brazil's rural milieu.

The National Council on Sustainable Rural Development (CONDRAF) is a collegiate body that forms part of the basic structure of the Ministry of Agrarian Development. Its function is to propose guidelines for the formulation and implementation of public policies, and to serve as a mechanism for consensus building and coordination among the different levels of government and civil society organizations in the areas of sustainable rural development, agrarian reform and family agriculture. The Council has 38 members, who represent 19 institutions within the different branches of government and 19 civil society organizations.

Strategy for implementing the First CNDRSS

The First CNDRSS culminated in the construction of a public policy that addressed the challenges posed by the country's regional and social diversity. It took into account the gamut of organizational experiences, productive initiatives and innovations in public policies that already existed in the rural milieu; and affirmed and guaranteed the principles and values summed up by the theme of the conference: "For a rural Brazil with people: sustainability, inclusion, diversity, equality and solidarity."

The participants in the First CNDRSS set out to devise a national public policy for sustainable and participatory development for the rural milieu that represents the "rural Brazil that we want"



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by adopting a strategic approach that attached importance to the role of men, women, young people and the elderly. The conference also endeavored to affirm a new vision of rural development and established courses of action and positions related to the challenges posed by the construction of a vision for rural Brazil, as part of a broader vision of national development.

The aim of the First CNDRSS was to achieve broad popular participation, and representatives of civil society and municipal, state and federal governments therefore took part. At each stage of the process, they discussed the proposed new types of rural organization and the territorial, regional and social dynamics, based on a plural and democratic process of interaction between the governments and social actors.

The First CNDRSS, held 25-28 June 2008, marked the consolidation of a broad process of mobilizing segments of society and galvanizing them into action, aimed at sustainable and participatory rural development. Over 30,000 people took part in the three stages of the process:

- **Preparatory stage.** As many as 225 municipal, inter-municipal and territorial conferences were held, as well as sectoral and thematic events, which were attended by 26,617 people.
- **State level.** A total of 26 conferences were held in the states, involving 7000 people.
- **National level.** Some 1572 people took part in the plenary: 1220 delegates



from civil society and the different branches and levels of government (federal, state and municipal officials), 115 observers and 237 national and international guests. A large number of women from all parts of Brazil took part in all the activities (over 42% of the participants).

Result of the process of devising a national public policy for sustainable rural development

Formulation and discussion of the base document

A base document, divided into two main parts, was drawn up to guide the discussions and the design of proposals.

- **"The rural Brazil that we have."** This section provides an overview of rural Brazil, dealing with aspects such as its economic and social makeup, regional diversity and segments of society, the effects of the conservative modernization process and the new scenario of public rural development

policies. The document also considers aspects of the international outlook and its impact on Brazil's rural development agenda.

■ **"The rural Brazil that we want."**

This section presents the elements and the proposals suggested for the preparation of the national sustainable rural development plan, comprised of strategic guidelines and focusing on four issues:

- a) Socioeconomic and environmental development: an analysis of the combination of economic, productive and environmental factors and territorial considerations.
- b) Agrarian reform and access to environmental resources: the document states that devising a national plan for sustainable and participatory rural development calls for the democratization of access to the land, knowledge, income and wealth that exists in Brazil's rural milieu.
- c) Quality of life in rural Brazil: this section sets out to demonstrate that promoting a process of sustainable and participatory rural development calls for greater economic and

social investment in aid of rural populations.

- d) Political participation and social organization in the rural milieu: this segment underlines the progress needed to establish "the rural Brazil that we want," such as close institutional-political coordination, the relationship among the Union, the states, the municipalities and the Federal District and the new institutional actors, and society's participation in political life.

The base document was designed to be the starting point for the deliberations. The participants in the earlier conferences and thematic and sectoral events were asked to critique it and suggest contributions.

Those contributions were incorporated into the second version of the document, which the states then discussed. The same procedure was followed for the preparation of the national version and the final document.

This participatory process encouraged all sectors to play an active role and made it possible to present demands and proposals at the municipal, state and rural territory levels. In that way, local, regional and national aspects were incorporated into the version of the base document.

For the discussions on the base document during the national stage of the process and the development of proposals by consensus, the participants were divided up into 21 thematic working groups. Efforts were made to preserve the inter-institutional nature of the work and reflect the diversity of people in rural areas.

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Outcome of the process: bases for formulating a national policy for sustainable and participatory rural development (PNDRSS)

The final version of the document approved at the First CNDRSS is a political text that includes declarations of principles and guidelines related to six thematic areas: a) public policies; b) agrarian and agricultural policy; c) social actors and the new institutional framework; d) social management of the policy; e) financing systems; and, f) the legal framework.

a) Public policy. One of the aims of the PNDRSS is to consolidate political linkages among the sectors committed to the democratization of access to land, water, energy and knowledge, environmental preservation and conservation, incentives for agroecological processes, sovereignty and food and nutritional security, and territorial production and development strategies aimed at promoting social justice. These issues require broad political debate and the coordination of social organizations to achieve a common strategic agenda.

b) Agrarian and agricultural policy. The State has a key role to play in ensuring that land performs its social function. Therefore, the policy has to give priority to agrarian reform, the regularization and reorganization of land, the sustainable development of settlement projects, the demarcation of lands traditionally inhabited by indigenous peoples and legal recognition of their ownership of



those lands, and the identification, recognition and titling of the *quilombola* territories (inhabited by descendants of slaves). All these are key issues in the process of social and economic inclusion for “the rural Brazil that we want.”

c) Social actors and the new institutional framework. The PNDRSS recognizes that social actors and their organizations form part of the new institutional framework. Public policies have to consider individuals as subjects, rather than objects, of development. Therefore, public policies must take into account the rights of women, children, young people, the elderly and the disabled, as well as those of indigenous populations, *quilombola* and traditional



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communities and the homosexual, bisexual, transvestite, transgender and transsexual population in the rural milieu.

d) Social management of the policy.

The execution of the PNDRSS should be characterized by social management, by principles and concepts related to the economic, social, cultural, environmental and ethical dimensions of diversity and sustainability, and by solidarity (i.e., collective and shared responsibility). This calls for the development of new institutional and intersectoral arrangements in the rural territories that will lead to actions more closely coordinated with public policies.

e) Financing systems.

New paradigms and practices have to be adopted to help improve the quality of life of rural dwellers. The solidary economy must be one of the main dimensions incorporated into financial mechanisms and types of financing, as well as the concept of the multi-functionality of family and small-scale agriculture. To that end, it is suggested that two funds be set up: a) a constitutional fund for the development of agriculture and family production and to strengthen agrarian reform (FUNDARA); and,

b) a municipal sustainable rural development fund (FDRS).

f) Legal framework. The PNDRSS emphasizes the urgent need to review the legal frameworks in place in Brazil and create new ones, particularly those related to:

- Execution of public policies by civil society organizations
- Education actions in the countryside
- Technical assistance and rural extension actions
- Legal and regulatory matters related to the right of access to land (acquisition, guarantees of ownership and succession) as well as legislation related to the “modulos fiscaes” (size, in hectares, of properties included in the agrarian reform program)
- Environmental, sanitary and tax laws applicable to small-scale family agroindustries and family enterprises
- Management of consortia
- Constitutional, public and private funds and “fondos de aval” (public funds designed to guarantee the payment of loans made to family farmers)
- Rural credit

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- General Law on the Cooperative Movement, to permit and facilitate the setting up of associations
- Socioeconomic and ecological zoning actions aimed at guaranteeing the country's sovereignty, to set the priorities for the occupation and use of the land and the subsoil
- Implementing regulations for the Family Farming Act.

The role of IICA and the standing Forum on Sustainable Rural Development (SRD)

To provide more technical assistance for the implementation of the actions proposed in the PNDRSS, with academic support from the Observatory of Public Policies for Agriculture (OPPA), linked to the Postgraduate Program in Development, Agriculture and Society of the Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (CPDA/UFRRJ), and at the request of the CONDRAF, IICA and the SRD Forum have conducted studies of proposals related to the following thematic areas:

- a) Good practices with respect to territorial public policies in Brazil and in other countries
- b) New territorial institutional actors
- c) Good practices in relation to the social management of territories
- d) Development of technical and institutional capabilities in the territories
- e) Legal / regulatory framework for territorial development
- f) Systems for financing territorial strategic projects.

Final thoughts

The First CNDRSS enabled Brazil to lay the groundwork for a public policy for sustainable and participatory rural development, working in a decentralized and participatory manner. Information about the strategies, methodologies and instruments developed should be disseminated, and they could be adapted and reproduced in other countries.

The corollary of this initiative was the institutionalization of a process for mobilizing and sensitizing the social actors and government entities and ensuring that both participated in the construction of "the rural Brazil that we want," which was the theme of the conference.

Institutionalizing the process makes it possible to evaluate, review and update rural development policies in accordance with the dynamics of the society concerned.

The big challenge now is to consolidate the results of the First CNDRSS. This calls for the mobilization of institutions and political forces, to equip the branches of government and civil society organizations with the tools they need to implement the proposals. The diverse nature of rural territories means that differentiated strategies are required.

Reference

Conferencia Nacional de Desarrollo Sostenible y Solidario "Por un Brasil rural con gente" (1, 2008 Olinda, Pernambuco, BR). 2008. Relatorio final. Ministry of Agrarian Development. 114 pp.

► Politique publique de développement agricole et de participation sociale

L'article présente la stratégie de développement de la Première Conférence nationale de développement rural durable et solidaire (CNRSS), qui avait pour objectif de jeter les bases en vue d'une nouvelle politique nationale de développement rural durable et solidaire moyennant un projet stratégique qui valorise le rôle de premier plan que jouent les partenaires sociaux. Dans cette initiative, l'institutionnalisation d'un processus de mobilisation, de sensibilisation et de participation des partenaires sociaux et des organismes étatiques en vue de l'élaboration de la politique a été aussi importante que les résultats obtenus. Près de 30.000 personnes ont participé à l'initiative, dans le cadre de 230 conférences territoriales, intermunicipales et municipales dans les 26 États du Brésil et le District fédéral. La politique nationale proposée par la conférence a été le résultat d'un processus de construction sociale prolongé, complexe et exhaustif. L'article explique également le rôle que joue le Forum du développement rural durable de l'IICA et montre les défis que pose la mise en œuvre des résultats de la conférence.

► Política pública de desenvolvimento rural e participação social

O artigo apresenta a estratégia de desenvolvimento da I Conferência Nacional de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável e Solidário (CNRSS), cujo objetivo foi a construção de bases para uma nova política nacional de desenvolvimento rural sustentável e solidário pela via de um projeto estratégico que valoriza o protagonismo dos atores sociais. Nessa iniciativa, a institucionalização de um processo de mobilização, sensibilização e participação dos atores sociais e entidades estatais para a formulação da política foi tão importante como os resultados obtidos. Participaram cerca de 30.000 pessoas em 230 conferências territoriais, intermunicipais e municipais, bem como em conferências nos 26 Estados do Brasil e no Distrito Federal. A política nacional proposta pela conferência resulta de um processo de construção social prolongado, complexo e exaustivo. Também é explicitado o papel do Foro de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável (DRS) do IICA e são destacados os desafios que significa a implementação das conclusões da conferência.

► Política pública de desarrollo rural y participación social

El artículo presenta la estrategia de desarrollo de la I Conferencia Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible y Solidario (CNRSS), cuyo objetivo fue la construcción de bases para una nueva política nacional de desarrollo rural sostenible y solidario por la vía de un proyecto estratégico que valoriza el protagonismo de los actores sociales. En esta iniciativa, la institucionalización de un proceso de movilización, sensibilización y participación de los actores sociales y entidades estatales para la construcción de la política fue tan importante como los resultados obtenidos. Participaron en la iniciativa cerca de 30 000 personas, en 230 conferencias territoriales, intermunicipales y municipales, así como conferencias en los 26 estados del Brasil y en el Distrito Federal. La política nacional propuesta por la conferencia fue el resultado de un proceso de construcción social prolongado, complejo y exhaustivo. También se explicita el papel del Foro de Desarrollo Rural Sostenible (DRS) del IICA y se señalan los desafíos que plantea la implementación de los resultados de la conferencia.