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Chapter 3: The National Federation of Men and Women Family Farming Workers (FETRAF-Brasil), Brazil

Executive Summary

Founded in 2004, the Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura Familiar (The National Federation of Men and Women Family Farming Workers), FETRAF-Brasil, is a national federation of trade unions which aims to strengthen family farming in Brazil. It calls for and implements government policies supporting family farmers, lending technical support, and implements social protection projects driven by the needs of its members. Today, it represents over 500,000 family farmers in 18 states and 22 micro-regions across the country, and incorporates 15 state-level federations and 600 municipal-level unions.

FETRAF-Brasil's origins lie in the rural “new unionism” labour movement of the 1980s, which in the 1990s started championing the cause of family farmers, who represented 84 per cent of Brazilian agricultural units but were disempowered by the government's export-oriented agricultural model, mostly favouring large agri-businesses and transnational companies. In 2001, rural unionists from 3 southern states (Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná) launched the first federation of family farmers' unions (FETRAF-SUL/CUT) to advance local, autonomous organizations for family farmers, advocate agrarian reform to end inequalities, and promote an “alternative development model” focused on the needs of family farmers and on agro-ecological practices. This framework of family farmer federations rapidly spread to other states; and in 2004 FETRAF-Brasil was created to unify and reinforce family farmer unions and federations throughout the country.

FETRAF-Brasil's expansion and present-day influence in soliciting and enacting policies addressing the needs of family farmers is closely linked to its successful implementation of a number of programmes and projects on education, housing, and technical assistance for agro-ecological production. It has been effective in mobilizing its members and ensuring the implementation of social security schemes for family farmers. The organization has also demonstrated the values of its sustainable development model by creating successful alternative economic structures such as cooperatives and producers' groups, and by developing and applying environmentally and financially sustainable solutions for major challenges such as rural housing for low-income households and the lack of technical training.

FETRAF-Brasil has proved capable of mobilizing its members for campaigning, influencing public policies, innovating, and implementing sustainable solutions to address the needs of family farmers. It has provided family farmers, the largest section of Brazilian rural workers, a much needed voice at the municipal, regional and national levels.

Section 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

The Federação Nacional dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura Familiar (National Federation of Men and Women Family Farming Workers), FETRAF-Brasil, is a federation of family farmers established in 2004 and active in 18 states out of the 26 states in Brazil. Its principal activities involve organizing its members at the municipal, regional and state levels to participate in collective actions and negotiations to obtain agrarian and social protection programmes for its members. FETRAF-Brasil also helps members improve their technical skills, access marketing and other services, and form cooperatives to increase their returns. With a membership of over 500,000 family farmers representing 84.4 per cent of the country's farming units, and producing 87 per cent of the principal foods consumed in the country, FETRAF-Brasil aims to strengthen the “hands that feed the nation”.¹

Rooted in the rural labour movement contesting the liberal, export-orientated agricultural model, FETRAF-Brasil is the product of the mounting interest in family farming among unions, policy-makers and social movements. Its creation also marks a shift in policy-making and union representation towards accounting for the specific needs and identities of the different marginalized rural communities. Following the creation of the first federation of family farmers in 3 southern states in 2001, the FETRAF model rapidly spread to other parts of the country based on the success of its innovative projects and its support for decentralized unionism devoid of state intervention.

FETRAF-Brasil develops and implements projects involving alternative economic structures, agro-ecological techniques, technical assistance at various phases of production, and connects members to social protection policies. Additionally, its advocacy and campaigns at the national level have resulted in the enactment of several important governmental programmes targeting rural workers, and family farmers in particular. FETRAF-Brasil has both helped develop these programmes and raised awareness about them among its membership. Its achievements include negotiations and subsequent partnerships with the government for accessible credit systems, better housing, rural extension programmes, and health and education services.

FETRAF-Brasil is a remarkable catalyst for rural transformation on 2 accounts: first, as a trade union, it advocates specifically the political and economic interests of smallholder farmers, a group whose needs have often not been acknowledged in agricultural policy-making in Brazil. Second, it encourages and supports a rural production model that economically empowers family farms by building their capacity to have greater control of, and intervene in, the entire agri-business value chain, from the production of raw materials to the marketing of finished goods to consumers.

¹ This is FETRAF-Brasil's official slogan which accompanies the organization's logo (in Portuguese: “mãos que alimentam a nação”).

1.2 Context

With a population of 196.7 million and a GDP close to USD 2.500 trillion, Brazil is the largest and most populated country in Latin America. In the last 2 decades, it succeeded in significantly reducing poverty through impressive economic growth and a focus on eliminating poverty.² In 2004-2007 its GDP grew at an annual average rate of 4.5 per cent, compared to 2.4 per cent in 2000-2003. The global financial crisis disrupted this upward trend, but in 2011 the country's GDP again grew by 2.7 per cent.³ Over the last decade, Brazilian policy-makers have introduced impressive poverty reduction policies that have lifted 28 million people out of extreme poverty, allowing 36 million Brazilians to enter the middle class.⁴ The current administration of President Dilma Rousseff recognizes that in Brazil, "It is necessary to change the political mind set to ensure our administration reaches out to the poor, and that it should not be up to a poor person to come and ask us for help."⁵ Consequently, the government is seeking strategies to reduce poverty through a multi-sectoral approach focusing on 4 areas: income assurance and social protection policies; the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) programme (a subsidy for families depending on their income level); the institutionalization of food and nutritional security; and the creation of the Ministry of Social Development, and the *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) programme, promoting multiple production, marketing and consumption initiatives.⁶

Despite these important programmes, poverty and income inequalities remain widespread. Even with a low unemployment rate of 6.2 per cent, 21 per cent of the population still lives below the poverty line.⁷ Brazil is also among the countries with the highest income inequality; the income share of the richest 20 per cent of the population being 33 times that of the poorest 20 per cent.⁸

Conditions of rural areas in Brazil

Poverty and socio-economic inequality are particularly acute in rural areas, where 19 per cent of the total population, around 36 million people, live. About 18 million of them are classified as poor, the largest number in the Western Hemisphere⁹; and an estimated 25 per cent of the rural population is classified as extremely poor, compared to about 5 per cent in urban areas.¹⁰

2 *Brazil at a glance*, World Bank, 2013, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil> (accessed 15 October 2012).

3 *Data: GDP growth (annual %)*, World Bank, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

4 S. de Saint Croix: "Brazil Strives for Economic Equality", in *The Rio Times*, 2012, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-business/brazil-strives-for-economic-equality/#> (accessed 21 October 2012).

5 Ibid.

6 FAO: "Cross-Sectoral Policy Dialogue on Food Price Increases and Volatility: Threats and Opportunities", *Sub-Regional Seminar: Southern Cone Report*, Santiago, Chile, June 2011, http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ISFP/Southern_Cone_FAO_Food_Prices_report_LAC_Souther_Cone.pdf (accessed 22 September 2012).

7 *The World Factbook - Brazil*, CIA, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/br.html> (accessed 1 May 2012).

8 World Bank: *Inequality and Economic Development in Brazil: A country study*, Washington, D.C., 2004, http://www.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/10/05/000012009_20041005095126/Rendered/PDF/301140PAPER0Inequality0Brazil.pdf

9 *Brazil*, Rural Poverty Portal, IFAD, <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/brazil> (accessed 15 October 2012).

10 Ibid.

Marginalized rural communities have been particularly affected by the unequal land distribution in the country, where 1.6 per cent of the population controls roughly half (46.8 per cent) of agricultural land and 3 per cent of the population owns two-thirds of all arable lands.¹¹ Conflicts over land have aggravated violence in rural areas, with 367 people reportedly having lost their lives as a result of such violence since the 1990s.¹²

The dominant model of smallholder farms in Brazil is family farming. According to the Brazilian government's definition, family farmers are those who:

- Own a single property not larger than 4 fiscal modules in size (measuring anywhere from 0.5 hectares in southern Brazil to 100 hectares in the Amazon region);
- Depend largely on the labour provided by his/her own family;
- Have a family income mainly derived from economic activities associated with that property.¹³

According to the 2006 Agricultural Census, family farmers represented 84.4 per cent of total farms in Brazil, contributing 38 per cent of the agricultural GNP, while occupying only 24.4 per cent of the total agricultural area.¹⁴ It was also found that family farms produce up to 87 per cent of the principal foods consumed in Brazil, including 58 per cent of milk, 70 per cent of beans, 42 per cent of corn, and 34 per cent of rice that is consumed domestically.¹⁵ Family farms are also a major source of rural employment. Typically, they employ 74.4 per cent of the agriculturalists in the country, with 15.3 persons employed per 100 hectares whereas non-family farms employ 1.7 persons for the same area.¹⁶

Meanwhile, agricultural policies have historically favoured large-scale farms by promoting export-oriented production. These farms occupy 76 per cent of the agricultural land in the country and contribute 62 per cent of the agricultural GNP.

11 *About Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement - MST), 2013, <http://www.mstbrazil.org/?q=about> (accessed 1 May 2013).

12 D. F. Hidalgo and N. P. Richardson: "The Economy of Land Conflict in Brazil", in *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, 2007, <http://clas.berkeley.edu/Publications/Review/Fall2007/pdf/BRLAS-Fall2007-HidalgoRichardson-standard.pdf>

13 FAO - Family Farming Observatory: *Family Farming in Brazil*, FAO, 2013, <http://www.rlc.fao.org/en/about-fao/regional-priorities/family-farming/baf/2012-09/ffo/>

14 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE): *Censo Agropecuário 2006 : Agricultura Familiar Primeiros Resultados* (Agricultural Census 2006, Family Farming: Preliminary Results), http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/economia/agropecuaria/censoagro/agri_familiar_2006/familia_censoagro2006.pdf

15 Op. cit., FAO - Family Farming Observatory: *Family Farming in Brazil*, 2013.

16 Ibid.

Section 2: Analysis of the Catalyst

2.1 Why was it created?

Purpose

FETRAF-Brasil aims to achieve social justice and equality for family farmers, who constitute one of the most disempowered and marginalized segments of the Brazilian rural economy. It also promotes democratic principles of freedom of expression and association, and engages citizens in participative politics and solidarity with workers, to achieve a more equitable Brazilian society.¹⁷

As a union of family farmers, FETRAF-Brasil defines its main objectives as:¹⁸

- Strengthening and expanding the representation of family farmers in Brazil;
- Unifying trade union action at municipal, state, regional and national levels;
- Building a sustainable development and agricultural production model, which prioritizes workers and the environment, while empowering Brazilian family farmers.



¹⁷ *Quem Somos* (About us), FETRAF Brasil, 2013, <http://www.fetra.org.br/conteudo/1/quem-somos> (accessed 4 May 2013).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Relevance

The goals, structure, and activities of FETRAF-Brasil are closely linked to the history of Brazil's rural labour movement, and the social and economic significance of family farming in the country.

A brief history of rural trade unionism in Brazil

Trade unions were officially introduced in Brazil through a series of labour laws passed between 1930 and 1943 that instituted a corporatist system.¹⁹ This implied state intervention in union practices such as strikes and representation, and permitted only one union per municipality, one federation per state, and one national confederation for each (state-defined) professional category.²⁰ These laws were extended to rural areas in 1963 through the Rural Labourer Statute, which led to the creation of the *Confederação Nacional de Trabalhadores na Agricultura* (National Confederation of Labourers in Agriculture), CONTAG. However, following a military coup in 1964, the organization and municipal-level rural unions were placed under strict state control, and army officers replaced local leaders.²¹

The late 1990s marked a revival of unionism in both urban and rural areas in Brazil. Known as *novo sindicalismo* or “new unionism”, it refocused attention on building workers alliances, prioritizing workers’ immediate demands, and countering state control over unions.²² Simultaneously, at the grassroots level, the rural labour movement actively opposed the military dictatorship, particularly in the southern states, through the activism of leftist leaders within the Catholic and Lutheran Churches.

The new unionism movement in rural areas was marked by struggles against both state control and the “conservative modernization” model of agriculture²³ implemented by the military government. This model promoted export-oriented agriculture, mechanization of agrarian production, increased use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and the expansion of agriculture into the Amazonia by appropriating land from indigenous peoples, while preserving the land concentration patterns benefitting wealthy agriculturalists.²⁴ These policies led to the displacement of nearly 30 million rural workers from the countryside to urban areas, in search of employment.²⁵ From 1960 to 1990, the Brazilian population

19 These laws were collectively known as *the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (Consolidation of Labour Laws). Source: K. Lang and M.J. Gagnon: “Brazilian Trade Unions: In (In)Voluntary Confinement of the Corporatist Past”, in *Relations Industrielles*, Vol 64, No. 2, Spring 2009, p. 251.

20 R. Abramovay, R. Magalhães, and M. Schröder: “Social Movements Beyond the Iron Cage: Weak Ties in Territorial Development,” in *World Development*, Vol. 36, No. 12, 2008.

21 Op.cit., K. Lang and M.J. Gagnon: “Brazilian Trade Unions: In (In)Voluntary Confinement of the Corporatist Past”, 2009, p. 251.

22 Ibid.

23 J.G. da Silva: *A modernização dolorosa: estrutura agrária, fronteira agrícola e trabalhadores rurais no Brasil* (The difficult modernization: agrarian structure, agricultural frontiers and rural workers in Brazil), Zahar, 1982, as quoted in F. Anjos et al.: “Family Farming and Economic Cooperation: The Emergence and Decline of Agrarian Condomínios in Southern Brazil”, in *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, Vol. 26, No.2, 2011, pp. 30–51.

24 Op.cit., F. Anjos et al.: “Family Farming And Economic Cooperation: The Emergence and Decline of Agrarian Condomínios in Southern Brazil”, 2011, p. 33.

25 G. Martine: “Exodo rural, concentraça urbana e fronteira agrícola” (Rural exodus, urban densification and the agricultural frontier) in G. Martine and R. Countinho Garcia (eds.): *Os impactos sociais da modernização agrícola* (Social impacts of agricultural modernization), Sao Paulo, 1987, pp. 59–79, as quoted in C. Welch: “Globalization and the Transformation of Work in Rural Brazil: Agribusiness, Rural Labor Unions, and Peasant Mobilization” in *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 70, Fall 2006, pp. 35-60.

living in rural areas declined from 55 per cent to 25 per cent; and while 84.4 per cent of rural properties were owned by family farmers, they only occupied 17.9 per cent of agricultural land.²⁶ In response to these aggravated conditions, in the early 1980s rural unions in the southern states of Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul jointly created a regional confederation for rural workers called *Articulação Sindical Sul*, and focussed their efforts on 6 main issues: land reform, wages for rural workers, increasing access to credit, education, social security, and healthcare for rural populations.²⁷

In 1983, both rural and urban unions belonging to the new union movement established a central union called *Central Unica dos Trabalhadores* (Unified Workers Central), CUT. The fall of the military dictatorship in 1985, and the enactment of the new Constitution in 1988, provided greater freedom to form unions and associations, which increased the rural CUT affiliated unions' activities in southern Brazil. There was also a strategic shift in union practices to dismantle the generic category of "rural workers" or "smallholders", and address the specific issues of diverse social groups that had been disempowered by the conservative agricultural modernization model.²⁸ Brazil's political democratization in the 1990s gave rise to a number of social movements such as the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement), MST, reflecting the diversity of identities, interests and "voices" that were emerging in rural Brazil.²⁹

The political mobilizations of disempowered rural communities was a response to the "conservative-modernization" policies of the 1970s, which had left unchanged the unequal distribution of land and wealth, and to the wave of neoliberal reforms introduced by the democratically-elected governments in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Structural Adjustment Plans signed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1982 and 1988, leading to the reduction of state support for prices, subsidies, credit, and marketing services, debilitated small farmers. The government also reduced tariff and non-tariff protection for imports and, in 1994, Brazil entered into the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) Agreement with Argentina and Uruguay, both of which had competitive agricultural sectors. This caused the prices of Brazilian agricultural products to become 50-60 per cent lower in the period 1995-1998 than in the period 1982-1986, while some key products such as cocoa and wheat fell as much as 70-75 per cent.³⁰

As a direct result of these policies, in 1990-1994 an estimated 2 million agricultural jobs were lost, and 200,000 family farms disappeared.³¹ In the face of "market shocks" caused by volatility and decreasing prices of commodities, small-scale producers could no longer access credit and continue their businesses. The privatization of credit and the lowering of

26 Op.cit., C. Welch: "Globalization and the Transformation of Work in Rural Brazil: Agribusiness, Rural Labor Unions, and Peasant Mobilization", 2006, p. 40.

27 *Deser in the history of family farming organizations in the south region*, Department of Rural Socioeconomic Studies (DESER), http://www.deser.org.br/english_intro.asp (accessed 22 April 2013).

28 A. Cordeiro, C. Job Schmitt and D. Armani: "Organizações Sociais Rurais Diante Do Ajuste: O Caso Do Brasil" (Rural social organizations in face of the adjustment: the case of Brazil), 2003, http://www.deser.org.br/biblioteca_read.asp?id=17

29 Ibid.

30 S. Helfand: "The impact of agricultural policy reforms on the agricultural sector in Brazil in the 1990s: Implications of Pro-Poor Agricultural Policies", Paper prepared for discussion at the *OECD Global Forum On Agriculture: Designing And Implementing Pro-Poor Agricultural Policies*, Paris, 10-11 December 2003, <http://www.oecd.org/tad/25833145.pdf>, (accessed 6 May 2013).

31 Op. cit., C. Welch, 2006, p. 43.



state control and assistance allowed mostly large-scale, export-oriented farmers to benefit from the liberalization policies of the 1990s. In 1992, 56 per cent of rural households lived in poverty, while in urban zones poverty affected 39 per cent of households.³²

These dire conditions created the basis for debates on agrarian reform in the country and refocused policy and academic attention on small-scale farming, identifying “family farming” as a category of social, political and economic significance. A number of studies carried out in the late 1990s were influential in demonstrating the healthy performance of family farms despite their small size and lack of subsidies, and their potential for reducing inequalities, create jobs and improve food security in the country.³³ The 1995-1996 Agricultural Census found that family farms represented 85.2 per cent of the farming establishments in Brazil, while receiving only 25.3 per cent of the government financing aimed at agriculture.³⁴ This growing policy attention, alongside major protests led by the rural labour and social movements demanding policies for the empowerment of family farmers, resulted in the enactment of the *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar* (National Programme for the Strengthening of Family Farming), PRONAF, in 1996 by Presidential Decree 1.946/1996. The programme focused strongly on credit for family farmers, and included measures to improve rural infrastructure, along with training for rural producers. PRONAF became the first government programme to recognize the significance of family farming, and its enactment opened a new level of dialogue between family farmers, rural unions, and the state.³⁵

32 Op. cit., S. Helfand, 2003, <http://www.oecd.org/tad/25833145.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2013).

33 FAO/ INCRA: “Novo Retrato da Agricultura Familiar: o Brasil Redescoberto” (New portrait of family agriculture: rediscovering Brazil), Brasília, 2000, www.territoriosdacidadania.gov.br/o/899430 (accessed 26 April 2013).

34 Op. cit., FAO/ INCRA, 2000, as quoted in J.P. Medaets, K. Pettan and M. Takagi: “Family Farming and Food Security in Brazil”, Paper prepared for the OECD *Global Forum On Agriculture: Designing And Implementing Pro-Poor Agricultural Policies*, Brasília, November 2003, <http://www.oecd.org/tad/25836756.pdf> (accessed 26 April 2013).

35 Op. cit., A. Cordeiro, C. Job Schmitt and D. Armani: “Organizações Sociais Rurais Diante Do Ajuste: O Caso Do Brasil”, 2003.

2.2 How was it created?

The founders

The initial founders of FETRAF-Brasil were rural union leaders aligned with the CUT and the “new unionism” movement. The organization’s mission and approach developed in the 1990s. Political changes, heightened policy interest in family farming, and a drive for decentralized union action set the stage for the creation of the first, independent federation of family farmers, *Federação dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura Familiar Na Região Sul* (Federation of Men and Women Family Farming Workers of the Southern Region), FETRAF-SUL/CUT. Following the success of this initiative, other such federations and unions emerged in different parts of the country and were later unified under the national-level umbrella organization FETRAF Brasil.

CUT’s rural unions in the 1990s

As mentioned earlier, the 1990s witnessed a major shift in focus from “rural workers” to “family farmers” in the CUT-aligned rural movement, signifying the need to prioritize the interests of family farmers.³⁶ In terms of action, prioritizing the interests of family farmers implied broadening activities beyond large-scale mobilizations and strikes, and focussing more on the implementation of programmes for credit, housing, and education in rural areas, alongside national level lobbying to change national policies.³⁷ Structurally, these changes heralded a horizontal organizational structure for rural unionism, with municipal and state level organizations allowed to develop and function autonomously while remaining formal departments within CUT’s organizational structure.³⁸

In the early 1990s CUT’s rural state departments began discussing and planning a development model based on the expansion and strengthening of family farming and “the struggle for massive and extensive agrarian reform.”³⁹ This model envisioned emphasized social and ecological issues in agricultural production, promoting new standards for supply, production, processing, and marketing, and enabling specific agricultural national policy supporting small farmers.⁴⁰ This model was adopted at the national level when CONTAG accepted the *Projeto Alternativo de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável* (Alternative Project of Sustainable Rural Development), PADRS, at its 6th Congress in 1995.

36 Op. cit., *Deser in the history of family farming organizations in the south region*, DESER (accessed 22 April 2013).

37 A. Favareto: “Farmers, workers: Thirty years of new rural labour unionism in Brazil”, in *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, Vol.3, 2007 (translated by A. Villalobos), http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/5713/scs_a08.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed 6 May 2013).

38 In 1989, CUT had created the *Departamento Nacional dos Trabalhadores Rurais da CUT* (National Department of Rural Workers of CUT) and a similar state-level body called *Departamento Estaduais dos Trabalhadores Rurais da CUT* (State Department of Rural Workers of CUT). Under each rural state department were a number of unions at the micro-regional and municipal levels known as *Sindicatos Trabalhadores Rurais da CUT* (STR). Source: Op. cit., *Deser in the history of family farming organizations in the south region*, DESER, and Op. cit., A. Favareto, 2007.

39 E. Battisti: “Sindicalismo de Trabalhadores do Campo: Origens, Concepções de Organização e Lutas” (Unionism of rural workers: origins, organization concepts and struggles), Master’s Dissertation defended in 2003 at the Federal University of Fluminense, http://www.nre.seed.pr.gov.br/franciscobeltrao/arquivos/File/disciplinas/sociologia/sindicalismo_no_sudoeste_do_parana.pdf (accessed 22 April 2013).

40 Op. cit., A. Favareto, 2007.

In 1993, CUT's National Department for Rural Workers submitted a proposal to the federal government to invest in subsidies and credit for small farmers, highlighting the necessity for a national programme addressing the diverse interests and socio-economic needs of smaller farmers.⁴¹ This proposal was followed by a major national demonstration on May Day 1994 called *Grito da Terra* (Cry of the Earth), organized by CUT in partnership with CONTAG and MST, the social movement for landless workers. A major achievement of this demonstration was the launch of the



Programa de Valorização da Pequena Produção Rural (Programme for the Enhancement of Small Rural Production), PROVAP, by the federal government that same year. Though the effectiveness of this programme was limited, it was the predecessor of the PRONAF programme enacted by the government 2 years later, following the Second *Grito da Terra* movement in 1995.⁴²

The second half of the 1990s was marked by internal conflicts between the rural departments of CUT and CONTAG (which had allied with CUT in 1995). The rural unions, especially from the southern states of Brazil, were visibly distant from CONTAG, which still included corporatist features from the days of the military rule. Furthermore, the autonomous leadership that had developed within the CUT-aligned rural movement in southern states was incompatible with the CONTAG's "vertical hierarchy". The lack of progress on the agenda of strengthening family farming at the local level prompted discussions among CUT's rural unionists on the need for a separate union focussed on family farming, which led to the creation of FETRAF-SUL/CUT.⁴³

41 Op. cit., A. Cordeiro, C. Job Schmitt and D. Armani: "Organizações Sociais Rurais Diante Do Ajuste: O Caso Do Brasil", 2003 (accessed 28 April 2013).

42 In the PROVAPE, access to credit was restricted to family farmers (at an interest rate of 4 per cent per annum). Source: Op. cit., A. Cordeiro, C. Job Schmitt and D. Armani: "Organizações Sociais Rurais Diante Do Ajuste: O Caso Do Brasil", 2003.

43 Op. cit., *Deser in the history of family farming organizations in the south region*, DESER.

Creation – Initial opportunities, support and challenges

Founding of FETRAF-SUL/CUT

FETRAF-SUL/CUT's creation was based on a growing consensus among members in CUT's rural departments on the need to increase the visibility of family farms, and overcome the organizational fragmentation of family farmer associations in the southern region.⁴⁴ Events such as the Meeting of Southern Family Farmers in 1997, and the formation of the *Frente Sul da Agricultura Familiar* (Front of Southern Family Farming) in 1999, consolidated the will to create an independent organization for family farmers in the southern states of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná. These state-level unions sought autonomy to extend their presence at the municipal level, and to exclusively represent the interests of family farmers, not the generic category of “rural workers”, as was the case in CUT and CONTAG until then.

The organization was launched in 2001 at the “First Congress of Family Farming Unions” held in Chapeco, Santa Catarina, which was attended by 1212 union delegates and more than 2000 participants. In founding FETRAF-SUL/CUT, CUT's rural departments of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná, and 95 municipal-level family farmers' unions (known as SINTRAFs)⁴⁵ merged to form a single body. While remaining affiliated to CUT and the political ideology of “new unionism”, they ceased to be official organs of the CUT structure (and therefore CONTAG), and officially committed to solely represent family farmers.

The unification and strengthening of regional and municipal unions were among the organization's major priorities at the time of its creation.⁴⁶ Its political goal was “breaking away from the official corporatist structure of trade unions”, fighting neoliberalism's exclusionist policies, and establishing alternative development models with family farmers at its centre.⁴⁷ Its organizational structure reflected its objection to the vertical hierarchy in the official trade union system, and was therefore decentralized, with various levels of activities. This implied a collective framework, together with an independent management system at the municipal, micro-regional, regional and state levels.

FETRAF-SUL/CUT founders, i.e. the rural unions from Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná, had gained crucial experience in implementing programmes with family farmers in the years before the founding of their organization. Their first experience was with the educational project targeting young family farmers called *Terra Solidária*, which was funded by the Ministry of Labour's “Worker Support Fund” in 1999.

44 FETRAF/SUL: “Parabéns Fetra-Sul/CUT!”, 2011, http://www.fetrafsul.org.br/2011/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=627:parabens-fetra-sulcut&catid=3:destaques (accessed 6 May 2013).

45 SINTRAF stands for *Sindicatos dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura Familiar* (Family farming workers' unions). These are typically municipal-level organizations which are linked to Federations at the state level. Following the formation of FETRAF at the First Congress of Association of Family Farming in the South, the CUT affiliated rural workers unions (*Sindicatos dos Trabalhadores Rural*, STRs) were officially renamed SINTRAFs, which exclusively represented family farmers. Source: E.L. Picolotto: “As Mãos que Alimentam a Nação: agricultura familiar, sindicalismo e política” (The hands that feed the nation: family farming, unionism and politics), Doctoral thesis presented to the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto De Ciências Humanas E Sociais Programa De Pós-Graduação De Ciências Sociais Em Desenvolvimento, Agricultura E Sociedade, June 2011, http://r1.ufrj.br/cpda/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/tese_evertton_picolotto_2011.pdf (accessed 6 May 2013).

46 Op. cit., E. Battisti: “Sindicalismo de Trabalhadores do Campo: Origens, Concepções de Organização e Lutas”, 2003.

47 Ibid.

Terra Solidária sought to stimulate the potential of family farming by building management capacity, agro-ecological technologies adapted to small farms, and training farmers in non-farm economic activities linked to family farms.⁴⁸ The project targeted young family farmers (above the age of 16) who had not received formal training, or even schooling. It therefore consisted of programmes on elementary education, development methodology, and management of sustainable enterprises. After 18 months of training, graduates were given certifications by federal technical universities. The project was implemented in 265 municipalities in the states of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná. By 2002, at the time of its completion, 2,500 young family farmers had been certified.⁴⁹

The implementation of the *Terra Solidária* project helped FETRAF-SUL to gain visibility and recognition from family farmers, and from other unions and workers' parties at the national level who supported this initiative. This experience also helped build coordination among the participating states, and implement independent, locally-relevant programmes.

Breaking away from CONTAG, the official union representing all rural workers, including family farmers, was a bold initiative for which FETRAF-SUL/CUT needed political legitimacy to be recognized as the major representative for family farmers in the country. Its leaders had to establish alliances with important political actors before being launched.

The "First Congress of Family Farmers' Associations", where the organization was officially launched, was attended by important political figures, such as the future President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who at the time was a popular trade unionist and political leader.⁵⁰ FETRAF-SUL/CUT also received support from regional government leaders such as the Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, and the influential political party, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party). In addition, by remaining aligned to CUT after its creation, FETRAF retained its popularity among other unions and political groups within the "new unionism" movement, and continued to benefit from CUT's political and policy influence.

The credibility gained from its successful implementation of the *Terra Solidária* project and the strong political support provided FETRAF significant visibility, allowing it to expand to other states.

Growth – Main steps since creation

A number of innovative projects and campaigns lent further credibility to the organization's Alternative Rural Sustainable Development model and strengthened the movement of family farmer unions in the country. Among them was a cooperative rural housing project created in 2001 to address the housing needs of low-income family farmers, called *Cooperativa de Habitação dos Agricultores Familiares* (Housing Cooperative for Family Farmers), COOPERHAF. This project was led and managed by family farmer communities, and it

48 M.L. Beduschi: "O Projeto Terra Solidária - Desenvolvido Pela Escola Sul - Cut: Uma Experiência Sindical Em Educação Profissional" (The Project Solidary Land developed by the Sul-Cut school: a trade-union experience in professional education), 2003, Masters Thesis submitted to Universidade Federal Santa Catarina, http://www.portalanpedsul.com.br/admin/uploads/2004/Painel/Painel/12_06_55_O_PROJETO_TERRA_SOLIDARIA___DESENVOLVIDO_PELA_ESCOLA_SUL___C.pdf (accessed 30 April 2013).

49 Ibid.

50 Op. cit., E.L. Picolotto: "As Mãos que Alimentam a Nação: agricultura familiar, sindicalismo e política", 2011.

included the construction of houses, undertaken with assistance from COOPERHAF'S technical team. FETRAF-SUL/CUT's municipal and micro-regional unions coordinated COOPERHAF's work. Beneficiaries were also given assistance to access credit from government rural housing schemes to build their houses.⁵¹ While the initial goal was to build houses for 357 families, the cooperative expanded to 260 municipalities in Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná, and then to other parts of the country.⁵²

Similarly, in 2002 family farmers in the state of São Paulo initiated a campaign to create awareness on sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS. This initiative was noticed by the Ministry of Health, and this led to a partnership between government-run municipal health systems and FETRAF on a leadership training and development programme that trained 84 leaders in the state of São Paulo to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS in rural communities.

Family farming associations affiliated to FETRAF-SUL were created in other states such as São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, and in northern states such as Bahia, Rio Grande do Norte, and Ceará. By 2003, 15 family farmer federations had been created, which gave rise to the idea of a national level federation, to coordinate the activities of state-level family farmers' federations.

FETRAF-Brasil was thus officially launched in 2004, at the "First National Congress of Family Farmers' Associations" held in Brasília, which was attended by 2000 family farmers from 22 states. Its agenda had many similarities with that of FETRAF-SUL, which was the main driving force behind the new national federation. Its objectives were to consolidate a structure of national representation and management, to campaign for public policies empowering family farmers, and to advocate for agrarian reform.⁵³

Currently, the organization includes 18 state-level federations (FAF's or FETRAFs), 600 municipal level unions (SINTRAFs), and represents over 500,000 family farmers.⁵⁴

51 *Winners and Finalists: 'Caprichando a Morada': Living well is part of human dignity*, World Habitat Award website, 2009, <http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/project-details.cfm?lang=00&theProjectID=18A31ABB-15C5-F4C0-9927E7D21E1D62B3>, (accessed 10 May 2013).

52 W. Paul: "Hands That Feed The Nation: Local Brazilian Housing Project, Interview with Adriana Paredes, COOPERHAF", 2009, <http://www.planetshifter.com/node/1386> (accessed 10 May 2013).

53 Op. cit., E.L. Picolotto: "As Mãos que Alimentam a Nação: agricultura familiar, sindicalismo e política", 2011.

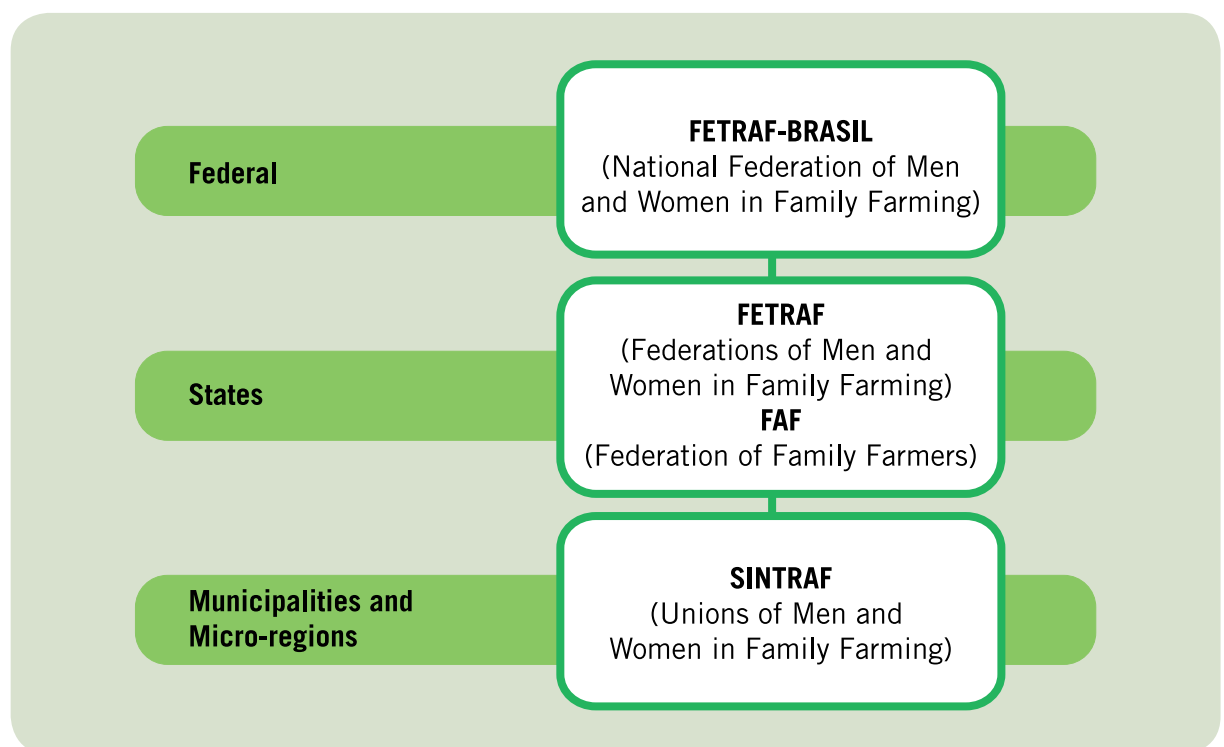
54 The current state-level federations that are members of FETRAF-Brasil are: FETRAF-SUL/CUT (Santa Catarina, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul), FETRAF-BA/CUT (Bahia), FETRAF-MA (Maranhão), FETRAF-PI (Piauí), FETRAF-PE (Pernambuco), FETRAF-RN (Rio Grande do Norte), FETRAF-CE (Ceará), FETRAF-PB (Paraíba), FAF-SP (São Paulo), FETRAF-MG (Minas Gerais), FETRAF-GO (Goiás), FETRAF-DFE (Distrito Federal e Entorno), FAF-MS (Mato Grosso do Sul), FETRAF-PA (Pará), and FETRAF-TO (Tocantins).

2.3. How does it currently work?

Structure

Given the wide geographical presence of FETRAF-Brasil, and its objection to a hierarchical official trade union system, a key feature of its organizational structure is decentralization in terms of leadership and action (see figure below). The organization is composed of individual, independently managed state-level federations that administer state-specific projects for family farmers. Below these state level federations are the *Sindicatos dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura Familiar* (Family Farming Workers' Unions), SINTRAFs, which function at the municipal and “micro-regional” levels (i.e., covering multiple municipalities) in each state. SINTRAFs also have separate administrative structures and have considerable autonomy in terms of managing and initiating projects at the municipal level.

Organizational Structure of FETRAF-Brasil



These decentralized units are bound by a collective framework implying shared commitments and areas of strategic focus based on the national Resolutions adopted by FETRAF-Brasil at its annual Congresses. At present, all the state-level federations work on a set of key issues for which separate coordinators are elected: agrarian reform, women, social policies, agricultural policies, youth, housing, and environment.

Elections

All FETRAF bodies elect an Executive Board which includes a General Coordinator, a Secretary General, and a Management and Financial Coordinator.⁵⁵ The elections of the Executive Board and Coordinators of FETRAF-Brasil occur at its National Congress, held every 3 years at its headquarters in Brasília. These elections follow a two-tier system, wherein each municipal level SINTRAF and state-level FETRAF or FAF, elects delegates who vote at the national level. SINTRAFs and state-level FETRAFS are entitled to elect one delegate, and additionally one delegate per 500 due-paying members.⁵⁶

To ensure gender balance and youth participation, a quota of 30 per cent women and 20 per cent youth delegates is set at the Executive Board elections and the National Congress.

Activities

To achieve its objectives of building an alternative sustainable development model to improve the working and living conditions of family farmers, and strengthen their representation in public policies, FETRAF-Brasil engages in 3 main types of activities: raising awareness and highlighting the demands of family farmers through mobilizations and campaigns; implementing projects and programmes on priority areas based on the needs of its family farmer members; and advocating and lobbying for the implementation of policies on social security, agrarian reform, and economic empowerment of family farming. FETRAF also links these activities; for instance, it campaigns and lobbies for policies supporting family farmers, then raises awareness about those policies among its members, and facilitates their access to the government schemes and programmes enacting those policies.

FETRAF's programme of action is determined through a democratic system of representation. Elected delegates and coordinators adopt Resolutions that direct its activities. Its decentralization also emphasizes a participatory approach in the initiation as well as the implementation of activities. Additionally, FETRAF actively integrates other economic structures in its project implementation, such as cooperatives, many of which it has helped create.

FETRAF's activities are largely funded by membership fees and through collaboration with public agencies. In a number of projects, FETRAF has been supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Agricultural Development and the Ministry of Health, alongside state and municipal-level government agencies. For financial support, FETRAF also relies on CRESOL, a network of rural credit cooperatives that provides micro-credit to family farmers; for instance, it has partnered with CRESOL for housing and education initiatives.⁵⁷ For certain projects, such as the improvement of its internal management and institutional plan of action, FETRAF has sought support from international non-governmental organizations for developmental cooperation on agriculture (called “agri-

55 *Coordenação* (Coordination), FETRAF-Brasil website, 2013, <http://www.fetra.org.br/> (accessed 6 May 2013).

56 *Regulamento do III Congresso da Fetraf-Brasil 2013* (Regulations of the third Congress of FETRAF-Brasil 2013), FETRAF-Brasil, 2013.

57 *Cresol Humaitá comemora 10 anos* (Cersol Humaitá celebrates its 10th anniversary), FETRAF-SUL/CUT, 2013, http://www.fetrafsul.org.br/2011/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=284%3Aencontro-historico-fetrafsul-cooperhaf-e-cresol-reafirmam-parcerias&Itemid=162%20http://www.fetrafsul.org.br/2011/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2480:cresol-humaita-comemora-10-anos&catid=1:ultimas-noticias&Itemid=104 (accessed 11 May 2013).

agencies”), such as AgriCord, AgriTerra, Solidaridad, and Kerkinactie.⁵⁸ The organization also regularly partners with a number of social movements, such as the MST and Via Campesina⁵⁹, particularly for advocacy and campaigning on issues such as land reform, social security, and credit for family farmers and other disempowered stakeholders in rural areas.⁶⁰ Additionally, the FETRAF-Brasil remains affiliated to CUT, and regularly participates in movements and demonstrations initiated within CUT.

FETRAF-Brasil’s main activities, along with some examples from state and municipal-level FETRAFs, are summarized below:

■ Campaigns and movements

As a trade union, FETRAF-Brasil has been at the helm of organizing mobilizations and campaigns to increase visibility and raise awareness on a number of issues that directly affect the lives of family farmers. Its founders have been active in several key movements, such as the *Grito da Terra*, which is now an annual event gathering thousands of family farmers to demonstrate against hunger and poverty in rural areas.⁶¹

Since its creation, FETRAF-Brasil has been active in the annual *Jornada Nacional de Luta da Agricultura Familiar e Reforma Agrária* (Day of Struggle for Family Farming and Agrarian Reform), highlighting a specific theme related to family farming each year.⁶²

■ Implementing programmes

Since one of the main objectives of FETRAF-Brasil is to promote an “alternative sustainable development model” empowering family farmers and adding value to their products and services, a significant part of its activities involves implementing programmes and projects in line with this model. The originality of these programmes and projects is that they demonstrate the value and returns of alternative economic structures, such as cooperatives, and agro-ecological techniques.⁶³ Altemir Tortelli, a General Coordinator of FETRAF-SUL/CUT, mentioned that, “When we are negotiating [with the government], we are proving our ideas with alternative economic systems [...] We are speaking about practice, and we are demonstrating that it is possible.”⁶⁴

58 *FETRAF-SUL Projects*, AgriCord, 2013, <http://www.agricord.org/farmersorganisations/organisation/15388/fetrafsul-federaco-dos-trabalhadores-na-agricultura-familiar-sul> (accessed 11 May 2013).

59 *MST e Fetraf realizam acampamento pedagógico no Ceará* (MST and FETRAF conduct a teaching camp in Ceará), MST, 2013, <http://www.mst.org.br/node/1131>

60 *Via Campesina e Fetraf apresentam propostas para Código* (Via Campesina and Fetraf present proposals for the Code), MST, 28 March 2011, <http://www.mst.org.br/Via-Campesina-e-Fetrafpresentam-propostas-para-COodigo>

61 “Cinco mil agricultores são esperados hoje no Grito da Terra” (Five thousand farmers are expected today in the Earth’s Cry), in *Diário de Pernambuco*, 30 April 2013, http://www.diariodepernambuco.com.br/app/noticia/vida-urbana/2013/04/30/interna_vidaurbana,436810/cinco-mil-agricultores-sao-esperados- hoje-no-grito-da-terra.shtml (accessed 11 May 2013).

62 *Direção Nacional aprova plano de ação para 2011* (National direction approves plan of action for 2011), FETRAF-Brasil, 2011, <http://www.fetrafsul.org.br/agencia-de-noticias/77/direcao-nacional-aprova-plano-de-acao-para-2011> (accessed 11 May 2013).

63 N. Paget-Clarke: “Interview with Altemir Tortelli, General Coordinator FETRAF-SUL/CUT: When Cooperative Structures are the Instrument and Autonomy,” in *In Motion Magazine*, 2005, http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/global/at_fetrafsul_int.html (accessed 11 May 2013).

64 Op. cit., Paget-Clarke, 2005.

FETRAF organizations have focussed on key issues affecting the working and living conditions of family farmers.

a. Capacity building and education

As mentioned earlier, FETRAF's first project initiated in 1999, *Terra Solidária*, affirmed the organization's commitment towards improving the education standards of family farmers, through training its members (particularly youth) in issues such as management, finances, and agro-ecology. The project used funding from the Ministry of Labour's *Fundo de Amparo ao Trabalhador* (Workers support Fund-FAT). It had 2500 participants at the time of its completion in 2002, and remains a model for future training and capacity-building projects. In 2013, FETRAF-SUL reinitiated the project (this time titled "*Juventude semeando Terra Solidária*", meaning "Youth sow the seeds for Solidary Land"), as part of a partnership between the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Federal University, *Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul* (UFFS).⁶⁵

Other state-level FETRAF units have launched their own projects on training and education for family farmers, in partnership with regional technical schools and state government facilities. For instance, in 2010 FETRAF in the north-eastern state of Bahia initiated PROEJA Campo, in partnership with the state government, the Centre for Professional Training of Semi-Árido-São Domingo, and the Family Farmer Technical School of Avani de Lima Cunha Valente. This project targets both young and adult family farmers, and its course focuses on sustainable development and solidarity family farming. It combines theoretical and technical training modules, and is aimed at the "improvement and sustainability of family farming, living environment, reduction of social inequalities, inclusion of young people and women, and income generation."⁶⁶



65 *Juventude semeando Terra Solidária* (Youths sow the seeds for "Solidary Land"), FETRAF-SUL/CUT, 2013, http://www.fetrafsul.org.br/2011/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2413:juventude-semeando-terra-solidaria&catid=1:ultimas-noticias&Itemid=104 (accessed 11 May 2013).

66 *Projeto de Educação* (Education project), FETRAF-BA/CUT, 2013, http://www.fetrafa.org.br/ler_conteudo.php?id=167 (accessed 11 May 2013).

In addition to such long-term projects, FETRAF members also organize capacity-building seminars and workshops on specific themes. For instance, in 2011 the northern state Pará organized several courses, including on animal husbandry, milk production, and apiculture.⁶⁷

The successful initiation and implementation of projects for rural education and capacity building has led to FETRAF being regarded as a key partner in guaranteeing the success of the Ministry of Agrarian Development's national programmes supporting rural education, and literacy such as the *Programa Brasil Alfabetizado* (Literate Brazil Programme), PBA.⁶⁸

b. Housing

One of the most innovative and successful projects initiated by FETRAF members is the cooperative rural housing initiative COOPERHAF, launched in 2001 in the southern states of Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul. This initiative targets the acute problem of housing shortages in rural areas, affecting more than 1.7 million rural workers, in particular family farmers.⁶⁹ This problem is particularly significant because the lack of decent living conditions also impedes access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitary facilities, and among others, aggravates rural to urban migration, particularly among young people. The project was funded with support from state and national governmental programmes, such as the Rural Housing Subsidy Programme, the Government Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees and National Social Interest Housing Fund. The initiative also provided households access to credit for building houses from the CRESOL Bank, a rural micro-credit agency. Funding from the federal government's housing programme has allowed COOPERHAF to reduce its membership from USD 45, which was the fee until 2006, to USD 2.⁷⁰

The COOPERHAF project began with the mobilization and organization of family farmers into cooperative structures. It then focussed on giving them access to rural housing credit and technical assistance in housing construction, and lastly, it conducted a post-occupancy research on the living conditions of beneficiaries.

One of the most important aspects of this project was its integrated approach, through which it engaged participants in other areas of importance to their farming activities. Thus, apart from ensuring housing to over 30,000 families, the project promoted sustainable livelihood creation through capacity building and training for participants on themes such as diversifying farm activities to increasing income-generation, organizing cooperatives for production, ecological building technologies and materials, and marketing.⁷¹ As a community-led project, COOPERHAF was also able to incorporate local knowledge in the process of planning and housing development.

67 *FETRAF realiza curso de inseminação com agricultores* (FETRAF organizes training about insemination with rural producers), FETRAF-Para/CUT, 2011, <http://fetraf-para.blogspot.ch/>

68 *Movimentos sociais defendem educação no campovoltada para a realidade do jovem rural* (Social movements defend education in rural areas realized by rural youth), MDA, 2006, http://www.moc.org.br/download/MDA_170506_brasilalfabetizado.pdf (accessed 11 May 2013).

69 Op. cit., World Habitat Award, 2009 (accessed 10 May 2013).

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

COOPERHAF's success and its subsequent expansion to 12 states in Brazil earned it the World Habitat Award in 2009.⁷²

c. Access to credit

FETRAF's role in championing policies at the national level to ease access to credit continues at the state and municipal levels through the creation of credit cooperatives, which improve family farmers' access to credit from government schemes such as PRONAF.⁷³ In addition, FETRAF's cooperation with the CRESOL Bank, which concentrates on the specific credit needs of family farmers, has enabled a number of its members to expand their businesses, as well as satisfy their housing and education needs.

d. Technical assistance for family farmers

FETRAF-Brasil has also focussed on aiding its members build their technical capacities and seek technical assistance, through projects such as the *Projeto De Agentes Multiplicadores De Assistência Técnica E Extensão Rural* (Project of Multiple Agents of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension), AMA, developed and implemented by FETRAF-Bahia. This project, initiated using the methodology of the government's *Assistência Técnica E Extensão Rural* (National Programme Technical Assistance and Rural Extension), ATER, seeks to generate knowledge on agro-ecology, socio-technical training, and income-generation, among others with a particular focus on youth and women.⁷⁴ It has so far been active in 77 municipalities in the state of Bahia and has impacted 7,860 family farmer households.

■ Advocacy and partnering for policies supporting family farmers

FETRAF-Brasil has played an important role in advocating, negotiating and establishing partnerships for the implementation of a number of government programmes targeting family farmers. Some of its activities in policy advocacy and implementation of government programmes are described below:

a. Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar (National Programme for Strengthening Family Farming), PRONAF

One of the earliest mobilizations of the CUT-affiliated labour movement from which FETRAF originated was to increase access to credit for family farmers. Following the privatization of the credit systems and the reduction of subsidies for small farmers in the 1990s, family farmers faced difficulties in expanding their businesses and enhancing the profitability of their products. The demands and impressive mobilizations by rural unions led to the introduction of the credit scheme PRONAF in 1996; which became the first government programme targeting family farmers, marking an important milestone in the government's agricultural policies.

FETRAF's role in the enactment of PRONAF has not prevented it from calling for

72 Op. cit., World Habitat Award, 2009.

73 Op. cit., Paget-Clarke, 2005.

74 *Projetos- Assistência Técnica E Extensão Rural (ATER) - Projeto De Agentes Multiplicadores de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (AMA)* (Projects – technical assistance and rural extension (ATER) – Project on multiplying agents for technical assistance), FETRAF-Bahia/CUT, 2013, http://www.fetrafa.org.br/ler_conteudo.php?id=167 (accessed 7 May 2013).

improvements of the programme. In recent years, FETRAF-Brasil has demanded fair minimum wages in the case of total loss of production, provisions for technical training for youth and awareness-raising mechanisms to inform farmers about available funding at the local level to strengthen PRONAF's impact in rural areas.⁷⁵

b. Programa Nacional de Crédito Fundiário (National Land Tenure Credit Programme), PNCF

The PNCF was set up in 2003 as a complement to land reform. It supports the purchase and extension of land holdings for family farmers. At the time of its establishment, existing FETRAF structures had proposed elements to address the problem of “red tape” associated with access to land and the effectiveness of agricultural reform.

FETRAF-Brasil is currently working towards the development of a project for promoting land tenure credit and encouraging membership in the PNCF. The goal is to enable farmers' access to credit so that, by acquiring their own land, they are able to improve the quality of their lives.⁷⁶

c. Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária (National Programme for Education and Agrarian Reform), PRONERA

The PRONERA initiative of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCRA), launched in 1998, seeks to improve educational levels and formal schooling among rural communities. It was initiated in partnership with a number of social movements, including FETRAF-Brasil,⁷⁷ and targets both youth and adult populations in rural areas. FETRAF-Brasil's experience in conducting education and training programmes for family farmers and its leaders, played an important role in the design and implementation of the programme, which is still on-going, and has benefitted over 400,000 rural workers.⁷⁸

d. Programa Nacional de Habitação Rural (National Programme for Rural Housing), PNHR

The successful implementation of the COOPERHAF initiative of FETRAF-SUL/CUT played an important role in demonstrating the best practices in rural housing assistance projects.⁷⁹ Inspired and convinced by the successes of this initiative, the government introduced the PNHR to assist rural populations seek credit and assistance in the house construction.

75 *Pronaf e Plano Safra são discutidas em reunião com MF e MDA* (Pronaf and Plano Safra are debated in meeting with MF and MDA), FETRAF-BRASIL/CUT, http://www.fetra.org.br/site/noticia.php?not=not_fora_home&id=1889 (accessed 18 December 2012).

76 E. Araújo, personal correspondence, 10 October 2012.

77 *Educação no Campo/Pronera* (Education in the Country-side/PRONERA), Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA), 2012, <http://www.incra.gov.br/index.php/reforma-agraria-2/projetos-e-programas-do-incra/educacao-no-campopronera> (accessed 12 May 2013).

78 C.A. dos Santos, M.C. Molina and S. M. dos Santos Azevedo de Jesus: *Memória e História do PRONERA Contribuições do Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária para a Educação do Campo no Brasil* (Memory and history of PRONERA: contributions of the national program on education at land reform for rural education in Brazil), Brasília, MDA and Incra, 2010.

79 E. Araújo: “Small-scale farmers and rural transformation: the case of Brazil, Rural Transformation”, Presentation for *Brussels Development Briefings*, 2011, <http://brusselsbriefings.net/past-briefings/n24-rural-transformations/> (accessed 18 June 2012).

Challenges

Despite its impressive growth across the country, and its formidable influence on national policies, FETRAF-Brasil still faces significant challenges that impede it to reach its objectives and full success of its activities. Consolidating the existing decentralized structure of the organization continues to be a challenge, particularly in terms of improving communication and information among state-level federations and municipal-level SINTRAFs.⁸⁰

In terms of policy influence, FETRAF-Brasil's emphasis on ecological agriculture, particularly its demands for the banning of genetically modified organism (GMO) seeds in agricultural production have not yet been comprehensively addressed by the national government. Despite its innovative GMO-free soy production venture in 3 southern states,⁸¹ there have been no significant policy measures in favour of agro-ecology, or the reduction of GMO in agriculture in Brazil. Important obstacles in policy advocacy seem to persist on certain issues, particularly when the lobbies of big businesses may be stronger than those of FETRAF-Brasil and other social movements.



80 Op. cit., E. Araújo, personal correspondence, 10 October 2012.

81 FETRAF-SUL/CUT and Contrimaio: "Prospectus: Non-GM Soy From Brazilian Family Farms", October 2005, http://www.gmfreeireland.org/feed/documents/FETRAF_prospectus_GMfree_soy%5B1%5D.pdf

Section 3: Assessment of the Catalyst

3.1 Main achievements

- **Spread and expansion** – One of FETRAF-Brasil's key achievement has been its successful growth from 3 to 18 states, and its extension to 1,000 municipalities in the country, as well as its consolidation as a national federation. The bold initiative taken by the founders of the first FETRAF created in 3 southern states of Brazil, challenged the official union structure and sought to carve out its own niche in the rural labour movement. Through the successful implementation of a number of projects, and through partnerships with important social and workers' movements and governmental agencies, FETRAF was able to build a strong reputation and increase its membership. Today, its organizational structure includes 15 state-level federations and 600 municipal unions, which together represent 500,000 family farmers;
- **Far-reaching campaigns** – Over the past decade, FETRAF organizations led a number of campaigns at the state and national levels. The rural unionists that launched FETRAF-SUL/CUT were among the first campaigners for policies favouring family farming in the country, which resulted in the enactment of the government's first programme for family farmers, PRONAF, in 1996. Today, FETRAF-Brasil continues to campaign for important issues such as agrarian reform, demonstrating its collective strength through nation-wide mobilizations;
- **Policy influence** – To strengthen family farms, FETRAF-Brasil has engaged in negotiations with state and national governments to introduce and expand agrarian and social protection programmes targeting the needs of family farmers. It has been at the helm of negotiations for important programmes such as the National Programme for Education and Agrarian Reform (PRONERA), the National Programme for Rural Housing (PNHR), and the National School Meals Programme.

These policies mark a significant progress in Brazilian policy-making, which has historically favoured the interests of large-scale farms and wealthier sections of the rural population. FETRAF-Brasil's role in advocating policies favouring family farming has attempted to change the idea that rural areas require only policies on agricultural development, and has promoted other forms of programme support, such as technical assistance, education, and training to help populations raise their income levels;

- **Demonstration of its “alternative sustainable development model” through successful project implementation** – FETRAF-Brasil promotes an “alternative sustainable development model” that emphasises social cooperation and ecology. Its model aims to make family farmers autonomous in the system of agrarian production, and focuses principally on cooperative economic structures. Drawing from this model, it has been successful in setting up and assisting cooperative structures for rural producers, such as the milk producers' cooperatives in the south of the country

(*Cooperativa Rio Grandense de Laticínios e Correlatos*, CORLAC).⁸² It has also encouraged the creation of cooperative structures to address the problem of rural housing through its award-winning COOPERHAF project, which was able to address the housing needs of nearly 30,000 family farmer households.

These projects demonstrate to the government and other agencies, that it is possible to achieve better working and living standards through cooperative economic structures;

- **Successful coordination and partnerships with other actors** – FETRAF-Brasil has also been able to maintain long-standing partnerships and alliances with other rural labour organizations and social movements. In some cases, successful coordination with agencies like CRESOL helped it to meet the credit needs of its members, and complete a number of projects. In other cases, it has joined hands with other agencies to implement or initiate projects such as PRONERA.

3.2 Future

The organization intends to give significant priority to continuing projects and programmes at the municipal and regional levels; and to continue its pioneering initiatives to facilitate its members' access to research, technology, and technical support.

FETRAF-Brasil also plans to spread its organizational base to other states of the country; and particularly strengthen its programmes in the north-eastern region, which contains the highest levels of rural poverty, and expand into other under-developed states in the country, such as Amazonas and Amapá. Eventually, the organization envisages expanding its approach to other Latin American countries, to strengthen family farmers across borders.⁸³

The organization also strives to broaden its impact on national policies, especially on the issue of agrarian reform and agro-ecology, which it considers to be urgent priorities in helping to achieve poverty reduction and preserving the environment. In 2013, FETRAF-Brasil submitted to the Ministry of Agrarian Development a list of demands that included provisions for government support on maternity leave and improvement of land credit policies for women and youth, to mark the 9th National Day of Family Farming and Agrarian Reform.⁸⁴

To continue impacting public policies, FETRAF-Brasil aims to build a close working relationship with the government. In May 2011, at a meeting with FETRAF officials, President Dilma Rousseff reaffirmed her administration's commitment to working with FETRAF-Brasil, and pledged funding for several FETRAF programmes, such as the *Programa de Garantia de Preços para Agricultura Familiar* (Programme of Price Guarantee for Family-Based Agriculture), PGPAF, and the *Garantia de Preços Mínimos* (Minimum Price Guarantee), PGPM, as well as for rural infrastructure programmes.⁸⁵ FETRAF-Brasil

82 Op. cit., Paget-Clarke, 2005.

83 Op. cit., E. Araújo, personal correspondence, 10 October 2012.

84 *Pepe Vargas marca reunião para conversar sobre pauta de reivindicações da Fetraf* (Pepe Vargas meets to discuss the list of demands FETRAF), Ministry of Agrarian Development Portal, 30 April 2013, www.mda.gov.br/portal/noticias/item?item_id=12793231

85 "Dilma Rousseff recebe dirigentes da Fetraf" (Dilma Rousseff receives FETRAF coordinators), in *Jornal de Beltrão*, 25 June 2011, <http://www.jornalbeltrao.com.br/beltrao/dilma-rousseff-recebe-dirigentes-da-fetraf-64333/>

intends to take up these potential areas of collaboration with the government, to maintain the momentum of government partnerships it attained under the previous administration led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

3.3 Lessons learned

FETRAF-Brasil's experience in empowering its family farmer members across the country provides the following key lessons:

- **Recognize specific needs** – FETRAF-Brasil resulted from a bold decision to break away from the official rural workers' union, and create a separate organization for family farmers. This was an important strategic and practical move, which allowed this large segment of the Brazilian rural population to articulate its own needs, based on its specific characteristics and obstacles, and become visible to policy-makers at the local and national levels. Internally, the organization places special emphasis on youth and women's empowerment, acknowledging the special potential and challenges of these groups in family farming;
- **Encourage leadership at the grassroots** – One of the key features of FETRAF-Brasil is its encouragement of local, municipal-level leadership. The organization includes more than 600 municipal level unions within its structure, which possess significant management autonomy and initiate their own locally-relevant campaigns and projects. This is a particularly important feature for rural unions, which benefit greatly from a strong municipal presence to adequately address the needs of their members;
- **Develop a decentralized structure** – A probable explanation for the rapid spread of FETRAF organizations from 3 to 15 states in Brazil in just 5 years may be the horizontal administration system of the federation. Even after the creation of the national federation of FETRAF-Brasil, the state-level federations remained leaders in their specific domains, allowing for organizational development without hierarchies;
- **Integrating activities** – To achieve its objective of strengthening family farming in Brazil, FETRAF-Brasil has adopted an integrated approach in its activities. Its effectiveness is based on the array of activities it engages in, ranging from advocacy and campaigning at the national level to the organization of cooperatives at the village or municipal levels. For FETRAF-Brasil, the improvement of working and living standards of its members requires multiple complementary interventions;





- **Adopt a community-based approach** – In its promotion of cooperatives and other projects for its members, FETRAF-Brasil has consistently adopted a community-based approach, in which family farmer communities are given the responsibility to lead and manage their own projects. The benefit of this approach is the inclusion of relevant local knowledge in project implementation, alongside ensuring leadership training and capacity building of community members;
- **Focus on environmental sustainability** – FETRAF-Brasil has a comprehensive vision of an alternative rural development model, which focuses on environmental, economic and social sustainability. For these reasons, the organization promotes agro-ecological techniques that are rooted in the local traditions of family farmers, and gives priority to learning and training for its members to ensure their access to sustainable livelihoods;
- **Facilitate social dialogue** – FETRAF-Brasil's organization of family farmers at the state and national levels, and its policy-advocacy seeking improvements in the lives of these communities, have established an important and mutually beneficial channel of social dialogue. For family farmers, governmental inputs, in the form of schemes and programmes, are crucial for improving their working and living conditions. Meanwhile, the government benefits from supporting this segment of the rural population, given its significant role in increasing food security and generating employment in the country;

- **Building strategic partnerships** – FETRAF-Brasil owes its success to its ability to build strong partnerships. It has long-standing partnerships with other social movements for its advocacy efforts, while for project implementation it seeks alliances with governmental agencies. These partnerships have contributed to the success of FETRAF-Brasil's ventures and have also helped it gain reputation and visibility;
- **Raise awareness and link beneficiaries and programmes** – In rural areas, where a large proportion of the population is disadvantaged in terms of access to technology, and information, many family farmers are typically not aware of governmental programmes that may benefit them. By organizing family farmers and connecting them through federations across the country, FETRAF-Brasil has been able to raise awareness and thereby empower its members;
- **Ensure financial sustainability** – FETRAF-Brasil has ensured the financial sustainability of its organizational structure and its activities through partnerships and funding from its membership fees. The organization's capacity to spread from 3 to 15 states in a short span of time demonstrates its effective and efficient management of resources, and its careful planning, which has enabled the organization to grow without compromising on its goals.