

## Chapter 5

# Multi-connected network involving women in agriculture in South Amazon for food sovereignty

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## Introduction

This chapter presents the contributions of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), in partnership with other institutions, involving women in agriculture in the south of the Amazon, in order to achieve the following actions: end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere (target 5.1) and undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources (target 5.A).

The construction of food sovereignty and the defense of biodiversity is a task that requires a determined action, in which the protection and conservation of life and nature are inserted, a work predominantly developed by women. With this work, they sustain human life by ensuring the supply of food and water, and it is the women who suffer the most the destruction of forest ecosystems.

Women from the region of Ouro Preto do Oeste, RO, after conversion to organic farming, began to produce food by diversifying production, preserving biodiversity and generating family income, whose practices were based on the use, management and sustainable land management. This was done through actions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the state of Rondônia, the federal government and Embrapa, through the Programa de Desenvolvimento Socioambiental da Produção Familiar Rural (Socioenvironmental Development Program for Rural Family Production – Proambiente).

In this context, the knowledge, use and redefinition of traditional and modern practices of ecological nature, processes of value added to production and rescue of local gastronomy are inserted. The actions of Embrapa in articulation with other institutions contributed to give visibility, to re-signify agricultural practices and products through the exchange of knowledge on ecologically based transition processes, adding value to production and inserting it into different modalities of short circuits.

This is a summary of the broad set of activities developed by Embrapa Environment in the context of the Proambiente project, whose actions were articulated and operationalized based on multiple interactions with municipal, state and federal institutions. In 2005, the first activities were developed in partnership with Embrapa Eastern Amazon and then in interaction with colleagues from Embrapa Acre and Embrapa Rondônia, linked to agronomy and rural sociology; and in 2014 the information was complemented (Abreu; Watanabe, 2016).

The research supported public policies and gave visibility to the original experience of the women's group, besides generating knowledge for the formulation of new public policies for its strengthening.

## **Research articulated with pro-environment public policy**

The experience of building the food sovereignty of this group of women is largely due to the impact of Proambiente's public policy actions. The idea was born in 1999 from the need to elaborate new models of technical and credit assistance for family farming in the Amazon and the interest to overcome the dichotomy between rural production and environmental conservation. The protagonists of this discussion were organizations of social movements: Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (Federation of Agricultural Workers – Fetags), Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers – Contag), among others. They also counted with the contribution of NGOs: Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional (Federation of Agencies for Social and Educational Assistance – Fase) and Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia (Institute of Environmental Research of the Amazon – Ipam). The governmental program stimulated, among other objectives, the use of conservation practices in several poles of development of the Amazon region. From 2005, it was Embrapa Environment's team – one of the arms of Proambiente research – that carried out the social diagnosis of environmental perception, in areas of production systems in ecological transition in the region of Ouro Preto do Oeste, RO.

This diagnosis identified the new role of women as a result of the transition stimulated by this governmental program, which led to the continuity of research and development in the region, in order to understand the role of women in relation to food production. In summary, the dialogue with the group led to

the identification of obstacles and the proposal for multiple improvements in transition processes, value added and alternative markets. In this chapter, the context of the activities developed will be detailed.

## **Context of activities developed by women in agriculture**

The municipality of Ouro Preto do Oeste is located in the central region of the state of Rondônia, in the South of the Brazilian Amazon. Since the beginning of its colonization (creation of the Integrated Colonization Project in the 1970s), women faced a serious challenge to their survival, which was to obtain food in quantity and quality for consumption.

With the initial support of NGOs and the Catholic Church in the late 1990s, women and their families established the Association of Alternative Producers (APA), which provided support for the organization on marketing of production in the international market. For some years, this strategy was successful; but in 2007 there was a crisis of administrative impropriety, and APA filed for bankruptcy. Women farmers began to process fruit in the family's own production unit, with the aim of selling them in fairs, markets and nearby markets, in Rio Branco, AC, and Manaus, AM.

As of the progress of the Proambiente project activities, Embrapa was instrumental in contributing to the articulation and integration of different sectoral support (environmental, agricultural, training/trade, extension, markets) and put the aspirations of APA producers in evidence. A wide diversity of food products from agroforestry yards was identified, such as vegetables (22 species), fruits in orchards (26 species), annual crops (rice, beans, corn and cassava), agroforestry systems (coffee, cocoa, cupuaçu, pupunha palm), breeding of poultry (meat and eggs, involving chickens, ducks, turkeys and quail), breeding of pigs (meat), breeding of cattle (milk, cheese, meat) and fish farming (fish meat, such as tambaqui, pacu and tilapia).

Watanabe and Abreu (2010) emphasized the importance of the diversity of products in household food, a theme that integrates the object of the authors' research, and they demonstrate through this case study that the concept of food security transcends respect for the concern with basic quantities of food per capita – including other aspects of the choice of production systems and the quality and variety of foods to be produced, consumed and marketed.

## **Institutional action in multi-connected network**

The methodology of the Proambiente project led to the implementation of systemic actions and articulated with other sectoral policies of the federal government. This project provided for the creation of dialogues and multiple interactions between agricultural and rural development institutions and civil society, especially among the APA women's group, the Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company – Emater/RO), the Brazilian Service of Support to Micro Businesses (Sebrae/RO), Embrapa Rondônia and Embrapa Acre (Abreu; Watanabe, 2016).

Embrapa generated social and agricultural knowledge, pointing out the main challenges posed by the experience of women farmers, whose results were socialized in the processes of discussion of Proambiente's sustainable development policy in partnership with other institutions. Through the exchange and dialogue with local actors (where women occupy relevant space), the goal was to establish improvements in agroforestry yards, in the processing of juices, pulps, jellies, sweets, liqueurs, honey and marketing systems.

One of the strategies of the women was to seek the Companhia Nacional de Abastecimento (National Supply Company – Conab) to market fruits and vegetables to meet PAA goals. For the production of vegetables, chicken meat and eggs for sale to Conab, the farmers adopted a system of production called integrated and sustainable agroecological production.

## **Final considerations**

Embrapa's actions gave visibility to female farmers' practices, their perceptions and interests, qualifying the ways they relate to the natural environment and how they organize the production, exploitation and management of the territories. Highlighting the relevance of certain productive practices and supporting the establishment of strategies aimed at local sustainable development, Embrapa, from its technical staff, supported the strengthening of these women.

Currently the institutions involved are articulated in a socio-technical network. The challenge is that rural extension services for ecologically based agriculture, especially for the olericulture and fruit growing, will be improved and aligned with the demands of women farmers.

## References

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