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When the *Mandacaru* Blooms: External Intervention as the Catalyst of Collective Action in Northeast Brazil

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ABREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABVC	Associação Beneficente do *Vale do Curu* (Benevolent Association of *Vale do Curu*)
ACOMTE	Associação Comunitária do Município de *Tejuçuoca* (Community Association of the Municipality of *Tejuçuoca*)
ASA	Articulação no Semi-Árido Brasileiro (Articulation at the Brazilian Semi-Arid)
BNDES	Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento (National Development Bank)
CA	Collective Action
CBO	Community-Based Organization
COAM-BC	Conselho das Organizações Associativas da Microregião da Bacia do Curu (Council of the Associations from the Micro-region of Curu's Basin)
COAMPE	Central das Organizações Associativas do Município de *Pentecoste* (Central of Associations of the Municipality of *Pentecoste*)
CREDIVALE	Sociedade de Microcrédito e Desenvolvimento Local do *Vale do Curu* (Society for Microcredit and Local Development of *Vale do Curu*)
EMBRAPA	Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (Brazilian Enterprise for Agro-business Research)
FECONGESA	Federação das Entidades Comunitárias de *General Sampaio* (Federation of the Community Organizations of *General Sampaio*)
GESPAR	Gestão Participativa Methodology (Participatory steering Methodology)
HDI	Human Development Index
LG	Local Government
PRONAF	Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar (National Programme for the Strengthening of Familiar Agriculture)
SEBRAE	Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas (Brazilian Service for the Support of Small and Medium Enterprises)
SETAH	Instituto de Estudos e Assessoria para o Desenvolvimento Humano (Institute for Studies and Advisory in Human Development)
UO	Umbrella Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

GLOSSARY

Açude	Artificial lake sourced by the water of a river and rain, very common in the semi-arid parts of the country as a coping strategy against droughts.
Coronelismo	Control of political and economic power by the big landlords.
Leaders	Community members that have played a leadership role during and/or after the intervention, including presidents of community associations and project facilitators.
Mandacaru	Specie of cactus typical from the region of the Sertão
Project Team	Team that has implemented ground activities of the UNDP project, composed by the staff of SETAH and UNDP officials.
Sertão	Natural unit in Northeast Brazil characterized by the Semi-Arid clime.
Sertanejo	Inhabitant of the *Sertão*, typically a poor peasant with very low levels of education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter intends to make the reader familiar with the objectives and the process of research. It presents the Research Problem, discusses briefly its relevance and limitations and details the methodology used for the collection and analysis of data. The last section explains how the paper is structured.

1.1 Presentation of the Research Problem

Amílton calls Augusta, who calls César, who informs Filomeno, who sends a message to Chico Julião through Marcílio, who also spreads the news to Antônio, Evandro and Júnior.

That's more or less how the network of community leaders from the municipalities of *Pentecoste*, *Apuiarés*, *General Sampaio* and *Tejuçuoca* is "activated" every month for the meetings of the COAM-BC – the Council of the Associations from the Micro-region of Curu's Basin. There, they share information, discuss common problems and formulate joint plans for the development of *Vale do Curu*, a forgotten piece of land in the hinterlands of Northeast Brazil that one never sees on road signs, on product labels or in the news. One of the poorest areas of the country, it is also characterized by harsh natural conditions and by traditionally low levels of social mobilization.

The COAM-BC was created in 2001, during an intervention of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on rural communities in *Vale do Curu*. It aimed, among other goals, to strengthen collective action organizations that could be used for the promotion of development in the region. This included not only the creation of the council at the micro-regional level but also the reinforcement of community organizations and municipal federations of these associations. The project lasted for two years and ended in July 2003.

The literature suggests that collective actions like those undertaken by the COAM-BC (and actually the set up of the council itself) do not arise so easily. It requires a perception of common interests, a minimum organizational capacity and a favourable external environment (especially a positive attitude from government), besides some

individual incentives. The influence of this process by an external agent, who is not even part of the community dynamics, seems improbable or at least provocative.

How then could have the UNDP intervention interfered in the process of collective action in *Vale do Curu*? In short, and using a metaphor, we can say that the agency has had more or less the effect of the *Mandacaru*, a local species of cactus. It has a pink flower that, when it blooms, signals that the rain is about to come. In a place where droughts are frequent, rains are definitely good news, and the *Mandacaru* has ended up serving as an injection of enthusiasm to put people into work. It has assumed, as has the UNDP, the role of a catalytic agent.

This paper uses the case-study of *Vale do Curu* to investigate the role of external agents in the local process of collective action (CA). Furthermore, it intends to derive some conclusions as to on how group behaviour can be sustained after the external agents leave. These objectives lead us to the two principal Research Questions that this paper endeavours to answer:

RQ1: How has the intervention of the external agent, namely the UNDP, influenced the process of collective action in *Vale do Curu*?

RQ2: How has collective action been sustained after the external agent left?

These questions are supported by a set of subordinated ones, elaborated in the light of the literature reviewed in the next chapter as well as of some preliminary information collected before the fieldwork. They are grouped under the two chief questions:

On RQ1:
- How has the external agent influenced individual motivations towards collective action?
- How has the external agent influenced the institutionalization of organizations? Has there been any difference in the impact on community-based and umbrella organizations?
- Has the external agent provoked changes in the relationship between local organizations and other external actors, especially the local government?

- How has the external intervention influenced group consciousness?

On RQ2:

- What are the visible and invisible outcomes of the intervention and to what extent have they influenced further collective action?
- Has leadership made any difference to the sustainability of collective action in different communities?

1.2 Relevance of the Study

The problem formulated above is relevant both for the topic itself (collective action) and for the context in which it is analysed. Below, it is unpacked in order to justify each of its elements.

Why collective action?

As will be argued in the next chapter, poverty has an important political dimension. It is related to the lack of assets and capabilities, vulnerability and powerlessness (Sen, 1999). Collective action addresses this last constraint, representing a possibility to transform powerless isolated individuals in a powerful integrated group who can pressure for social justice, combine forces, catalyze collective gains as well as articulate and defend common interests. In other words, by acting collectively the poor can influence decisions that affect their lives and enlarge the choices available to them. This is a route to development that, for Sen (1999), is a state of freedom.

Why Brazil?

Brazil is known the world over for its extreme inequality, which makes even more relevant the argument made above. In the particular case of agriculture, public policies traditionally overlook the small farmers and are directed to the interests of big landlords, mainly from the export sector. Only since the late 1990s has the importance of smallholders, actually a significant part of the rural population in the country, been recognized by some governmental programs. Nevertheless, there's still much to be done in order to shape policies according to the specific reality and demands of the

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small farmers – characterized by diversity of production and extremely vulnerable to natural and economic shocks. CA is essential to voice their interests.

Why Vale do Curu?

The case was selected due to two factors. First, it is a typical example of Community Development project led by external agents, which are increasingly popular in Brazil. Second, this intervention was carried out in a challenging context: a region that is known for its low HDI and levels of collective action, sharply contrasting with the frequently mentioned reality of the South region of the country[1].

Why external intervention?

The two research questions formulated above address two challenges regarding CA, that is, how to initiate it and how to sustain it. External agents are seen in the literature as having a contradictory role in this process. On the one hand, they represent a necessary support in providing capacities and legitimacy; on the other, they can generate dependence and undermine autonomy. Investigating the impacts of one an intervention of one of these agents can yield lessons that may be incorporated into other initiatives.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Data collection

This research is based on the case-study of *Vale do Curu*. More precisely, it will look at the intervention of an external agent in the process of CA in that micro-region. In order to capture the various dimensions of this process, qualitative primary data were used as the main source, mainly the perceptions of the different stakeholders collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observation of key events at the communities (an association's meeting and another at the Coam-BC, and a community's religious party). Project reports were used as a complement, providing more specific and technical information.

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[1] Differently from the rest of the country, settlement in the Southern states has followed a model based on small properties and collectivism (Prado Jr, 1973). This particular history has favoured the occurrence of many experiences of collective action and social mobilization in the region, among them the famous example of Porto Alegre.

The interviews[2] were based on the set of principal and subordinated questions presented early on. They entailed descriptive inquiries (e.g. the characteristics of the households and the activities during the UNDP intervention) as well as more reflective questions on several issues (e.g. motivations towards CA; participation in community association; changes in people's behavior and values and in the organizational capacity of the communities). At the end of each talk informants were asked to make a drawing of "how they saw their community" – an attempt to capture another (more spontaneous) evidence of the group dynamics. This was particularly important due to the low levels of education of the respondents and to the abstract nature of some of the issues, which hamper the articulation and expression of ideas.

The field work was carried out from August 5th to 30th. The interviews were all in Portuguese and included three members of UNDP project team (interviewed in Fortaleza, the state capital) and four representatives of the Local Government (from each municipality was selected the official with more contact with CBOs). The bulk of the interviews, however, targeted community members and leaders, selected through the sampling method described below:

- From the 34 Community-Based Organizations involved in the project, 8 were selected as units of analysis during preliminary talks with some local leaders[3], being 4 mobilized and 4 demobilized towards collective action. The selection also looked for a balanced geographical representation of the micro-region (one mobilized and one demobilized per municipality).
- From these communities 11 leaders[4] and 24 community members (3 from each community) were selected, picked randomly among those that participate in community meetings, being the only concern the balance between both sexes.

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[2] See outline in the annexes.

[3] It's important to recognize the subjectivity of the selection, as it has followed the leaders' judgement on what characterizes a mobilized community.

[4] To simplify the terminology, *Leaders* will refer to the people who have played a leadership role during and after the UNDP intervention (sometimes more than one per community). *Community members* will refer to the householders that have participated in the project, but did not have direct contact with the project team.

- 4 *municipal facilitators* of the project and 5 other leaders of federations of CBOs were interviewed. Also, a Focus Group Discussion was conducted with the executive board of COAM-BC[5].

1.3.2 Data analysis

The analysis of collective action is not a straightforward one. Because it is a process, it is difficult to grasp, observe, measure or evaluate. Therefore, this study does not look for clear-cut answers based on quantitative measurement of CA outcomes. These outcomes will be addressed, but more for their potential in encouraging further collective behaviour than as indicators of increase or decrease in levels of CA. Instead, the analysis will take a disaggregated approach, looking separately at the different factors that determine CA. These elements, reflected at the subordinated questions presented earlier on, were transformed into six key categories[6], which will be handled through qualitative methods of analysis:

On RQ 1:

1. *Individual motivations*: look at the impacts on the factors (rational, social and symbolic) that push individuals towards CA.

2. *Institutionalization of organizations*: look at how CBOs and UOs were established and/or reinforced.

3. *Legitimacy vis-à-vis external actors*: look at changes in the relationship between communities (mainly through their leaders) and external actors (mainly LG).

4. *Group-consciousness*: look at the impacts on group awareness, identity and cohesion.

On RQ 2:

1. *Positive outcomes*: look at how positive outcomes of collective action have themselves advanced further CA.

2. *Leadership*: look at the role of leadership in the sustainability of CA

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[5] Where 9 of the leaders previously interviewed were present.
[6] Though defined previously to the fieldwork, the categories passed through several adjustments during the process of analysis.

Primary data collected in the field were systematized according to these six categories and then coupled with the different theories. The most significant pieces were selected and translated into English[7] to backup the analysis. Besides being used for illustrative quotes, answers were whenever possible grouped in order to give a more unified and broader perspective to the qualitative evidence. One important point to be underlined is that, because respondents from the four municipalities have presented a very similar pattern in their answer, the micro-region of *Vale do Curu* will be taken as a unit, disregarding comparative analysis between the different towns.

Descriptive information obtained from the interviews was separated and later on combined with data obtained from project reports in order to provide a multi-perspective description of the case-study (as presented in Chapter Three).

1.4 Limitations of the Research

The focus of this paper is the promotion and maintenance of collective action, a topic that by itself gives room for an extensive discussion. Therefore, the impacts of these actions in development are outside the terms of reference – though the recognition that they are positive and relevant is what pushes it forward. The link between CA and development is emphasized at the theoretical framework and brought in later in the conclusion, but without a deep discussion.

The main difficulty of this research was to isolate the phenomenon investigated from its broader context. Brazil is passing through a process of democracy deepening, where new democratic institutions that can push CA from the top are being built, so it's hard to separate the influence of the external agent selected (UNDP) and other agents such as the government in its various levels. Another weakness of the study is the inexistence of a clear picture of the reality existent before the intervention. For a more accurate analysis of the changes in the process of CA, especially regarding individual motivations, it would be necessary to understand the previous networks existent within the different communities.

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[7] It's important to account for the loss of content during the translation into English. The *Sertanejos* have a very localized vocabulary and a rather reticent way to express themselves, which in some cases implied the total restructure of sentences.

Finally, time and resource constraints impeded a more in-depth data collection that could diminish the two shortcomings related above. In communities where people are not used to be interviewed and to interact with outsiders, obtaining information is a long and continuous process based on participation and observation. Informants play an active role contributing with their knowledge not only during the interviews but especially in informal, spontaneously, moments. A longer stay in the field, which could stretch out those moments, would no doubt enrich the data sample.

1.5 Outline of the Research Paper

The paper is divided into five chapters including this Introduction. Chapter 2 brings a theoretical framework that consists of a multidisciplinary discussion on CA as well as studies on collective action organizations (CBOs and UOs). It also introduces the paradigm, the scope and the approach to Development in which the research in embedded. Chapter 3 presents the case-study, including an overview of its broader context. In Chapter 4 the information provided in the two previous ones is coupled for the analysis of the main findings. Chapter 5 summarizes the main conclusions and brings in some suggestions for future interventions.

CHAPTER TWO: A DRIVE THROUGH THEORY

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that has guided the collection and analysis of data. The first section sets up the paradigm of Development in which the analysis is embedded, as well as its scope and approach. The second part addresses the main concept of this paper, i.e. collective action, drawing upon theories from different disciplines. Studies on organizations are presented afterwards, as they form the groundwork on which CA takes place. Finally, at the very end theories are wrapped up in a concise manner.

2.1 Defining Development: the paradigm, the scope and the approach

The concept of development adopted in this paper will be the one of *Human Development*, outlined by the Indian economist Amartya Sen and later popularized and consolidated by the UNDP[8]. It is a broader approach to development which embraces economic, social and political perspectives in an integrated fashion. On its roots, it refers to the *freedom* that allows a person to make choices and satisfy some ends – a process that is retrained by their endowments (such as income, land, education...) (Sen, 1999). In that sense, Human Development does not deny the relevance of income as one of the key elements to overcome poverty, but argues that there are other factors equally important, such as political freedoms and social inclusiveness, both of them dependent on social institutions not controlled by the individual (Haq, 1995). Besides repacking Sen's idea under the "trademark" Human Development, UNDP has created a way to quantify it: the Human Development Index, which combines indicators on Longevity, Literacy and Income. It is nowadays used world-wide as the basis for project interventions.

It is in the light of the development paradigm presented above that the study of collective action is carried out along the paper. Yet, we still need to establish two other rims in order to circumscribe better the case-study. First, it has as local scope of action, being mainly concerned with what is commonly called *Community Development* – a process that involves the direct participation of people in the

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[8] The term was actually popularized in 1990 with the publication, by UNDP, of the first Human Development Report.

solution of their common problems, using democratic mechanisms and supported by the transfer of the necessary technology (Ruttan, 1997). Second, it looks at Human Development from one specific angle: the *Sustainable Livelihoods* approach. *Livelihoods* refers to the means of living adopted by the households, including their capabilities (what they can do), activities (what they actually do) and assets (tangible and intangible ones) (Chambers and Conway, 1992). It is *sustainable* when it can "cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation" (1992: 8).

This idea of sustainable livelihoods has been largely used by the UNDP in its community development interventions, with a special focus on the *assets* basis and on the process that influence them, such as collective action. These interventions normally emphasize community strengths as opposed to needs (often making use of surveys to identify assets, capabilities and activities) and the establishment of macro-micro links (looking for policies and modern technologies that can influence and complement people's livelihoods) (Carney et al., 1999).

2.2 Collective Action as a way to Development

In view of what has been discussed above, we can say that *collective action* is a pivotal strategy of one's sustainable livelihoods – which is, in turn, a route towards Human Development. By acting collectively, people can combine assets, capabilities and activities, share risks, access information, cope with shocks and, moreover, promote social pressure towards a better distribution of assets in society.

The backbone of this section will be the landmark work of Olson (1971), which, despite being almost 40 years old, is until now recalled in most of the related studies. Other authors will be presented in a concise way, always trying to establish links with Olson's ideas. Due to space constraints, it won't be possible to go deeply in each theory. Instead, I have used from each of them some points that, even if they are de-contextualized, can bring some insights for the analysis presented on Chapter 4.

Collective action is the action towards a *collective good*, that is, the one which provides benefits and/or costs for more than one individual (Olson, 1971). These can be *public* or *club goods*, which are distinguished by the presence, in the latter, of a mechanism (such as membership fee) that can exclude from the benefits the ones who are not contributing to it (Cornes and Sandler, 1996). In other words, public goods are non-rival (one person's consumption does not diminish the benefits of the others) and non-excludable (no-one, even non-contributors, can be excluded from the benefits), in opposition to private ones (rival and excludable). Club goods stand in the middle ground, as impure public goods which have excludable and partially rival benefits (Samuelson 1947, in Gillison, 2004: 12).

CA problems are commonly illustrated by the so-called Prisioner's Dilemma, a game-theory developed in the 1950s which shows that what makes sense for an individual is different from what makes sense for the group (Hardim, 1982). As summarized by Gillinson (2004: 9), "the fundamental problem of collective action then is the perceived tension between individual and collective best interests".

In this context, Olson's main argument is that, especially in large groups, rational individuals won't act in a group-oriented way unless motivated by separate and selective incentives. These refer to negative sanctions or positive rewards of economic or non-economic order (e.g. prestige, respect, friendship), which are distinct from the common goal and offered to the members of the group individually against their involvement in the pursuing of the group objectives. "Unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests" (1971: 2).

The second central argument elaborated by Olson is that "no collective good can be obtained without some group agreement, coordination, communication or organization" (Olson, 1971: 46). The point he makes here is the importance of an institutional base conducive to group formation – which, again, is particularly (though not exclusively) valid in large groups, where it is more difficult for the individuals to organize and, moreover, to see a direct relation between their contribution and the benefits of CA (as the share they get from collective benefits is proportionally

smaller). From this arises what has become known in the literature as the "free-rider problem": when rational individuals holdback their resources assuming that the others will bear the necessary costs for the achievement of the collective good – which, by its nature, they will receive anyway (Frohlich and Openheimer, 1970). In sum, the bigger the group, the higher the chance of free-riding is, as it becomes difficult for individuals to see any payoff for their efforts.

In his theory of the social order, Elster broadens Olson's idea of rational self-interest motivation outlining a set of mixed motivations (not only rational, but mainly guided by social norms) that make individuals cooperate and engage in collective actions. "Altruism, envy, social norms and self-interest all contribute, in complex, interacting ways to order, stability and cooperation" (1989: 287). These motivations, which will build upon each other, tend to be present in all societies, following different combinations. As Elster (1989: 186-187) explains:

> *When one is confronted with successful collective action, the task is to identify the precise mix of motivations – selfish and normative, rational and irrational – that produced it. Motivations that taken separately would not get collective action off the ground may interact, snowball and build upon each other so that the whole exceeds the sum of its parts.*

With this argument, Elster gives room for the irrational motivations that, according to Turner (1988: 57)[9], account for an important part of the social interaction: "Motivation operates at varying levels of an individual's conscious awareness. Sometimes actors become highly conscious of their efforts to engage in a particular course of action, but in general motivational processes are implicit, operating beneath the surface of explicit awareness and reflection". By motivational processes Turner understands those that energize and mobilize actors to interact.

Several other authors criticize Olson's selective incentives for being too attached to economic interests and hence missing a considerable part of the phenomenon.

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[9] Turner (1988) investigates deeply the process of social interaction and proposes that they become the focus of sociological analysis, as opposed to the classical emphasis on social action given by Parsons (considered one of the "fathers" of Sociology). "The basic unit of sociological analysis is not action, but interaction" (Turner, 1988:3).

"Motives, other than self-interest, must be part of an adequate explanation of most collective action", summarizes Udéhn (1993: 256). Barry (1970/1978, cited in Udéhn, 1993), also calls attention for the problem in the terminology, which ends up not providing any explanation for CA: "If an organization maintain itself, we say 'It must have provided selective incentives', and this is bound to be true since whatever motives people had to for supporting it are called selective incentives" (1970/1978, cited in Udéhn, 1993: 248).

An important non-economic motivation to CA is what Hardin (1982) calls *Political Entrepreneurship*, characteristic of the leaders "who, for their own career reasons, find it in their private interest to work to provide collective benefits to relevant groups" (Hardin, 1982: 35). Another driving force pointed out by the same author is the desire to take part in history and in the promotion of own development, for instance through social movements, great events and activities.

At this point, it is important to mention one more subtle element (of the "implicit" kind highlighted by Turner) that can have major implications in the process of CA. In this paper, it will be called *group-consciousness* and refers to a "deep awareness". The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970), who named it *conscientização*, stresses that the "oppressed"[10] must be made aware of their world and themselves so that they will perceive a group sharing the same reality and condition. This sense of identity and belonging in relation to the group gives the basis for them to collectively transform reality, or "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (1970: 64). Freire argues that communities must see themselves as totalities and, moreover, as part of broader totalities, this way overcoming the attempts of the elites to break down the oppressed into smaller units in order to alienate and divide them.

Sandler (1992) is perhaps the most optimistic author regarding the occurrence of collective action. According to him, it "abounds in real world", although sometimes it requires "a great deal of outside support to be feasible" (1992: 196). Whereas Olson considers CA from a static perspective, Sandler looks more at situations where agents

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[10] "Those whose humanity has been stolen" due to injustice, exploitation and oppression (Freire, 1970: 26).

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are interacting repeatedly, mainly within institutions. His argument is that group size itself does not explain propensity to collective action. Instead, he proposes an explanation based on the frequency of events: repeated interactions foster participation, since individuals develop a bigger concern in relation to the group. "Agents who deal with one another on a repeated basis are apt to place more weight on cooperation" (Sandler, 1992: 198). After all, CA is characterized by interdependency, "so that the contributions or efforts of one individual influence the contributions or efforts of other individuals" (1992: 1).

By looking at CA as a continuous process, Sandler suggests that its main incentives are its positive outcomes themselves: "Collective rationality implies both predictability and efficient outcomes" (1992: 2). Likewise, he argues that the conducive institutional basis emphasized by Olson is built in small steps, with little (less risky) positive experiences of cooperation triggering new ones. As Ostrom (1997: 178) observes, "once participants learn they can solve problems effectively by adjusting their own rules and procedures, their capabilities for adjusting in the future are far better".

This argument, so to speak the self-reinforcing potential of positive outcomes, will be central to the analysis carried out in Chapter Four. It is endorsed by several other authors. Helmsing (2002: 12) calls attention to the effects of path-dependency[11] on the process of CA, as efficacy in past capacities and experiences serves as a stimulus to new ones: "If collective action can bring quick results, it can trigger further collective action and organisation that may be needed for it". Finally, Esman and Uphoff (1984: 232) show that the group become more cohesive and confident about collective work after experiencing positive performance:

> *Competence contributes to confidence, as does past success. Group solidarity and commitment are often necessary for good performance, but this is a two-way relationship. Unless solidarity is intrinsic because of ethnic, religious, or*

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[11] This term has its origins in the work of Nelson and Winter (1982), that brought about the idea of organizational routine, where the path taken by an organization (ways of doing things) will determine its future path.

other ascriptive bonds, commitment must be built through performance rather than vice-versa.

Finally, another point largely discussed in the literature is the importance of a leadership body to the jump-start and sustainability of CA. As Starkley (1999) puts it, there must be a core group of committed members who stimulate the others, delegate responsibilities and create a sense of belonging in the group. This study concentrates on the leadership embodied in Community-Based Organizations and their associations (Umbrella Organizations) – which, according to Berner (1997), play a pivotal role as channels of CA in poor communities. They are the theme of the next section.

2.3 Organizations as a way to Collective Action

"It is basically through their organizations that the poor value, develop, apply and leverage their assets" (Hordijk, 2002: 213). Agreeing with this statement, this paper sees organizations are a central element in the process of CA, since they represent an important *channel* through which it occurs (although at the same time they could themselves be considered outcomes of it). In this paper, they will refer to what Knoke (1990) calls Collective Action Organizations, where members cooperate for individual and collective benefits, through the combination of forces, the exchange of knowledge and the articulation of common interests. The terms organization and associations will be used interchangeably to refer to this organizational form.

Two types of organization are addressed here: *Community-based Organizations* (CBO) – which work at the community level – and *Umbrella Organizations* (UO) – federations of similar organizations, e.g. CBOs, which share information and represent the group vis-à-vis broader actors (Lovig and Skogan, 1995; Gilchrist, 1995). According to Esman and Uphoff (1984), an institutional system of multi-level and articulated organizations performing different and complementary functions is crucial to articulate interests and access resources. Helmsing (2002) stresses the importance of UOs[12] in strengthening CBOs by raising their influence, facilitating the sharing of information and experiences, training for participation in the political

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[12] Instead of Umbrella Organizations, he actually refers to "second and third level CBOs".

process and, moreover, by undertaking large-scale functions which are not feasible at the community level. Berner (1997) adds that UOs can reinforce CBOs by establishing a common agenda and by connecting them with NGOs, potential allies in development.

UOs are thus essential to establish vertical linkages between communities and the external world, inserting the poor into the new complex networks that are characteristic of today's globalized world. As Kanter (1995: 379) puts it, globalization is changing the meanings and the agenda of communities: "Communities need to break down the walls that separate organizations, institutions, sectors, jurisdictions, neighbourhoods, or people...Instead of walls that divide, regions and their people should build bridges that connect".

Organizations arise from the institutionalization of informal linkages existent among people; that is, when they acquire "the legitimacy, the respect, and the durability of an institution" (Uphoff: 1994: 201). Organizations and institutions are often taken as synonyms, as they in many cases overlap. The distinction used here is made by Uphoff (1994: 202): "organizations, whether institutions or not, are structures of recognized and accepted roles", whereas "institutions, whether organizations or not, are complexes of norms and behaviors that persist over time by serving collectively valued purposes".

Having clarified the terminology, we can then say that the process of *institutionalization* is crucial to *organizations* because without it they lack legitimacy and are more likely to dissolve and disappear (Uphoff, 1994). In this process, leadership is pivotal in identifying and articulating problems, formulating plans of action, mobilizing and managing resources and resolving conflicts (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). As concluded by Nelson, "a neighbourhood that cannot generate or attract trusted leaders will not maintain an organization, even though it has many of the characteristics that should promote collective action" (1979: 261). Uphoff also stresses the importance of leadership in formulating and articulating its doctrine, which for him (1994: 212) consists of:

directing and concerting people's efforts and ideas toward appropriate goals, providing both justifications and motivations for collective action. If well conceived and well-articulated, it will influence external actors (those with whom linkages are maintained) as well as persons within the organization.

Another element that must be combined with the leadership in this process of institutionalization is the participation of the members of the organization, which can assure the assessment of leader's performance and accountability (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). This brings us back to the debate on individual motivations raised early on. What, after all, motivates people to join CBOs or UOs? Knoke and Wright-Isak (1982) give an answer that goes in the same line as Elster's argument of "mixed motivations". They show that individuals take into account "their rational cost-benefit calculations, their desires to conform to group norms and their affective ties to the collectivity" (Knoke and Wright-Isak, in Knoke, 1990: 44). These three processes happen jointly through a decision-making process (D) which can then be calculated as follows:

$$D = f(R) \cdot g(N) \cdot h(A)$$

*Where f, g and r are the functions corresponding to the three motivations: rational choice (R), normative conformity (N) and affective bonding (A).

Knoke adds another important contribution to this debate: the idea that incentives may change as the time goes by and institutions (and individuals) evolve. According to this dynamic perspective, members may have a set of motives when joining the organizations and later "discover other reasons for continuing to contribute their time, money and effort" (1990: 124). Personal gains, social activities and political pressure can in that sense alternate in the individual's set of incentives.

Esman and Uphoff (1984) observe that in Developing Countries the performance of local organizations is undermined by a combination of factors, such as hostility of central government (that sees organized groups as potentially subversive), local elite's resistance (combined with political control), internal division, malpractices and, moreover, lack of skills and resistance among the poor. As the authors (1984: 196) emphasize:

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Political skills, organizational skills and technical skills are often in short supply among disadvantaged groups in rural areas. The underdevelopment of these skills, due to low levels of education and inexperience with formal association, can reinforce low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

They stress that, in order to assure their sustainability and efficiency, organizations must find ways to mobilize internal resources and spread leadership responsibilities, without mentioning the importance of training (combining organizational and technical skills, e.g. like on agriculture, handicrafts etc), both to the higher and lower levels of the organization, "so that there will be enough knowledge of proper practices throughout the organization to check malpractices and to keep the gap between members and leaders (of staff) from growing" (1984: 229). On this point also they call attention to the socialization role of training sessions which makes them enjoyable occasions for sharing knowledge: "Especially among uneducated persons, acquiring knowledge and skill enhances a sense of worth and efficacy" (1984: 229). The idea is supported by Gilchrist (1995:18): "Events such as conferences and training workshops can be ideal occasions for sharing ideas and building contacts".

The main point highlighted by Esman and Uphoff, however, is the need to establish linkages with external institutions, especially from the public sector. They see organizations[13] as intermediaries between the poor and government agencies or private firms: "The ability of local organizations to help their members depends on linkages worked out with institutions that control and allocate various services and resources" (1984: 268). The problem, according to them (1984: 209), is that

peasants usually lack the money and time, the knowledge and manners to be able to meet with distant officials, to understand how paper can be manipulated to their benefit, to turn legal loopholes to their advantage, and

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[13] Tocqueville was one of the first to call attention to the role of organizations as intermediaries between individuals and the state. In his *Democracy in America* (1956), he concludes that a variety of voluntary and free associations is essential to democratic societies as it enhances the chance of individuals to influence the process of decision-making.

(perhaps most important) to gain a continuing foothold in the political system – unless they are involved in an organized way.

These links can thus be established with the help of external agents – understood here as NGOs, international development agencies, private firms and donors that intervene in the process of local development in a certain region. They can use their influence to stabilize and legitimize the role of CBOs and UOs in society, particularly vis-à-vis the government, emphasizing their importance in the promotion of development. Furthermore, they can strengthen one organization's capacities through training, for instance helping them formulate projects, organize meetings etc (Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Berner, 1997). Of course this external assistance also has its drawbacks, as it can cause instability and dependency (Nelson, 1979).

Although all the issues above raised are relevant to both CBOs and UO, the latter adds up a few other challenges. According to Berner (1997: 192), the "interface between local and umbrella organizations is a problematic one", mainly due to the competition that arises between communities. He also calls attention (1997: 191) to the high burdens that are implied in UOs, especially in terms of time and transport:

> *To organize and hold meetings of such alliances is still an extremely time-consuming task judging from experience. Not only people take long rides to attend, but discussions between representatives of different groups who have little regular contacts tend to be much more tedious and lengthy.*

Another problem is that the informal networks that support UOs are normally much weaker than the ones found behind CBOs. After all, the latter are rooted in social linkages formed spontaneously when neighbours meet at the vicinity, at parties, at school, at the church and the like. In the lack of such pre-existent links, the push for UOs frequently come from outside, that is, from external agents that play the role of what Krebs and Holley (2002: 7-8) called *network weaver*: who has the "vision, the energy, and the social skills to connect to diverse individuals and groups and start information flowing to and from them".

As pointed out by Berner (1997: 194), "supra-local alliances are exclusively initiated and largely maintained by the NGOs to legitimize their claim to represent the interests of the poor". This was also observed by Nelson (1979), in her study of some cases from Latin America. As she puts it, UOs tend to be "sponsored from above" and suffer more from dependency and instability, as they tend to serve the purposes of the sponsors. At the same time, they are more likely to be repressed or cooped by the political elites – who may be afraid of their potential to lobby.

2.4 Conclusion

Summarizing what has been discussed above, CA implies, first of all, a group of people that have (and perceive) a shared problem or goal. This should be followed by the realization that these joint-actions are feasible and can payoff individual time, energy, and material resources spent. This awareness should be combined and reinforced by less rational motivational process which can include conformance with group norms and affective ties with the group. Finally, the group must be embedded in a conducive institutional basis and endowed with minimum capabilities that can sustain cooperation.

This institutional basis, important to coerce or motivate individuals towards group behavior, can be provided by formal associations. A multilevel system of organizations is the ideal one, with CBOs working at the grassroots level and UOs undertaking larger-scale functions and connecting with external actors. The effectiveness of these institutions as channels of CA will depend on several factors, such as leadership, active participation, good external links (handled carefully to avoid dependency) and capacity to overcome logistical constraints. Addressing these challenges is an essential part of Community Development, as it allows the enhancement and sustaining of livelihoods and, furthermore, the promotion of Human Development.

CHAPTER THREE: A DRIVE THROUGH *VALE DO CURU*

As explained in the Introduction, this research paper takes as study-case the process of collective action in *Vale do Curu*, a micro-region[14] located in the state of Ceará, Northeast Brazil. The present chapter outlines the context in which the experience has taken place and gives a detailed description of the external actor's intervention – namely, the UNDP project.

3.1. Setting up the scene

Since the new Constitution of 1988[15], Brazil has entered into a process of decentralization, following the global trend towards the shrinking of the state. Local Governments (*municípios*) have emerged as important actors in policy-making and service-provision, as well as the civil society and the private sector. Community Development interventions have become increasingly predominant, in many cases led by NGOs in partnership (technical or financial) with international agencies. In that context, networks appear as a very popular organizational form, connecting actors and different institutions, mobilizing and articulating them towards public interests (Farah, 2001).

This study will focus on one of these interventions, carried out from July 2001 to July 2003 in the municipalities of *Pentecoste, Apuiarés, General Sampaio* and *Tejuçuoca*. Together, they cover a piece of land of around 3,000 sq/km and form the so-called micro-region of *Vale do Curu*, named after the *Curu* river, which crosses the area. It entails a population of about 63 thousands inhabitants, being 51% in rural communities (IBGE, 2000), not easily accessed (transportation is made by trucks – *pau-de-arara* – or motorcycle). Each municipality is composed by a small town surrounded by 40 to 70 rural communities, having each of these around 60 households (frequently from the same familiar groups). Communal areas on these districts are

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[14] Micro-region is understood here as a small-sized region, this defined by Markusen (1987: 16-17) as "an historically evolved, contiguous territorial society that possesses a physical environment, a socioeconomic, political, and cultural *milieu*, and a spacious structure distinct from other regions and from the other major territorial units, city and nations".

[15] "New" Constitution because it was formulated after the reestablishment of democracy in the country, replacing the military laws.

restricted to a small church (usually Catholic and in a few cases Protestant), where mass is given once a month, and a small elementary school, normally composed by one single classroom where one single teacher teaches children of all ages together. That's in these two places where community members find the few opportunities to get together, in religious events (e.g.: "Church Patron Day") and school festivities (e.g.: Mother's day).

Church in the community of Miguá Ilha: space for social gathering

Vale do Curu is located in the Brazilian state of Ceará, in the Northeast region, more precisely in the so-called *Sertão* or *Polígono da Seca* (Drought Polygon), indicated in the map below. The Northeast gathers some of the worst social indicators of the country. The regional HDI is 0.608, compared to 0.830 at the national level. The inequality, a notable feature of Brazil, is even more accentuated in the region, which is demonstrated by the Gini coefficient of 0.617 – as compared to the country's index (already high itself) of 0.609 (Ministério da Integração Social, 2003). Apart from the social conditions, development is constrained by the harsh characteristics of the environment, which include recurrent droughts and shortage of permanent rivers.

Brazil **Sertão** **Vale do Curu**
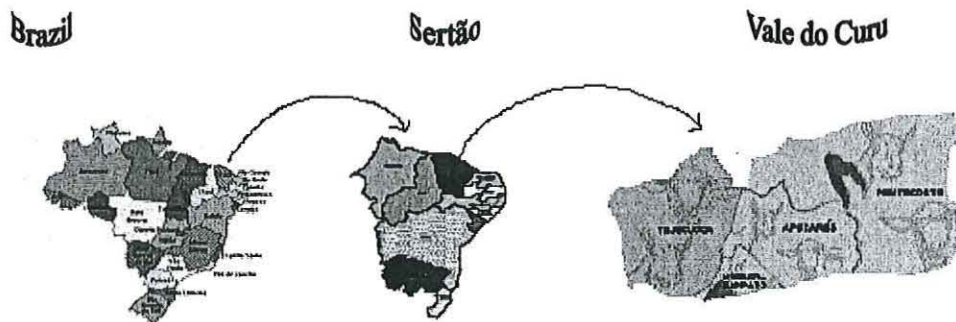
Sources: Sudene, 2003/ Setah, 2004

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These problems are more accentuated in the *Sertão*. With annual rainfalls that range from 400mm to 800mm, not well distributed along the year, the area has never really been attractive to agriculture. As it was left aside by the colonizers, its settlement happened in a disorganized fashion by cattle growers and socially excluded groups – descendents from native inhabitants and African slaves escaping from the sugarcane plantations in the shore, who didn't receive any serious social investments (Prado Jr, 1973). In the last decade, the area has been passing through a gradual land reform undertaken by the federal and state government.

Properties in *Vale do Curu* are usually small, and rural households build their livelihoods on the basis of subsistence agriculture (such as cassava, beans, maize and corn) and the raising of some homestead animals (mainly chicken, sheep, goats and pigs). Embroidery occupies an important part in the portfolio of activities of most women, but so far it does not constitute an economic one. With no sources of income, households depend largely on the land to get their food, as well as on government cash transfer programmes, being thus very vulnerable to droughts and other natural shocks and to political instabilities.

Rural communities in Vale do Curu: houses (right) spread throughout the harsh land of Curu river (left) – a permanent flow of water, but severely reduced during the dry season

Besides the lack of income opportunities, rural communities in the micro-region also suffer from some structural constraints such as low levels of education, isolation (only one among the eight communities visited had a public phone) and inexistence of sewage and water systems (and even electricity in some of them) – which frequently

leads to serious health problems. The situation is reflected in the low HDI, presented for each city in the table below:

	General Sampaio	Tejuçuoca	Apuiarés	Pentecoste	Brazil
HDI	0.606	0.611	0.622	0.635	0.830

Source: BNDES/PNUD, 2000

The main causes of poverty in the region have a political dimension. Although not fully included in the colonial system, the *Sertão* was highly influenced by its main "illness": the *coronelismo*, which refers to the control of political power by the *coronéis* (big landlords). In his *Raízes do Brazil*, one of the landmarks of Brazilian sociology, Buarque (1997) argues that the public sector in the country is distorted in its functioning by the strong historical influence of familiar/private forms of relationship. In this sense, local elites operate the public from a private logic, managing public goods according to their private interests and manipulating and creating dependence among their constituents against continuous favours. Political engagement of the poor thus has never been stimulated, especially in the *Sertão* area. As a community leader in *Vale do Curu* puts it: "The *sertanejo* spends most of his time within the homestead, with no much interaction with the neighbors. We don't have the culture to work in an organized way like in the south of the country, where people bring this from other countries. We were educated to beg, to be dependent".

The situation only started to change in the 1980s, with the spring up of democratization movements throughout the country. It was in that period that the first CBOs were created in *Vale do Curu*, through a top-down process, when the regional government launched the *Projeto São José* aimed at financing small-scale social and economic projects. Community associations needed to be created as they were responsible for elaborating the projects and sending them to approval (SDR, 1999). Many projects were then financed, mainly churches and water reservoirs. A few communities also managed to build a house for the association; in all the others meetings take place at either the school or the church[16]. Apart from the endeavour prompted by the *Projeto São José*, only a very few actions were undertaken by the

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[16]Community associations are very close to religion organizations (particularly the Catholic Church), as religion plays an evident role in social life in the region.

associations in the last decade (such as cleaning the roads, sometimes the discussion of an urgent problem).

As a rule, around 60% of community households are members of CBOs. Almost all statutes establish a symbolic membership fee for minor expenses such as stationery items. However, in most cases the president or the executive board has to keep these burdens, as defaults are frequent and not punished.

Another important fact that pushed people's mobilization in *Vale do Curu* was the creation of federations of community associations, which happened in the last decade supported by an NGO called GACC (*Grupo de Assistência às Comunidades Carentes*). However, they ended up serving political ends and not really playing the expected role of networking. Despite the support of GACC (and of course the UNDP intervention that is studied in this paper), we can say that the presence of outsiders in the communities is rare. No NGOs, no private investments, no international aid. Visits from public sector officials are not often either, being normally restricted to health agents that come once a month. Some development programs from the Central Government operate in the region, though without direct contact with the households. The three main ones are listed below:

→ Pronaf: coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Development, to support rural development through the strengthening of familiar agriculture as an opportunity for income generation. One part of the programme, the *Pronaf-infraestrutura*, provides financial support to infra-structure projects (Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário, 2004).

→ Programa Fome Zero (Zero Hunger Programme): aimed at eradicating hunger in the country, it includes some cash transfers but also a strong emphasis on civil society participation (Betto, 2004). The articulation for actions in *Vale do Curu* is done through the municipal federations.

→ Embrapa: linked to the Ministry of Agriculture, it aims at creating solutions to sustainable development, with a focus on agro-business, through research and transfer

of knowledge and technology (EMBRAPA, 2004). For the time being it is working in the region in coordination with the *Fome Zero* programme.

3.2 The arrival of "the chicken project"

The intervention studied here was part of a programme implemented by UNDP, with funds from the BNDES (National Development Bank), in 17 Brazilian micro-regions identified by their low HDI. The project in *Vale do Curu* started in 2001 and lasted for two-years, with the ground actions being carried out by a subcontracted regional NGO, *SETAH*, who was trained by UNDP technicians. The local Unions of Rural Workers and the Local Governments provided logistical support (especially in transportation and alimentation) and were invited to send representatives to take part into the project's different activities.

The scope of initiative was the micro-region as a unit; that is, all communities were seen as part of one single group, with no territorial division. The first overall objective, in what was called *communitarian dimension*, aimed at strengthening networks in the micro-region in order to support sustainable collective actions at all levels: 1) among households, through stronger CBOs; 2) among communities, through municipal federations of associations and 3) among municipalities, through the creation of an inter-municipal council named COAM-BC. The latter was pivotal to success of the intervention, as it would reinforce and institutionalize the micro-regional approach, a perspective still totally new in the area.

This first strategic goal was complemented by a second one, in what was named *productive dimension*: to support households develop economic activities from a sustainable livelihood approach. In other words, the idea was not to transform small farmers in businessmen, but help them improve household income. This began via the identification of local strengths and groups of interest which could reflect the wide portfolio of activities undertaken by the households (embroidery, homestead chicken husbandry, goat production, dairy farming, horticulture, fruit culture, fish growing and apiculture). The second step would be the development of strategies for each of these groups – though, as we will see, the efforts ended up being concentrated on chicken husbandry.

The methodology adopted, named *Gespar* – abbreviation *of Gestão Participativa* (Participatory Steering) – was developed by a group of indigenous researchers and development practitioners. It is based on and interdisciplinary approach and participatory methods, especially the ones borrowed from the constructivism pedagogy – which sees individuals as active actors, emphasise their role in history and their capacity to associate with others (Zapata and Jordán, 1997). Conceived to facilitate Community Development, specially through the formation of leaders and reinforcement of collective action organizations, it aims at building "the capacity of poor communities to organize, identify needs, priorities and opportunities, and access credit to invest in skills and equipment" (UNDP 2001: 4).

The project was targeted at the rural communities. As they were too many (almost two hundred in the whole micro-region), only 34 were chosen. The selection was made during preliminary meetings to which representatives of all communities were invited. It followed some criteria such as the level of organization and participation, available technology and infrastructure as well as the economic potential. The channel between the project team and the communities was made through CBOs, which were dubbed UR (Units of Reference) as they should serve as an example to the neighbour communities. Each UR had to select one facilitator to participate directly (and voluntarily) in all the project activities. They should be preferably young, having completed Basic Education and be already involved directly or indirectly with the actions undertaken at the territory. Actually, in most cases the president of the association has taken the role of local facilitator. Four municipal facilitators were also chosen, in order to work for the articulation of all URs in the municipality. As the job implied a salary, candidates had to pass through a selection process which included a written test and an interview. Finally, two local technicians in agriculture plus one external technical advisor in agro-ecology were hired.

The intervention started with a diagnosis phase, when facilitators had to visit households to get data about their livelihoods and communitarian life. This was intended not only at gathering information but also at sensitizing, articulating and mobilizing community members around the project. After that, the main part began,

which entailed a series of ten two-day workshops (one per month), each one held in a different community, where the selected facilitators from all communities were capacitated according to the two overall objectives (i.e. supporting CA and improving livelihood opportunities).

The reunions entailed a mixture of reflection and practice on different integrated and interdependent topics: solidary economy, agro-ecology, management of associations, homestead chicken husbandry, horticulture, dairy farming, pedagogy of facilitation, organization of productivity and fair trade. Besides, they provided information on governmental programmes oriented towards Poverty Reduction as well as on key issues to introduce community leaders in the discussions of Development field (e.g. poverty indicators, environment and gender) (SETAH, 2004). A great part of the learning, however, came from the "occult content" transmitted during the workshops through examples and discussions.

All activities were based on group work and on participatory methods, with a clear influence of Freire's (1970) ideas. This was reflected on the emphasis on the history of the processes and practices they were learning. In the workshop on horticulture, for instance, one whole chapter was dedicated to the history of agriculture in Brazil and in the world. Attention was also given to reflection on the actions to be undertaken (guided by debating questions like: what do we want with this action? What's our role in the local development?). Finally, CA was dealt with almost as a religion, with catch-phrases such as "Nobody knows everything, each one knows a little; together we will know more", being spread throughout the written material.

Workshops were complemented by visits to communities with positive experiences and to a fair trade market at the state capital. Facilitators were then supposed to apply the knowledge learned in their own homestead, creating pilot units (with financial support from UNDP) that could serve as an example to the other community members.

The so-called *communitarian dimension* focused on the institutionalization of organizations. Leaders of CBOs and municipal federations – were capacitated and a micro-regional council, namely the COAM-BC, was created. This was meant to

represent all local organizations of the micro-region and to serve as a new space for discussing, negotiating and proposing public polices, as well as supporting community development programs. A micro-credit cooperative, the CREDIVALE, was born within the COAM-BC to support small business through micro-credit. With the assistance of UNDP, the council contacted SEBRAE, a national organization for the support of small enterprises, who supplied training, equipment and some resources for the implementation phase. Nevertheless, in order to be operational CREDIVALE still needs a sponsor for the initial provision of working capital.

Despite this broader scope of activities, the project actually became popular among community members as "the chicken project", because a great part of the efforts ended up being concentrated in the promotion of *homestead chicken husbandry* – chosen for being the core foregoing strategy in people's livelihoods. In the workshops, facilitators have learned ways to make it more profitable, and afterwards were given 100 chicks and feed for one month so that they could apply the new techniques. They were responsible for building a chicken coop at their homestead and sharing the new knowledge with the community, organizing meetings, providing technical assistance and visiting households. After the production achieved a certain level, each facilitator was supposed to give 100 chicks to another household, who would pass through the same process and then give the chicks to a third one, so on and so forth, until everyone interested was contemplated with the initial investment. In reality, only in a few communities the replication was started.
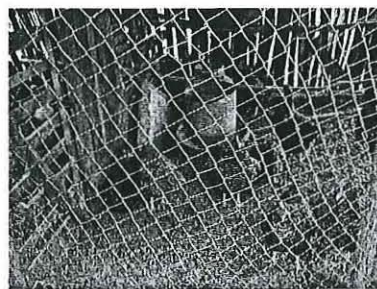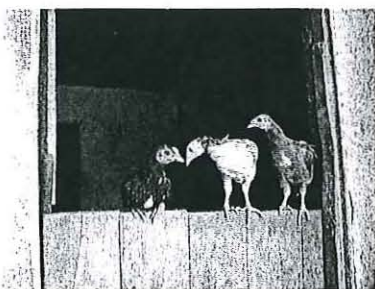
Free-range chicken by the door of a house in Jurema *(left) and chicken coop at a pilot unit in* Carrapato *(right): the idea was to transform the chief livelihood activity in a more profitable one*

Besides chicken husbandry, experiments on horticulture and fruit-culture took place here and there, though not really systematized. Another economic activity explored was the goat production, this one in partnership with a governmental research

institution, the EMBRAPA. The latter was in charge of providing the animals and technical assistance, whereas UNDP offered the methodology for replication (similar to the one used with the chicken). According to one of the technicians from EMBRAPA, the region was chosen because there was already one project sponsored by the UNDP to which the community was responding positively. Today, the partnership between EMBRAPA and the COAM-BC includes other two projects: one for environmental awareness and one for the creation of a database of the seeds available in the region, to be used in strategies for the enhancement of productivity.

Goat-production Project in Riacho das Pedras: *new external partner through UNDP mediation*

3.3 What came next?

In July 2003, the UNDP intervention was concluded and the project team left *Vale do Curu*. Over the first year without external support, some leaders have been endeavouring to implement in their communities what they have learned. That's for instance the case of Tibúrcio, municipal facilitator in *Pentecoste*. Using what he had learned in the workshops and the different experiences he had seen, he formulated a project of a new system to pump water from the public *açude* to all the houses of his community, *Miguá Ilha*. Community members helped digging and installing the pipe system, so that since December 2003 water comes to most of the houses. The maintenance of the pump is made by one of the neighbours who had knowledge in mechanics, and financed by a charge paid by the households (with very low levels of default) every month.
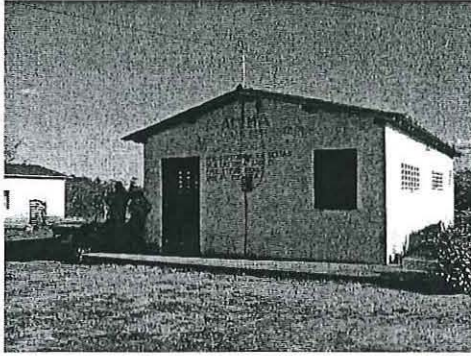
Meeting at the CBO of Miguá Ilha, August 2004: discussing how to manage the collective water system

Furthermore, many people that have participated in the process are now spread throughout democratic institutions present in the region, i.e. Council of Education, Council of Social Development, Council of Health and the like. The channels of negotiation and dialogue with the Local Governments seem to be more explored and the articulation with the programmes by the Central Government is more efficient. The best example happened in the beginning of 2004, when the COAM-BC elaborated a project for an agency of commercialization where farmers from *Vale do Curu* could market their products together. They made a list of what was needed and divided in four smaller projects, which were then presented one by each municipality (with the support of the Local Government) to the *Pronaf-infraestrutura*[17]. The strategy worked: in total, around 70,000 USD were released to finance the building of four small chicken feed factories, thirty tents to sell the products in the fair of familiar agriculture at the state capital and a truck for the transportation.

The COAM-BC keeps holding monthly executive board meetings with the eight titular members plus other casual participants. Its most important action over the last year was the articulation to the ASA (*Articulação no Semi-Árido Brasileiro*) network, with which they were acquainted by the former coordinator of UNDP project. ASA is a Forum of more than 700 civil society organizations created in 1999 that work towards the promotion of development in the 11 states that are part of the *Sertão* (ASA, 2004). Its goal is to articulate all sorts of collective action organizations that work with the semi-arid such as unions, social movements, international agencies, religious associations and local organizations. Each municipality can send three representatives to the Forum, which happens once a month. In *General Sampaio* and

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[17] The programme is detailed in Pg 33.

Tejuçuoca, all representatives have taken part in the UNDP project. In *Pentecoste* and *Apuiarés*, two out of three.

Through the ASA Forum, the COAM-BC has already signed a contract to build 320 cisterns, some irrigation systems (*mandalas*) and some underground dams (to capture pluvial water), all important projects for communities that suffer from severe droughts. All this is now being implemented in the four municipalities of the *Vale do Curu*, financed by the Brazilian Federation of Banks (FEBRABAN) and by the Central Government. "We receive invitations for all the reunions organized by the ASA and we always make an effort to be there, because it's an opportunity to show our region and talk about our needs", explains Marcílio, actual president of COAM-BC.

Meeting at the COAM-BC in August 2004

The most recent achievement of COAM-BC was the creation of the *Instituto Camaleão*. Still in the implementation stage, it is meant to provide technical assistance to rural projects in the region, thus reducing dependency on external experts and finding more suitable solutions for the local problems. "We've realized that we had enough capacitated people to do that in *Vale do Curu*, but they were spread around. So we've decided to join everyone", justifies Evandro, member of COAM-BC who is now leading the implementation of the Institute. He observes that some sort of external sponsorship is needed, at least at the beginning, to pay the work of local technicians.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter was meant to be a drive through *Vale do Curu*, visiting its environment, its history and its people. The main part was dedicated to the description of the UNDP intervention, which, in a nutshell, consisted of a process of building networks among organizations, communities and people – or the process of "building bridges, instead of walls", in the metaphor created by Kanter (1995). The map below shows the organizations existent today in *Vale do Curu*, as well as the vertical linkages established by them:
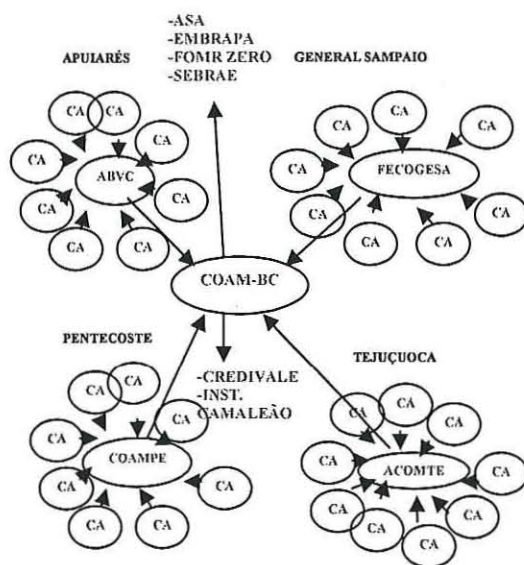
CHAPTER FOUR: THEORY MEETS *VALE DO CURU*

> *"I don't believe anymore on that story of the little bird*
> *that keeps trying to extinguish the fire in the forest*
> *bringing water in his beak. Of course it is important*
> *he does that, but alone he will never make it.*
> *We need to work together"*
> *(Amílton, president of ACOMTE and member of COAM-BC)*

The previous chapter presented an overview of the process of CA in *Vale do Curu* with emphasis on the period when an external agent, i.e. UNDP, was intervening in the region. Herein, the findings from fieldwork are coupled with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two in order to answer the two principal Research Questions. The Subordinated Questions are indirectly addressed through the six categories of analysis in which they were incorporated. After being handled separately, in sections 4.1 and 4.2, these categories are combined in a concluding section (4.3).

4.1 How has the intervention of the external agent influenced the process of collective action in *Vale do Curu*?

As explained in the Introductory Chapter, collective action is seen here as a continuous process determined by different factors. The Research Question above was thus handled in a disaggregated way, looking for external agent's contribution in four categories of analysis: *individual motivations, institutionalization of organizations, legitimacy vis-à-vis external actors* and *group-consciousness*. The analysis draws on interviews with both community members and leaders, though it's worth stressing that the latter were the major source of information (as they had more direct contact with the external agent). It is also important to clarify that answers were in a great deal homogeneous among communities, with no relevant difference found between groups labelled as *mobilized* and *demobilized*.

4.1.1 Individual motivations

We have seen that typical *sertanejos* are not very likely to leave their houses and interact with neighbors, in part due to the historical influence of *coronelismo*, in part due to geographical constraints (big distance between houses), in part due to their

introverted personality. As a rule, levels of mobilization in the Sertão are extremely low. What would then push individuals to take part in collective actions in *Vale do Curu*?

The findings indicate that the individual motivations in that directions are of various types (in accordance with Barry, 1970/1978; Elster, 1989; and Udéhn, 1993) and operate at varying levels of an individual's conscious awareness, sometimes highly conscious but more often implicit, as argued by Turner (1988). In order to identify the incidence of different sources of motivations, answers of community members and leaders to the question "Why do you think it's important to be involved in collective actions here in the community?" were grouped into the three categories created by Knoke (1990) – i.e. 1) rational cost-benefit calculations, 2) desire to conform to group norms and 3) affective ties to the collectivity, as presented below:

MOTIVATION (%)	Leaders	Community Members	Total
Rational cost-benefit calculations	65	18	70.5
Desire to conform to group norms	40	29	34
Affective ties to the collectivity	10	8.5	9

[1]Based on 44 interviews (20 leaders and 24 community members)
[2]Percentages were calculated, despite the small sample, to allow comparisons between leaders and members (who were in different numbers). They exceed 100% for some informants presented multiple motivations.

As we can see, responses follow a similar pattern between community members and leaders, indicating that motivations are mainly of the first type, namely rational cost-benefit calculations, hence supporting Olson's main argument. The desire to conform to group norms also seems relevant. It appeared in statements like the one of Juarez, community member in *Boa Ação*: "I like to accomplish my duties as a member of the community association". Finally, the affective ties to the group seem to have if not a minor, at least a less conscious influence. This stimulus was present in only 4 interviews, in vague sentences such as "It's good to be united".

How has the external actor influenced this pattern of individual motivations? The findings suggest that during the first months of intervention the project team has awaken and instigated mainly the first type of incentives, that is, the rational cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, it would be difficult for the external agent, exactly for its

exogenous nature, to stimulate affective ties or influence people's observance to social norms – which are essentially internal to the group. We can thus say that at that initial stage the UNDP provided selective incentives related to two crucial vulnerabilities of one household's livelihoods in *Vale do Curu*: lack of physical assets to enhance productivity and weak human capital to participate in the labour market. The majority of the respondents have engaged in the project activities expecting economic benefits. "It was very common to see people coming to ask whether they would receive some money with the 'chicken project'", recalls Marcílio, president of the COAM-BC.

Particularly – though not exclusively – among younger interviewees, incentives were more related to the opportunity to acquire knowledge that could help them find a job: "It's always good when there is a course where we can learn something, it doesn't matter what. My dream is to be employed, and I thought we'll have a chance with the project", says Benedita Tavares, community member in *Boa Ação*. "I was unemployed and thought this could be an opportunity for training, for getting knowledge", endorses Simone, municipal facilitator in *Tejuçuoca*.

The answers also indicate that, as time progressed, new motivations have started to gain importance. This confirms Knoke's argument (1990) that the incentives individuals have when joining an organization may change as they discover other reasons (of various orders) for continuing to contribute. As Edilardo, municipal facilitator in *Apuiarés*, admitted: "During the courses I started to open my mind: it was not only about money". Especially amongst leaders, we can identify the emergence of Hardin's *political entrepreneurs* (1982) motivated the desire to follow a career in the public sphere or to take part in history and in the promotion of own development:

> *"I have to confess that when I went to the first meeting I was mainly thinking of a personal loan that I needed. But then I started to enjoy those reunions, to understand the social aspect of it... Today I'm a municipal representative at the ASA, at the Fome Zero Programme and at the COAM-BC".*
>
> (César, community leader in *Cajazeira* and member of COAM-BC)

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"My vision has changed when Lacerda [from the project team] said they wanted to help us investing in our potentials. Then I saw we would have chance to be recognized outside by our collective work", said the president of community association.

(Júnior, community leader in *Vila Soares* and member of COAM-BC)

One of the main findings of this research, however, is the presence of a more subtle factor that seems to have influenced individual motivations, especially in the first months after the arrival of the UNDP, by cutting across the three motivational processes outlined by Knoke. It can be named "the feeling of being seen"; that is, of been paid attention to from the outside world. The arrival of the project team – a group of outsiders willing to work with the communities – seems to have awoken in the traditionally excluded people from *Vale do Curu* high doses of expectation and a mixed feeling of enthusiasm, pride and self-confidence in relation to the external agent – as identified in more than half of the interviews. This has facilitated the acceptance of the project and the adoption of the whole package of ideas and values that came with it (of which CA was a chief one), as shown in the following extracts:

"As any new intervention, they brought the hope that something would finally change here"

(Assis, community leader in *Jurema*)

"Before, people were very incredulous about the power of collective action. When they saw outsiders coming because of our collective effort, they started to believe more. I didn't miss any meeting myself".

(Chico Julião, community leader in *Currupião*)

The external agent can thus be seen a bit like the Mandacaru, a local species of cactus. As explained in the Introduction, this plant became a symbol of hope due to its particular characteristic of announcing the raining season with the blooming of its flower. As Assis, from Jurema, said: "It happens many times that the flower comes but the rain doesn't; yet, the flower is like an incentive for people to start working harder on the land, and after some time we have beans, cassava and corn, with or without the rain". Tracing the parallel, we can say that the presence of UNDP was

essential to generate expectations and enthusiasm around CA. And this irrational element, especially in a stage when collective experiences are still very incipient, has proved to have a crucial catalytic effect on further initiatives.

4.1.2 Institutionalization of organizations

The importance of institutionalized organizations as channels of collective actions was one of the points most emphasized by the literature reviewed (Olson, 1971; Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Knoke, 1990; Hordijk, 2002). CBOs and UOs take on the leadership role (Berner, 1997) that is essential to stimulate others, delegate responsibilities, create a sense of belonging among the group (Starkley, 1999) and, particularly in the case of UOs, establish vertical links to other actors (Lovig and Skogan, 1995; Gilchrist, 1995; Berner, 1997; Helmsing, 2002). Moreover, by promoting repetitive interaction, organizations encourage cooperation, which is the basis of group behavior (Sandler, 1992).

The findings indicate that UNDP has had a pivotal role supporting local groups in *Vale do Curu* to cross the threshold from disorganized "sporadically connected" individuals to institutionalized CBOs and UOs. First, it has promoted the capacity-building of local leaders, upgrading organizational skills that facilitate group agreement, coordination and communication – whose relevance was highlighted by Olson (1971), Nelson (1979), Esman and Uphoff (1984) and Berner (1997). Second, it has reinforced linkages between the multiple organizations of the micro-region, sponsoring their institutionalization through the set up of an organization at the micro-regional level, i.e. the COAM-BC.

While the process of capacity-building took place mainly during the workshops, we observe that the main source of learning was not the explicit content of the lessons, but the practice and example acquired through the regular participation in the meetings and interaction with the project team. "We repetitively exercised cooperative practices; then we ended up incorporating them", recalls Evandro, member of COAMPE, who took part in all activities of the project as local technician. *Articulate*, for instance, became such a popular word among the leaders that it ended up being incorporated in their daily vocabulary: "Don't worry, we will *articulate* a

ride for you to cross the *açude*", one community leader said to me, while calling the municipality and asking whether we could use the public boat to get to a community on the other side.

Among the three types of skills highlighted by Esman and Uphoff (1984) – i.e. organizational, technical and political ones –, it seems that the main capacities developed during the capacity-building process were from the first type, for instance those that could facilitate regular gatherings, such as...

...how to convoke community members:
"We discussed a lot about the importance of good communication. So I've decided to formalize the convocation for the meetings annexing a reminder and a list of the issues to be discussed to the water invoice that I deliver monthly to each house".

(Tibúrcio, who has developed the water system described in Chapter 3).

...how to prepare the reunion:
"I used to arrive at the meeting without knowing what I was going to talk about. I learned to organize better the meetings and the information I'm going to use. All this has made me much more respected by the group".

(Chico Julião, from *Carrapatos*)

"We've learned many techniques to improve our meetings, like valuing everyone's opinion or using better our informal networks and events to spread information. Also, we've learned small tips to attract people. For example, now on every meeting we bring tea and cake. It's simple, but very efficient".

(Júnior, from *Vila Soares*)

As Augusta, member of COAM-BC, explains, a "habit" for meeting was created:

"They were very insistent with meetings, workshops and seminars, things that are not so normal around here. And, by doing so, we have learned how to work as a team. Yes, because it is different to be together and be organized as a team. Being organized is to be in tune about what is happening, what can still be done, and about the commitments established".

As we see, the methodology adopted by the UNDP placed an important role in the workshops. The drawback of this method, however, is that the community members were not able to enjoy these moments of "socialization" (Gilchrist, 1995). The participation of the members – stressed by Esman and Uphoff (1984) as an essential element in the process of institutionalization of the organizations – was, according to the philosophy of the project, in charge of the leaders (facilitators), who were supposed to replicate the learning. This, as we will see later, had important implications in the sustainability of CA.

The second role of the external agent in the process of institutionalization of organizations was the establishment of the COAM-BC. This was a much more complex task, for there were no solid links across the micro-region that could serve as groundwork for cooperation (like the ones present within and – less strongly – among communities of the same municipality). "I went for the first time to *Tejuçuoca* to attend one of the meetings of the project", said César, a member of COAM-BC and of FECONGESA. *General Sampaio*, where he lives, borders *Tejuçuoca*.

In fact, communities in *Vale do Curu* are small, isolated and used to face-to-face contacts (discussion of common issues as well as convocation for community meetings normally happen informally, using the same channels as the grapevines). The strengthening of the existent federations and the creation of COAM-BC (spaces where people could discuss common problems and find joint-solutions for them) was then crucial to bind people from different communities and municipalities together. Moreover, these formal institutions ended up fostering informal links, which are nowadays important channels for the exchange of information, perhaps so as the monthly meetings at COAM-BC. A set of quotes shows the "micro-regional reality" today:

> *"The communication between communities improved a lot. Today I attend meetings in the neighboring communities and people from there come to ours".*

> (Assis, from *Jurema*)

"Today, when I hear something about Tejuçuoca, I immediately think of Amilton and Otônio [leaders at ACOMTE]. We are part of the same group, with one same compromise, one same cause".

(Augusta, member of COAM-BC)

"We now know where to find each other, and we are always giving information about programs, events, things that we hear and that can help our work".

(Tibúrcio, municipal facilitator in *Pentecoste*)

"Today, when we go to meetings we don't represent this or that CBO, this or that federation; we talk on behalf of the COAM-BC"

(Evandro, member of COAMPE and COAM-BC)

The micro-regional approach was a completely new perspective brought by the UNDP. But, as we see, it was easily "bought" by the leaders in *Vale do Curu*. It was cited spontaneously by all the eight members of COAM-BC when they were asked around the main contribution of UNDP, and recalled by the majority of the other community leaders. On the other hand, it was mentioned by only 3 out of the 24 community members interviewed, indicating that the council might still be distant from those whom it supposedly represents.

Confirming the findings of Nelson (1979) and Berner (1997) regarding the relation between UOs and external actors, it seems that, without the initial push from the UNDP, the COAM-BC would not be initiated. Instead of arising from the communities themselves, it is natural that the micro-regional perspective come from external agents, who are more connected with other realities and are aware of the new trends and challenges in today's world (like the ones outlined by Kanter, 1995). After all, different views require distinct standpoints. Borrowing the image created by Machiavelli (1981: 24) in his classical *The Prince*, one needs to "place low down in the plains to study the mountains", and "be high up on the mountains to get a better view of the plains".

However, the evidence from *Vale do Curu* does not hold for the assertion, present in the studies of both Nelson and Berner, that the maintenance of UOs is largely dependent on the external actor. Nor did they seem more unstable and repressed by the political elites. Conversely, the UOs studied, particularly the COAM-BC, have deepened the process of institutionalization after the UNDP left, and have speeded up the achievement of collective goods in the region (which, as we will see later, proved to be essential to foster further CA). Furthermore, UOs have actually been strengthening CBOs, helping them establish links with external institutions such as NGOs and governments, especially through a common agenda (Berner, 1997; Helmsing, 2002). "By working at the micro-regional level they became less dependent on the political will of local governments. If one project doesn't obtain support in one municipality, they can chase it in one of the others", explains the project local coordinator, Antônio Lacerda. Amílton, member of COAM-BC, endorses this idea:

"Our actions are now always coordinated. We speak the same language and on behalf of four municipalities, so it's easy to get something. Due to that sometimes people mix up COAM-BC, ACOMTE, COAMPE... But this is good because it just adds up. It doesn't matter if we get something to develop Tejuçuoca or Pentecoste, what we want is to develop the region".

We certainly cannot ignore the higher burdens that, as stressed by Berner (1997), represent a major constraint to larger organizations. Meetings at COAM-BC demand considerably high logistic and transportation costs (7 of the 8 titular members come from rural communities), not to mention time. During the period of intervention, these costs were borne by the UNDP, in partnership with the Local Governments. This was particularly important at that initial moment, when the outcomes of this "micro-regional effort" were still uncertain. "Moving is very expensive around here. If we had to pay ourselves to go to the workshops at the communities, for example, I think much less people would have attended", says Augusta, member of COAM-BC. Over the first year after the leaving of UNDP, members have been paying these burdens, motivated by the positive outcomes of the joint-work.

Finally, the expected rivalry between communities under the same umbrella organization (Berner, 1997), did not show up in the interviews. This might be related to the fact that, for the time being, collective actions undertaken by the COAM-BC are basically restricted to lobbying (leverage vis-à-vis the *Pronaf Infra-estrutura*, voicing in the *ASA* Forum and chasing sponsors for the *Instituto Camaleão* and the *Credivale*), which tend to further cooperation instead of competition. When the resources obtained through these various initiatives start to be allocated, disputes are more likely to arise. For instance, the cisterns acquired in the ASA Forum are to be installed in the communities more severely affected by droughts. But judging who suffers more is a tough task that often produces disappointments and jealousy – two powerful sources of rivalry.

What the evidence does indicate is another type of dispute: the one between UOs and CBOs for people's time and efforts. "Now that I meet at FECONGESA every month, we don't have meetings at the community so often. Everything is centralized there", declared Pedro, community leader at *Currupião*. As this was the only time this point was raised, no strong conclusions can be drawn. But there is certainly a scope for further investigation here. If proved to be true, this would mean that UOs can actually undermine CA at the community level.

Before closing this discussion, it is worth making one last observation on the gender dynamics within the organizations studied. Overall, evidence indicates that women participate more at the grassroots level, while men are the huge majority among the leaders. The latter are majority chairing CBOs and almost a rule in UOs. For the time being, only one woman is part of the executive board of the COAM-BC. Within CBOs, attendance of men and woman is roughly the same. However, it does not necessarily mean they participate equally. Women many times go to the meeting just "to listen", as revealed by the answer of Maria das Dores, community member in Ipueira Funda: "I go to all the meetings. Then I just stay there listening to what they are saying... Participating, you know?". The interface between CA and gender discourses can be an interesting scope for future research.

4.1.3 Legitimacy vis-à-vis external actors

Establishing links with external actors that allocate various services and resources is essential to the performance of UOs and CBOs, as stressed by Esman and Uphoff (1984). In *Vale do Curu*, the role of the UNDP in facilitating these links is summarized in the following report from Augusta, member of COAM-BC:

> *"Before, there were many things from the communities that the public sector didn't know. Now, if we identify ourselves as COAM-BC, they know it's something serious. We also know better the different programmes, the role of each person at the municipality, to which secretary we need to address each matter... All this goes into our agenda when we are discussing at the COAM-BC. Plus, when we want meet the secretaries it's easier, because we know their phone number, the days they are working in the city. Not only is the access easier but also our courage to go, claim and negotiate".*

From this piece we can withdraw three main contributions of the project team. The first one refers to the provision of information about the "playing-field", including the political and social context, the different programmes and actors that they might deal with and legal framework – elements that, according to Esman and Uphoff (1984), peasants lack. This is especially important in the case of Brazil, where decentralization has been leaving a considerable scope for LG and other external actors' investment in Community Development. "The new government [central government] is giving more space to civil society, and we can take advantage of that because we are already organized", analyses Evandro, member of COAMPE. According to Elizabete Nascimento, Secretary of Labour and Social Work of *Tejuçuoca*, this awareness made organizations more conscious of their role: "They are much more confident to request anything; they go everywhere, they participate much more actively in the local councils [of education, health etc]".

Secondly, the project team worked as an intermediary body, on the one hand helping associations establish channels with other external actors (making the first contact, setting up meetings, getting the phone number...) and on the other improving the image of the former vis-à-vis the latter, especially by showing their potential in the promotion of development (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). This is illustrated by the

picture below (a placard of the goat production project by the roadside in *General Sampaio*) and by the following description:

> *"We had some ideas of projects on agro-ecology for which we needed technical support. Then the people from Setah contacted EMBRAPA on our behalf. One technician came to a meeting at the COAM-BC and we showed them what we could do and what we needed from them. After a few months they were back here with three projects: one of goat husbandry, one of environmental awareness and the last for the creation of a data base with the seeds in the region, to be used for researches to improve productivity".*

<div align="right">(Júnior, from Vila Soares)</div>
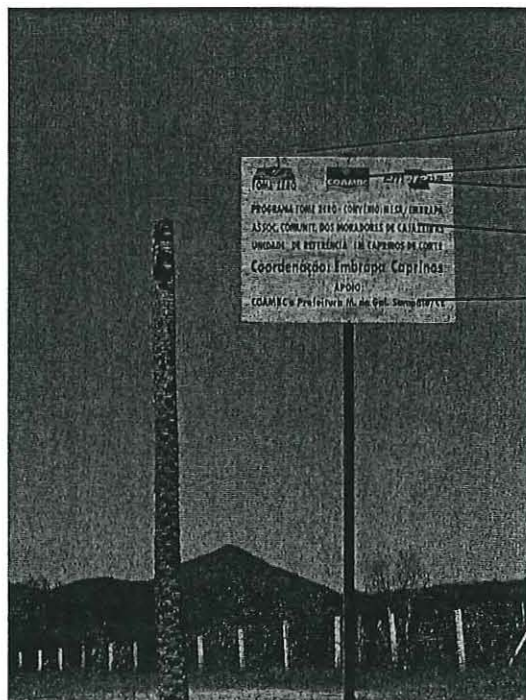
Multi-actor articulation

Fome Zero: Central Government
COAM-BC: Umbrella Organization
Embrapa: Central Government
Community Association of Cajazeiras: CBO
Municipality of General Sampaio: LG

The changes in the image of local organizations is evident in the interviews with the four members of LG, as exemplified by Joana D'Arc, Secretary of Basic Education in *General Sampaio*: "We've decided to call people from the association to take part in the Council of Education, because they would be able to contribute with their experience". Aware of that, leaders have become more confident for further CA: "Today everybody respects us. Wherever we arrive we are welcome in another way. It has became easier to get an answer to our claims", tells Chico Julião, from *Carrapatos*.

The last but not least role of the Project Team was to capacitate communities to approach and negotiate with external partners, especially from the public sector. "More than showing us the channels towards the public sector, they called our attention to the fact that, although we needed the government, we shouldn't create a relationship of dependency. Instead, we should negotiate", declares Augusta, member of COAM-BC. This investment in capacities to work with the governmental bodies is justified by Lacerda, the project local coordinator: "Community associations, in many cases, are created to claim, and are not prepared to propose, to participate in the new democratic spaces that today are open to them. We've tried to capacitate them in that sense, especially on how to formulate projects".

From the opinion of the Secretary of Agriculture of *Pentecoste*, Valter Verçosa, we can see that these capacities have been recognized: "Today it's much easier to articulate with them. Leaders are more confident about what they want and less timid to approach us. Before, they used to wait at the door very insecurely".

4.1.4 Group-consciousness

The methodology *Gespar*, adopted by the UNDP, draws many elements from the pedagogy of Freire (1970)[18], emphasizing group-consciousness and associative capacity. "The meetings were important because there we could see other people who also believed in collective work", explained Filomeno, municipal facilitator in *General Sampaio*. One moment that was mentioned by more than half of the leaders interviewed was the diagnosis of livelihoods and communitarian life in the communities, carried out by the leaders in the initial phase of the intervention. "We began to walk around the community, from one house to the other, and discovered all the knowledge we have here", analyses Filomeno, municipal facilitator in *General Sampaio*. "This contact with the families, where we could detect the needs of the farmers, was important to guide our work", adds César, community leader in Cajazeira and member of COAM-BC. Furthermore, as we have seen in the description of the workshops (in Chapter Three), several mechanism were used to make leaders

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[18] Paulo Freire was born and has worked for a long time with the education of rural peasants in Northeast of Brazil.

more aware of their realities, such as a great emphasis on the history of the processes and practices, reflection on the actions undertaken and discussion about their role in the process of development.

By dominating more precise information about their realities, leaders have got a clearer idea of the projects that were needed in the communities. Moreover, they have gathered data to formulate consistent proposals to be presented to external sponsors: "It was one of the most important contributions of UNDP. Before, if someone came interested in helping us and asked what the main activities here were, we were not able to answer accurately", recognizes Amílton, president of ACOMTE and member of COAM-BC.

We can say, however, that the relevance of group-consciousness went beyond this pragmatic role. By fostering group awareness, identity and cohesion, it has actually influenced the three other aspects of CA mentioned so far: the individual motivations (particularly through the affective ties), the legitimacy vis-à-vis external actors (making the group stronger) and the institutionalization of organizations (reinforcing the links among members).

**4.2 How has CA been sustained after the external agent left?**

This second research question refers to the maintenance of collective action after the leaving of the external actor. The analysis follows the two categories defined early on, i.e. *positive outcomes* and *leadership*, each one representing a key element of sustainability.

Differently from the first part of the analysis, where similar trends were found across communities, here we see two distinct patterns between the sampling groups – namely mobilized and demobilized communities. In the first, not only is the participation of householders in CBOs higher, but they are also more connected and promoting new CA (like the water system implemented in *Miguá Ilha*, described in the end of the last Chapter). In the latter, community members are much less enthusiastic about their associations and the tension between individual and collective best interests (the prisoner's dilemma) is decided by choosing the first one.

When asked to draw their communities, householders have expressed two distinct patterns of behaviour in terms of their links to the group. Informants from the demobilized groups tend to reduce the community to their homestead (symbolized by one house, one individual, sometimes a couple), whereas the ones from mobilized groups more often bring in clusters of houses, common spaces and even social interaction (e.g. people holding their hands). The difference can be seen in the table and in the two pictures below:

Evidence of group dynamics in the drawings	Mobilized group	Demobilized group	TOTAL
Isolation	4	11	15
Connectivity	8	3	11

*Based on 26 drawings of community members and leaders who have agreed on drawing.
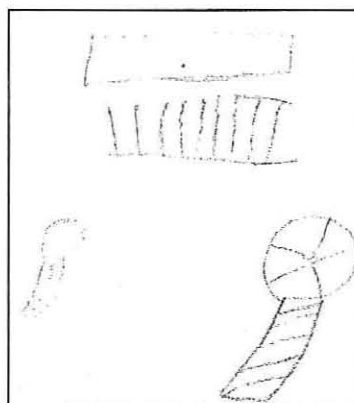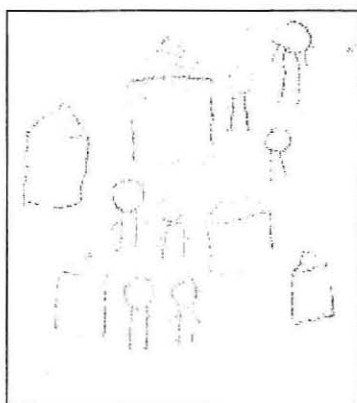
Riacho das Pedras (left): clusters of house and social interaction. And Ipueira Funda (right): one individual, one house and a wind turbine to pump water.

4.2.1 Positive outcomes

During the Focus Group Discussion conducted with the members of the executive board of COAM-BC, there was a consensus that CA in the region have been more frequent in the last few years, especially after the intervention of UNDP. "We see our group more united, committed and capable", observed Marcílio, president of the council. Some of the examples cited were the ASA Forum, the partnership with EMBRAPA, the project presented to *Pronaf/Infra-estrutura* and the small projects

implemented at the communities such as water systems, common orchards and road cleaning.

These positive outcomes, as many authors emphasize, seem to have a self-reinforcing role, by advancing group cohesion and new collective efforts in a process of path-dependency (Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Sandler, 1992; Ostrom, 1997; Helmsing, 2002). The findings show that this is particularly true when collective action goods obtained are "perceptible" ones; in other words, when they imply concrete outcomes. These (especially the ones related to water projects and chicken husbandry) appeared frequently in the drawings of the communities, mainly among mobilized groups, as we see in the table and in the example below:

Evidence of Concrete Outcomes in the drawings	Mobilized community	Demobilized community	TOTAL
Chicken husbandry	5	0	5
Water projects	6	1	7
Others	2	1	3
TOTAL	13	2	15

*Based on 26 drawings of community members and leaders
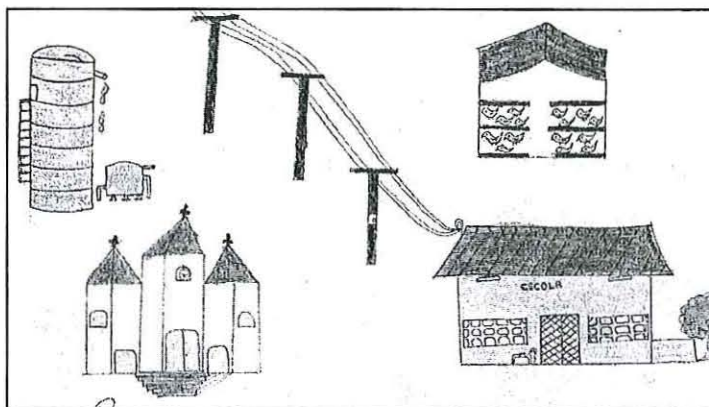
The water reservoir, the energy lines and the chicken coop: they were given the same importance as the church and the school, two of the main community institutions

The importance of concrete outcomes (economic gains in particular) also came out in 12 out of 19 leaders interviewed, as illustrated by Antônio Evaldo, from Riacho das Pedras: "I think the changes in people's behaviour were in part due to the positive results achieved here in the community. The 'Chicken Project' was and still is really

successful, and because of that we'll now have access to a credit line from the bank. People get more confident when they see that something good is happening at their neighbours' house". Likewise, these concrete outcomes were repeatedly mentioned by community members: "UNDP project? It was very good. We've always grown chicken, but now they are laying eggs all the time. I got some chicks and now that they reproduced I'm going to give some to another neighbour", describes Raimunda, also from the Riacho das Pedras.

This evaluation made by Raimunda basically reduces the intervention to the chicken husbandry activities, which are more concrete (and maybe closer to her) than the COAM-BC or the Credivale. Nevertheless, what we see is that the "chicken project" has ended up binding people together. Moments like chicken vaccination or technical workshops served as moments to share information and enhance group solidarity and commitment. Indeed, all 4 communities labelled as mobilized have presented good achievements in chicken husbandry. In other words, we can say that the results of the so-called *communitarian dimension* have undergone the ones obtained in the *productive one*. Because economic benefits are more obviously perceptible, they are pivotal to advance collective behavior – towards either economic or non-economic purposes.

It is important to account that this is a two-way relationship (Esman and Uphoff, 1984), and hence previous distinct levels of organization could have determined distinct economic performances. This hypothesis, however, is weakened by the fact that communities chosen by the UNDP to take part in the project had relatively equivalent levels of mobilization (a minimum level was actually a criteria of selection, as explained in Chapter 3). Besides, the economic activities were consciously the starting point of the intervention, as a way of supporting the process of networking-building. "We've decided to start from the productive dimension due to the lack of income opportunities in the region. After all, one can't put one person that suffers from hunger to discuss with another who's got a full stomach. It's not fair and the hungry person will tend to accept whatever the other one offers", explains Lacerda, the project coordinator.

To recap, concrete outcomes, particularly the economic ones, have proved to be a crucial element in the sustainability of CA after the leaving of the UNDP. This is one of the most important findings that emerge from this research. The explanation for heterogeneity in economic performance goes beyond the scope of this paper, as it can be a technical one. However, it may have been influenced by issues regarding leadership, which are explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Leadership

Given the methodology used by the UNDP in *Vale do Curu*, where the contact with communities was done through facilitators, it was expected that leaders would play a major role in the sustainability of collective action, as stressed by Nelson (1979), Esman and Uphoff (1984) and Starkley (1999). After all, they represented the link between the project team and the community members, and were in charge of replicating to the latter the learning and experiences that they had acquired with the former.

Findings have shown that, overall, the leaders interviewed had very similar profiles in terms of their economic and educational background[19] as well as the same commitment towards community work. Individual characteristics, therefore, does not seem sufficient to explain the distinct performances among communities. The evidence, however, does point out to a difference in the way power is centralized by the leaders. This is made clear in the two quotes below, of leaders from a mobilized and a demobilized community, respectively:

> *"When they have a problem they look for me, because the have difficulty talking to the authorities. It was me who registered many children here. I also help when someone is sick, when they need something from the city. I get proud when I manage to solve someone's problem".*
>
> (Antônio, leader in *Ipueira Funda*)

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[19] Schooling, income, properties and daily activities were used as indicators to characterize the profiles (see outline in the annexes).

"Today almost everyone is a facilitator here, because we are all involved in the activity and keep exchanging information among ourselves"

(Júnior, leader in *Vila Soares*)

In the first answer, there is a clear reproduction of paternalistic relations at the community level and a centralization of power on the hands of the leader. He is himself very active in the regional political arena (he even got a trophy for highest frequency at the municipal councils), but he doesn't manage to gather people together within his community, which is rather disarticulated. As no one seemed interested in becoming a facilitator at the "chicken project", he took over the responsibility alone. At the end, most of the chicks died because he was not able to carry out all the duties properly. As observed by his daughter, "people here are not interested in working together. The only one who works for the community here is my father. If he leaves we won't have even water, because he was the one who got money for the pumping system and is responsible for the maintenance".

In Vila Soares, on the other hand, the CBO was already led by a handful of leaders. This core group of committed members of the kind emphasized by Starkley (1999), who have participated in the workshops together, shared the tasks necessary for the implementation of the pilot units and coordinate the CBO[20]. Not only were the responsibilities of the 'chicken project' shared, but also they were able to implement some of the other activities learned, mainly the horticulture. In those cases, the experience was more widely shared by community members. This shared leadership is found in three of the four communities considered mobilized.

Besides dividing responsibilities (which has proven to be essential for a better performance), shared leadership also seems to enhance the power of replication. After all, if we consider Sandler's (1992) argument that, in CA, the efforts of one individual influence the contributions or efforts, we can say that the more the individuals are involved in stimulate others, the more effective the replication will be.

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[20] Although other community members were allowed to join the "official" facilitator in the workshops, only a few communities have in fact done so.

4.3 Conclusion

This Chapter has addressed the two Research Questions following the six key categories presented at the Introductory Chapter. Regarding the first one, we conclude that the external agent has stimulated mixed individual motivations towards collective work, through both rational and symbolic incentives. Indeed, the majority of the individuals have joined the project seeking possibilities to enhance their productivity. Second, it has fostered the process of institutionalization of institutions, not only through the several capacities built in the various courses but also through the creation of an opportunity for constant contact between householders. Furthermore, it has facilitated the links between communities and other external actors and has fuelled group-consciousness, essential basis for the three other process mentioned.

The analysis of the second RQ has demonstrated the importance of positive concrete outcomes, especially economic ones, to the advancement of CA. Moreover, it has shown that, while leaders do play a pivotal role in the sustainability of CA, the key issue is not in their individual skills, but in shared leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This paper has begun by highlighting collective action as a way for deprived communities to overcome development constraints and achieve goals that go beyond the individual capacity of its members. Nevertheless, reality is full of cases, like the Brazilian *Sertao*, where low levels of CA and extreme poverty coexist and actually reinforce each other. This is due to the fact that acting collectively is not only a matter of perceiving common benefits, but it also requires a favourable environment as well as several capacities and incentives that the poor usually lack. This study has intended to investigate how the intervention of external agents can influence CA in poor rural communities, as well as to understand the factors that can ensure the sustainability of group behavior once this agent leaves.

The case-study of *Vale do Curu* has shown that an external intervention (in this particular situation, of an international development agency) can have a catalytic effect by contributing to some of the key elements of CA. First, it can offer incentives (material and symbolic ones) that are essential to make individuals allocate their time and effort to collective endeavours, especially in contexts with little tradition in this sense. Moreover, the simple presence of the outsiders in normally excluded communities seem to awake feelings enthusiasm, pride and self confidence that constitute an important basis upon which CA takes place. Here is where we can identify a scope for future research, as these symbolic motivations are not fairly discussed in the dominant theories discussed in Chapter Two.

Second, the external intervention can provide strategic moments where individuals articulate common interests, raise group-consciousness and actually see the group from new perspectives. These are important steps towards the institutionalization of organizations – CBOs and UOs – considered by the literature as important channels of CA. Because of their good connexions with the "outside world", external agents also have the potential to bring the poor, through their CBOs and UOs, to the spotlight – improving their image vis-à-vis other external actors and providing them with information to identify access and negotiate with public and private institutions.

In *Vale do Curu*, the UNDP intervention has played a pivotal role in the jump-start of CA, as it was through their participation in the project that a considerable number of community members have seated and worked together for first time. The question that remains, nonetheless, is to what extent communities are able to sustain this process after the leaving of the external actor. In this sense, the main conclusion that can be drawn from the case-study is that positive outcomes, especially economic ones, work as an important self-reinforcing mechanism that can advance further group behavior. As a result, we can say that activities that represent an increase in household income should be an essential part of any intervention aimed at fostering CA. And, if these interventions manage to promote concrete results, they have the potential to engender a more autonomous process of CA, led by the communities themselves.

A second and crucial factor to the sustainability of CA, very emphasized by the literature, is the presence of an effective leadership able to involve the whole community in the process. Effectiveness, in this context, was proved to rely not so much in the individual characteristics of the leaders, but in the sharing of leadership. From this we can withdraw a second suggestion for future interventions: capacity building activities that involve one single leader per community have less potential to foster sustainable CA. After all, how can one promote group behaviour by capacitating single and isolated individuals? Instead, a group of community members who are trained together, and together experience (and see the results of) collective work, are very likely to carry on and replicate this experience in the future.

As a final point, it is important to account that all these conclusions are being drawn little more than one year after the ending of the UNDP intervention in *Vale do Curu*. This timeframe, it must be recognized, might not be sufficient to capture all the complexity that characterizes the process of CA. As time progresses, issues like conflict of interests between and within communities might arise and interfere in the sustainability. Nonetheless, it is believed that the set of factors tackled in the analysis, i.e. individual motivations, institutionalization organizations, legitimacy, group-consciousness, concrete outcomes and leadership, will remain as central ones.

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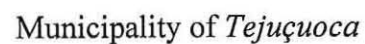
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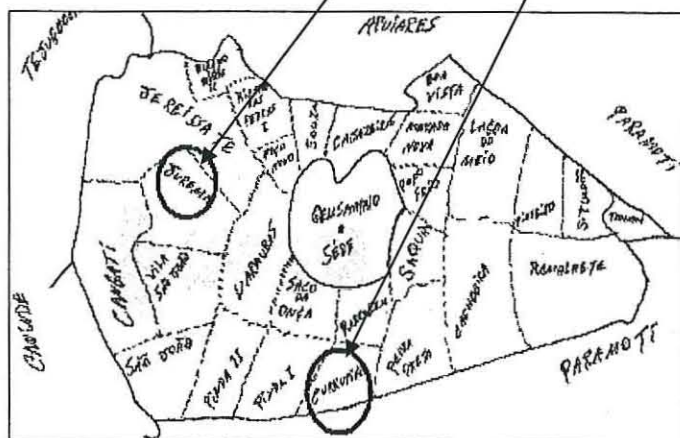
ANNEXES

1. Maps

Municipality of *Pentecoste*
Communities selected: *Ipueira Funda* and *Carrapatos*

Municipality of *Tejuçuoca*
Communities selected: *Boa Ação* and *Riacho das Pedras*

Municipality of *General Sampaio*
Communities selected: *Jurema* and *Currupião*

Municipality of *Apuiarés*
Communities selected: *Vila Soares* and *São Pedro*
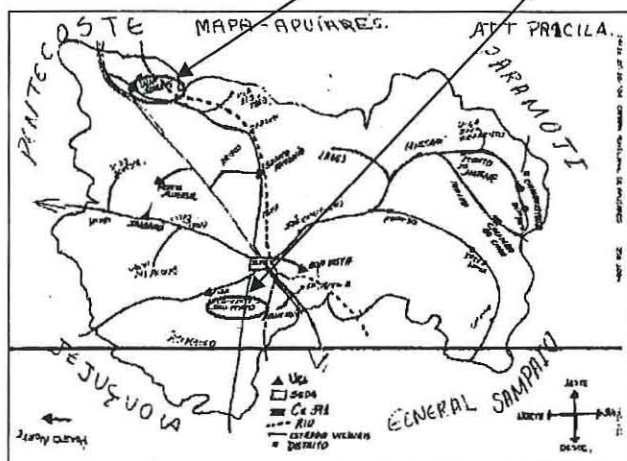
2. List of interviewees

Communities selected:

MUNICIPALITY	*MOBILIZED*	*DEMOBILIZED*
PENTECOSTE	Carrapatos	Ipueira Funda
APUIARÉS	Vila Soares	São Pedro
GENERAL SAMPAIO	Currupião	Jurema
TEJUÇUOCA	Riacho das Pedras	Boa Ação

Abbreviations:
Sex: masc = masculin; fem = feminin
Cl = community leader
Cm = community member

Project Team
Antônio Lacerda – *local project coordinator*
Francisco Valdenir Amâncio – *project staff*
Vânia Margareth Rodrigues Bomfim – *project staff*

LG Representatives
Elizabete Augusta Siqueira do Nascimento – Secretary of Social Work in *Tejuçuoca*
Luiz José Barbosa Góes – Secretary of Agriculture in *Apuiarés*
Joana D'Arc Gomes Cavalcanti – Secretary of Basic Education in *General Sampaio*
Valter Luis Herculano Verçosa – Secretary of Agriculture in *Pentecoste*

Leaders of Municipal Federations
Amílton – rep. of ACOMTE *(+ COAM-BC)*
Francisco César Matos de Almeida – masc, rep. of FECONGESA *(+COAM-BC)*
Maria Augusta Freitas Diniz – 42, fem, rep. of ABVC *(+ COAM-BC)*
Evandro Batista de Souza, 33, masc, rep. Of COAMPE *(+ COAM-BC)*
Marcílio, masc, rep of COAMPE *(+ COAM-BC)*

Municipal Facilitators
Maria Simone Santos Nunes – *Tejuçuoca*
Filomeno Ferreira de Araújo Neto – *General Sampaio (+ COAM-BC)*
Edilardo Soares Sales – *Apuiarés*
Tibúrcio Sousa de Castro – *Pentecoste*

Community Members and Leaders

Comunidade de Boa Ação
Maria Ivoneide Teixeira Mota – 24, fem, Cl
Juarez Teixeira Barbosa – 69, masc, Cm
Maria Rosa Cruz Paula – 51, fem, Cm
Benedita Tavares Mota – 40, fem, Cm

Comunidade de Riacho das Pedras
Antônio Evaldo Henrique da Silva – 43, masc, Cl
Francisco Olavo de Souza – 40, masc, Cm
Raimunda Ilza Souza Barbosa – 65, fem, Cm
Jessilda Bernardo Almeida – 19, fem, Cm

Comunidade de Currupião
Pedro Santos da Silva – 49, masc, Cl
Antônia Claudineide – 20, fem, Cm
José Wilson – 58, masc, Cm
Antônio Mariano da Cruz – 34, masc, Cm

Comunidade de Jurema
Francisco Assis dos Santos Neto – 37, masc Cl
Luiza Martim de Souza – 58, fem, Cm
Maria da Conçeição Martins – 32, fem, Cm
Raimundo Nonato Bastos – 39, mas, Cm

Comunidade of Vila Soares
Francisco Raimundo Barroso Junior, 29, masc, Cl *(+ COAM-BC)*
Gerardo dos Santos Sales – 26, masc, Cl
José Rodrigues Silva – 58, masc, Cm
Elton Pereira de Oliveira – 20, masc, Cm
Maria de Fátima, - 50, fem, Cm

Comunidade São Pedro
Francisco Haroldo P. Costa – 31, masc, Cl
Vicente Silva – masc, Cl
Antônia Ivone Barreto, 36, fem, Cm
Antônio Rodrigues Matos, 44, masc, Cm
Maria Lúcia de Souza da Silva, 44, fem, Cm

Comunidade de Carrapato
Franciso Vaz de Oliveira (Chico Julião) – 37, masc, Cl *(+ COAMBC)*
Francisca Antônia Almeida Sousa – 20, fem, Cl
José Guerra de Souza – 64, masc, Cm
Maria do Carmo Ferreira Luz – 46, fem, Cm
Rita Márcia Coelho Ferreira – 28, fem, Cm

Comunidade de Ipueira Funda
Antônio Ribeiro da Silva – 46, masc, Cl *(+ COAM-BC)*
José Adalto de Castro – 54, masc, Cm
Antônia Cláudia Nascimento da Silva – 25, fem, Cm
Maria das Dores da Silva – 50, fem, Cm

3. Outline of semi-structured interviews

Community Leaders and Members

1. Individual motivations: why do they consider important engaging in collective action? Why have they engaged in the UNDP project? Have the motivations changed? When and why? Have the expectations been fulfilled?

2. Institutional basis: How often do they participate in CBOs/UOs? What other forms of CA are they involved with? Are they participating more after the UNDP intervention? Has the project influenced the way they see community? Is community more organized today? Costs of organization – participation in the meetings etc – how do they cope with that?

3. (only to the leaders) Organizational skills: What was the main learning you've got from the project? Describe their participation in the workshops. Is it easier to coordinate/organize people? Why?

4. Micro-regional approach: how was the relation with other communities? And other municipalities? How is it now? Contributions of the UNDP intervention to that? Advantages and drawbacks of working in the micro-region? (to community members: first ask if they know the COAM-BC)

5. Legitimacy vis-à-vis external actors: How is the relation with the LG? How was it before the intervention? What has changed? Contributions of UNDP? How about other external institutions – is it easier to establish partnerships?

6. Group-consciousness: is the group more united after the intervention? What changes they see in people's behaviour? Has group cohesion been facilitating CA?

7. Relation with the project team nowadays: how often do they talk? What has changed after they left? Do they feel weaker/less powerful? How do they cope with organizational costs?

8. Positive outcomes of CA: What was the most important contribution of the project? Enumerate some outcomes. How have these outcomes influenced their involvement in CA?

9. Characteristics of the leadership: who were the people who were directly involved in the project? How many? How was the selection/calling for participation within the community? Have other people got involved during the process? Who are the leaders in the community? For how long have they been leading?

10. Drawings: Ask them to make a drawing that represent the way they see their community.

Representatives of the LG

1. Name, position, time in this position.

2. Their relations with local organizations: how often? In which circunstances? How is the relation with them? Some outcomes of this joint-work? Their view on the role/importance of CBOs and UOs.

3. Recent changes: Changes in the last few year? To what extent has UNDP intervention contributed to those changes? Other factors that might have influenced? What else could be done to enhance efficacy of organizations?

4. Community leaders: Perceived changes in the way they approach/interact with the LG. And with their communities? Participation in other democratic institutions? To what extent has the project contributed to that?

5. Micro-regional approach: how do they see it? Gains and drawbacks of working together with the other towns.

Project Team

1. Name, position in the project.

2. How was his/her role during the intervention? How often in Vale do Curu?

3. Their ideas on collective action: what is it? Why is it important? Constraints to promote it in realities like *Vale do Curu*? How did the project expect to do that?

4. Description of the intervention: workshops, pedagogy/methodology used, main features of *Vale do Curu*. Which changes could they see in the region? How has the intervention contributed to those changes? Changes in the local organizations? Detail their contribution to that.

5. People in the project: Who participated (how many, age, sex, occupation)? How was the contact with the leaders? And community members? What kind of motivation people had to get involved in the project? Were they able to fulfil them?

6. Micro-regional idea: Why the micro-regional approach? How has it worked? Relation micro-region/CBO – reinforcing, complementing or competing? The costs issue.

7. Involvement after the conclusion of the project: how often do they talk to people from *Vale do Curu*? How is their involvement with the leaders? How do they think CA will be sustained? Differences across the communities/municipalities involved? Why?