



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 09, Issue, 03, pp.26786-26788, March, 2019



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY: TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PARTICIPATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

*¹Ângelo Altair Oliveira and ²Ancelmo Schörner

¹Master from the Community Development Graduate Program, UNICENTRO – PR

²Doctor in History; PhD from the Social Sciences Graduate Program at PUC/SP; Professor at the History Department at Unicentro/PR – Irati

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 03rd December, 2018
Received in revised form
08th January, 2019
Accepted 26th February, 2019
Published online 31st March, 2019

Key Words:

Training; Spirituality; Landless settlement;
Land reform; Social movement;
Community development;
Participative development

ABSTRACT

This present paper presents a study conducted in 2017 and 2018 about the participative development experienced by landless rural workers settled in the Rio Bonito do Iguaçú municipality, in the state of Paraná, in Brazil, from 1996 to 1997. Methodology consisted on studying interviews conducted through Oral History methodology and written sources from the time, such as newspaper articles and official State documents, which were interpreted based on similar research projects and concepts from various theorists. It was concluded that two aspects were fundamental to the success of the participative development process studied herein: the educational work developed by leaders with the people involved and the appreciation of the group's spirituality as a propelling element.

Copyright © 2019, Ângelo Altair Oliveira and Ancelmo Schörner. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Ângelo Altair Oliveira and Ancelmo Schörner, P. 2019. "Education and spirituality: two important elements to be considered in participative development processes", *International Journal of Development Research*, 09, (03), 26786-26788.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study in Participative Development, a term coined by Portuguese researcher Antonio Fragoso. Building on studies by various authors, Fragoso (2005) suggests that, instead of community development, a term used by many theorists even today, it would be better to use the term participative development, with the following elements: 1) Participation through popular organization in search of social change and improvement; 2) The people should be the ones to organize and create social change; 3) Participation should be achieved in a dialectical manner, in which people build confidence in their problem-solving abilities through process learning; 4) A process that is effectively controlled by the population at every step, from problem selection and problem solving to the management of the necessary budget; 5) Resulting in new knowledge developed by the people themselves; 6) Participation implying democratically-taken decisions; 7) A non-closed process, i.e., featuring unpredictable outcomes; 8) A process that can start with

external intervention, but that should be come increasingly endogenous; 9) Participation consisting in a true educational process; 10) Participation resulting in effective improvements for the participating people. Using this concept, we developed studies with rural workers settled at the Settlement Acampments of Ireno Alves dos Santos and Marcos Freire, at the Rio Bonito do Iguaçú municipality, in the state of Paraná, in Brazil. The research was conducted in 2017 and 2018 and attempted to gather data about a participative development process experienced in the fight for land reform mediated by MST, the Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra), from 1996 to 1997. In order to gather data, using Oral History methodology, interviews were conducted with eighteen people who were active participants in the process, and newspaper articles from the time were consulted, as well as documents from INCRA, the National Colonization and Land Reform Institute (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária). Data was analyzed through bibliographical research in papers, dissertations and thesis dealing with similar topics, using concepts from various theorists as interpretative tools. We concluded that two factors were decisive for the success of the participative development process in question: educational work developed by leaders

*Corresponding author: Ângelo Altair Oliveira,
Master from the Community Development Graduate Program, UNICENTRO – PR

and the people involved, and the appreciation of the group's spirituality as a propelling element.

Development: In the year 1996, Ireno Alves dos Santos and Jaime Calegari, MST leaders, organized in Rio Bonito do Iguacu, Paraná, Brazil, an encampment settlement with around 3,000 families. It was the biggest settlement organized by the movement theretofore. This squat intended to pressure the Brazilian State and demand the expropriation of these estates for Land Reform, as established by Article 186 in the 1988 Constitution of Brazil. There were over 12,000 people, mostly land workers who, due to various conservative rural modernization processes (Wanderley, 1996) occurring in the state of Paraná from 1950 to 1980, found themselves landless and in poverty and joined MST in order to obtain land for agriculture and to live there with their families. Due to the organized fight for land led by these people, the State expropriated 26,800 hectares (approx. 66,224 acres) from the Pinhal Ralo Farm, then owned by Giacomet-Marondin S.A., and 1,501 families were then settled in that land, in two steps, first on September 1997, with the settlement of 900 families at the Encampment Settlement Ireno Alves dos Santos (Ministério Extraordinário de Política Fundiária, 30/09/1997), followed the settlement of 601 families at the Encampment Settlement Marcos Freire, in December 1998 (Superintendência Regional do INCRA do Paraná, 1/12/1998).

The 3,000 families of landless workers were initially squatting in extremely adverse conditions, with infants living under tarps, in a part of the recently-established Rio Bonito do Iguacu municipality, which didn't have the appropriate state apparatus to provide health and education for the landless workers. Many of the squatters didn't have economic resources and those who had disposable funds only had enough for survival. This group's challenge wasn't only to resist and demand land expropriation from the Brazilian State to establish a proper settlement, but mainly to survive during that time, with access to food, clothing, medicine etc. In order to do so, landless workers began a highly positive participative development process. An obstacle to the group's development and to their problem-solving was the scarce participation of women in decision-making. This problem was noticed by Sister Lia, a Catholic sister who followed landless worker's settlements since the 1970s, was present in the founding of MST and always chose the most difficult squats to settle in. As told by Sister Lia, landless workers were organized in a hundred groups, and only one of them was led by a woman, because, according to her, squatted men believed that decisions were up to them, without female participation. Having realized that problem and knowing that squatters saw the world through a religious lens, Sister Lia, using the Bible, a common space and language between male and female squatter, started to train and educate women. She told us that her Bible education was based on what happened in the settlement, and helped women, as well as men, to reinterpret their fight through the sacred text, leading discussion to necessary squat decisions.

Indeed, as we started our interviews, we found that squatters in the fight for land weren't materialist in their way of understanding and interpreting the world, but saw the world through the lens of Christianity. Having realized that, religious leaders who supported the fight for land in that squat started to work with Bible and religious education, which proved to be of the utmost importance for squatters to take a critical look at their reality and incorporate philosophical, historical, political and social categories in their way of theorizing about life and

its events. Sister Lia told us that the education was ecumenical and gradual, following the settlement's steps, with the clear intent of making settled workers, both male and female, understand that their fight needed to be fought in every sphere, i.e., that all of them had to participate in discussion and decision-making, execute the steps and evaluate what was happening in the process as a whole. The educational work wasn't limited to the Bible, extending to historical, philosophical, political and economical elements. The fact that many of these people were illiterate demanded that those who taught used not only written text, but oral stories, staging and symbols, starting from common knowledge to expand from there. Among people responsible for this educational work were teachers connected to MST, from various fields of study, especially Philosophy, History and Economics. MST leaders and activists also spoke about the political situation and land reform. Religious leaders, such as priests, sisters, pastors and deacons, also participated in different scopes of the process. The entire educational process at that settlement was based on the reality of squatters, helping them interpret daily happenings in that space as well as the context of the fight for land reform in Brazil, and gave them important tools to find solutions for their problems, in an educational and consciousness-raising way (Ander-Egg, 1982).

Another element that was shown to be central for the group's participative development was spirituality. As well as education, celebrations were strong moments in the squatters' journey. As we have previously said, most landless workers came from religious backgrounds, seeing and interpreting the world through religious theories, and moments of prayer nourished the subjects of the fight for land. We understand that the conceptions internalized by a culture's subjects, the values passed from generation to generation, what's unsaid and the relationship with supernatural forces resulting from their beliefs are a culture's soul; therefore, most of the daily life is conducted in a certain way because of interpretations, values and beliefs carried by subjects, because there's a hidden spiritual dimension to banal activities, and "spirituality is lived daily as life energy" (Netto *et al.*, 2012, p. 49). However, in modern society spirituality can be lived as an escape from life, reinforcing a process of alienation where community is used as a crutch, instead of as support for a collective path. In the settlement, however, spirituality was lived as a transformative mysticism, an energy translated into revolutionary praxis (Netto *et al.*, 2012). A very noticeable facet of spirituality are the gestures and words that make up sacred rites. In the squat, sacred rites were called celebrations. Danilo Ferreira, one of the squatters, told us that celebrations were prepared based on the moment's reality, in an ecumenical fashion, in the language of the settlers, and they brought hope, filled people's hearts and souls. Indeed, in their stories, interviewees imply that they feel as if they are living in a war camp. Surviving and resisting wasn't easy, and mysticism, prayer, celebrations and the Bible served as food and drink to give hope and renewed strength to continue the fight. In the language of Viktor Emil Frankl (1985), reflections based on the Bible and celebrations gave *meaning* to the fight. In that sense, the presence of religious leaders from various churches and denominations was seen by landless workers as a symbolic presence of the force of God. And the fact that these leaders made religious apparatus available to squatters is recalled as making all the difference. Due to their religious interpretation of facts, both religious leaders and squatters, using the language that had been long-imposed to them, undid the fatalities of the

established order through a popular use of religion, changing their workings, metamorphosing their form of speaking from a given language to a “song of resistance” (Certeau, 2013, p. 74). In this way, they maintained utopia, understood here as the place of destination.

Final thoughts: We agree with Fragoso (2005) that it’s better to use the concept of participative development, instead of community development, because true development can only be achieved if the interested community is active in the process and benefits from its results. Through the acts of Sister Lia and other leaders, we realized that previous knowledge developed in other development processes can be of great help when a new process faces hardship. The moments of education and religious communication with women also show that a participative development process can’t be limited to actions devoid of reflection, and that educational moments based on the reality of what is being lived are uniquely important for the subjects of development to broaden their understanding and be able to see which steps to take by themselves. An aspect that is often overlooked in participative development projects but which has been shown as essential in our study is that of spirituality, understood here as deeper searches and the values a certain group brings imprinted in their souls. For example, for squatters who had their way of seeing the world mediated by Christian religious concepts, celebrations and Bible reflections were extremely important for finding solutions to their problems, sustaining them during the fight and broadening their awareness of society and bigger historical processes to which their movement was owed. In this sense, a project can’t result in participative development in an

indigenous nation, for example, unless their culture, way of seeing and interpreting the world, and forms of organization and establishing relations are taken into account. Moreover, from our point of view, that’s exactly why many community development projects are unsuccessful, because they don’t take into account the culture, religion, desires and the social project of the population where the project is supposed to be developed.

REFERENCES

- Ander-Egg, E. 1982. Metodología y prácticadel desarrollo de lacomunidad. México: El Ateneo.
- Certeau, M. 2013. A invenção do cotidiano: 1, artes de fazer. 20 ed. Petrópolis, Vozes.
- Fragoso, A. 2005. Desenvolvimento participativo: uma sugestão de reformulação conceptual. Revista Portuguesa de Educação. Braga, Portugal, v.18, n.001, pp.23-51.
- Frankl, VE. 1985. Em busca de sentido. Petrópolis, Vozes.
- Netto JP, Brant Carvalho MC. 2012. Cotidiano: conhecimento e crítica. 10. ed. São Paulo, Cortez. Ministério Extraordinário de Política Fundiária. Portaria n. 43, de 30 de setembro de 1997.
- Superintendência Regional do INCRA do Paraná. Portaria n. 115, de 1 de dezembro de 1998. in: Diário Oficial, n. 238, 11 de dezembro de 1998.
- Wanderley, MNB. A modernização sob comando da terra: os impasses da agricultura moderno no Brasil. Revista do Instituto de Filosofia e ciências humanas. Campinas, v. 3, n. 2, jul/dez 1996.
