

Peasant Associations in Theory and Practice

*Nora McKeon
Michael Watts
Wendy Wolford*

Civil Society and Social Movements
Programme Paper Number 8
May 2004

United Nations
Research Institute
for Social Development



This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme Paper was produced with the support of UNRISD core funds. UNRISD thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for this funding.

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Acronyms

ACCIR	Association champenoise de coopération inter régionale
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ANCAR	Agence national de conseil agricole et rurale
APCR	Association nationale des présidents des communautés rurales
ASAP	Agricultural Structural Adjustment Program
ASIP	Agricultural Structural Investment Program
ASPRODEB	Association sénégalaise pour la promotion du développement à la base
BOAD	Banque Ouest Africaine de développement
CBO	community-based organization
CEB	Comunidade Ecclesiastes de Base
CESAO	Centre d'études économiques et sociales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
CILSS	Comité inter Etats de lutte contre la sécheresse au Sahel
CIPSI	Cordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidarieta Internazionale
CNCAS	Caisse national de crédit agricole du Sénégal
CNCR	Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux
CONCRAB	Confederação das Cooperativas de Reforma Agrária no Brasil
CONTAG	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura
CPT	Comissão Pastoral da Terra
DFID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
ENDA-Tiers Monde	Environnement et développement du Tiers Monde
EU	European Union
EZE	Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCFA	franc Communauté financière africaine
FNRAA	Fonds national de recherche agricole et agroalimentaire
FONGS	Fédération des ONG sénégalaises
GIE	Groupement d'intérêt économique
GM	genetically modified
ICCO	Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation
INCRA	Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária
MFR	Maisons familiales rurales
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for African Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
NOVIB	Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation
NPA	Nouvelle politique agricole
ONCAD	Office national de la commercialisation et de l'assistance au développement
PCB	Partido Comunista Brasileiro
PE	Pernambuco
PO	producers' organization
PROCERA	Programa Especial de Credito Para Reforma Agrária
PRONAF	Programa Nacional de Agricultura Familiar
PSAOP	Projet des services agricoles et des organisations de producteurs
R	Brazilian real
RAFAD	Recherches et applications de financements alternatifs au développement
ROPPA	Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
SAED	Société d'aménagement et d'exploitation du Delta, Sénégal

SATEC	Société d'assistance technique
SC	Santa Catarina
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Six-S	Se servir de la saison sèche en savane et au Sahel
SODEFITEX	Société pour le développement des fibres et textiles
SODEVA	Société de développement et de vulgarisation agricole
SOMIVAC	Société pour la mise en valeur de la Casamance
UEMOA	Union économique et monétaire Ouest Africaine
ULTAB	União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil
UNCAS	Union des Coopératives Agricoles du Sénégal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

A decade after Eric Hobsbawm's obituary to the "end of the peasantry", in his book *The Age of Extremes*, rural producers' organizations are at the forefront of mobilization against globalization –the so-called anti-globalization "movement of movements". From the formation of the Zapatistas in southern Mexico to the suicide of a South Korean farmer at the 2003 World Trade Organization meeting in Cancun, peasants and rural workers' organizations have taken the lead in denouncing the deepening of the global market system.

International Monetary Fund-sponsored structural adjustment programmes have radically re-structured local rural economies and oriented production toward an international commodity market historically dominated by large-scale modern (and often heavily subsidized) North American and Western European producers. This paper considers the ways in which liberalization and global market dependence have affected poverty, hunger and what Amartya Sen has called "entitlements": the political, social and economic resources that condition an individual's access to food and basic needs. The paper builds on Sen's work by considering the ways in which peasant communities and organizations can be central actors in resisting or negotiating the effects (and character) of the marketplace. The authors present two case studies of rural producers' organizations in Brazil and Senegal to illustrate how they can shed light on both development as entitlement provision and what Sen himself has called "development as freedom".

The attempts of groups and communities to form associations and increase the political visibility of rural producers can be seen as a first step toward addressing broader issues of distribution, alternative approaches to production, long-term economic stability and citizenship. The two organizations presented, the Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (CNCR) in Senegal and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil do not represent the great variety of associations, organizations and social movements found in rural areas, but their comparison allows for an in-depth look at the ways in which rural producers might mobilize participants, develop a methodology and ideology for action, and affect political and economic agendas considered hegemonic at home and abroad.

The CNCR emerged in 1993 in response to the failure of state-sponsored agricultural policies and rural cooperatives, and the liberalization of the economy under structural adjustment. Over a decade it succeeded in building a powerful national platform, winning government recognition for peasant farmers and a place at the negotiating table, which it has used successfully to defend the interests of small producers.

The MST emerged in 1985 after an authoritarian agricultural modernization programme expelled millions of small farmers from the land. As the military government began to withdraw from power, rural producers throughout Brazil seized the political opening and organized under the discursively coherent umbrella of agrarian reform. Nearly 20 years later, the MST is an important actor in national politics, having scaled up the battle for agrarian reform into a battle for effective democracy, equality and social justice.

The experiences of these organizations raise a number of important questions about the dynamics of peasant associations, trajectories of change (and their relations to democratic questions), the connection between civil society and state, and, not least, the fiscal foundations (including the role of foreign assistance) in associational forms of development. One of the key lessons from this paper is that entitlements are often grounded in the organizational and political capacities of communities and associations, not in individuals or households, and the ways in which entitlements are mobilized and negotiated depend on the local histories of relationships between the state, civil society and the market. In different contexts, the mode of relation with the state can be an essentially conflictual one (as in the Brazilian case) or one of negotiation and confrontation (as in the Senegalese case). For policy makers and practitioners in

multilateral and bilateral development agencies, increasingly committed to promoting what is currently termed “good governance”, these cases raise issues of the uncomfortable interface between social movements and development cooperation programmes.

Nora McKeon is a policy advisor on civil society relations at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Michael Watts is Director of the Institute of International Relations and Professor of geography at the University of California. Wendy Wolford is Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography, University of North Carolina. This paper was prepared under the Institute’s project on *Civil Society Strategies and Movements for Rural Asset Redistribution and Improved Livelihoods*, which was carried out between 2000 and 2003. The project was led by K.B. Ghimire, with assistance from Anita Tombez.

Résumé

Dix ans après le livre d’Eric Hobsbawm qui annonçait “la fin de la paysannerie”, *The Age of Extremes*, les organisations rurales de producteurs sont à l’avant-garde de la mobilisation contre la mondialisation, le “mouvement des mouvements” altermondialistes. De la fondation du mouvement zapatiste dans le sud du Mexique au suicide d’un agriculteur de la République de Corée en passant par Cancun en 2003 lors de la réunion de l’Organisation mondiale du commerce, les organisations paysannes et celles des travailleurs ruraux sont les premières à dénoncer la radicalisation du système de marché mondial.

Les programmes d’ajustement structurel parrainés par le Fonds monétaire international ont entraîné une profonde restructuration des économies rurales locales et orienté la production vers un marché international des produits de base, historiquement dominé par les grands producteurs modernes (souvent fortement subventionnés) d’Amérique du Nord et d’Europe occidentale. Dans cette étude, Nora McKeon, Michael Watts et Wendy Wolford s’intéressent aux effets qu’ont eus la libéralisation et la dépendance par rapport au marché mondial sur la pauvreté, la faim et ce qu’Amartya Sen a appelé les “*entitlements*” (parfois traduits par “droits à l’échange”), soit les ressources politiques, sociales et économiques qui déterminent l’accès de chacun à l’alimentation et à ce qui lui est nécessaire pour vivre. S’appuyant sur l’œuvre de Sen, les auteurs se demandent en quoi les communautés et organisations paysannes peuvent jouer un rôle central en résistant aux effets (et à la nature) du marché et en les négociant. En études de cas, ils présentent deux organisations rurales de producteurs, l’une au Brésil et l’autre au Sénégal, pour montrer quel éclairage elles peuvent jeter sur le développement comme pourvoyeur de droits à l’échange et sur ce qu’Amartya Sen a lui-même appelé “le développement comme liberté”.

Les efforts déployés par des groupes et des collectivités pour former des associations et accroître la visibilité politique des producteurs ruraux peuvent apparaître comme une première tentative pour affronter les problèmes généraux de la distribution, d’une production conçue autrement, de la stabilité économique à long terme et de la citoyenneté. Les deux organisations présentées – le Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (CNCR) au Sénégal et le Mouvement des travailleurs ruraux sans terre (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST) au Brésil – ne sont pas représentatives de toute la gamme des associations, organisations et mouvements sociaux que l’on peut trouver dans les campagnes, mais la comparaison des deux permet d’étudier en profondeur la façon dont les producteurs ruraux peuvent mobiliser leurs collègues, mettre au point une méthodologie et une idéologie de l’action et bouleverser des programmes politiques et économiques considérés comme hégémoniques tant sur un plan interne qu’à l’étranger.

Le CNCR a été créé en 1993, en réaction à l’échec de la politique agricole du gouvernement et des coopératives rurales et à une économie libéralisée à la suite de l’ajustement structurel. En dix ans, il est parvenu à construire une solide plateforme nationale, à obtenir pour les agriculteurs et paysans la considération du gouvernement et une place à la table des négociations, qu’il a parfaitement su utiliser pour défendre les intérêts des petits producteurs.

Le MST est né en 1985, lorsque des millions de petits exploitants ont été expulsés de leurs terres par un programme autoritaire de modernisation agricole. Lorsque le gouvernement militaire a commencé à lâcher le pouvoir, les producteurs ruraux, dans tout le Brésil, ont profité de l'ouverture politique pour se regrouper sous la bannière de la réforme agraire et donner ainsi de la cohérence à leur discours. Peu à peu, le MST est devenu un acteur important dans la vie politique nationale, ayant transformé la bataille pour la réforme agraire en une bataille pour une démocratie de fait, pour l'égalité et la justice sociale.

Les expériences de ces organisations soulèvent diverses questions importantes qui touchent à la dynamique des associations paysannes, à la trajectoire du changement (et à ses liens avec les questions démocratiques), aux rapports entre la société civile et l'Etat et, aspect non négligeable, aux bases financières des formes associatives de développement (notamment au rôle de l'aide extérieure). De cette étude, on retiendra essentiellement que les droits à l'échange viennent souvent des capacités organisationnelles et politiques des collectivités et associations, et non des individus ou des ménages, et que la manière de revendiquer et de négocier ces droits dépend de l'histoire locale des relations entre l'Etat, la société civile et le marché. Selon les contextes, la relation avec l'Etat peut être essentiellement de l'ordre du conflit (comme dans le cas brésilien) ou de la négociation et de la confrontation (comme dans le cas sénégalais). Pour les responsables politiques et spécialistes des agences multilatérales et bilatérales de développement, qui ont de plus en plus à cœur d'encourager ce qu'on appelle actuellement la "bonne gouvernance", ces cas posent la question de l'incommode interface entre les mouvements sociaux et les programmes de coopération au développement.

Nora McKeon est conseillère en politiques à l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture (FAO), spécialisée dans les relations avec la société civile. Michael Watts est directeur de l'Institut des relations internationales et professeur de géographie à l'Université de Californie, Berkeley. Wendy Wolford est chargée de cours au Département de géographie de l'Université de Caroline du Nord à Chapel Hill. Cette étude s'inscrit dans le cadre du projet de l'Institut sur *Les stratégies et mouvements de la société civile en faveur de la redistribution des biens ruraux et d'une amélioration des moyens d'existence*, qui a été exécuté entre 2000 et 2003. Ce projet était dirigé par K.B. Ghimire, assisté d'Anita Tombez.

Resumen

Diez años después de que Eric Hobsbawm escribiera un obituario dedicado al "fin del campesinado" en su libro *The Age of Extremes*, las organizaciones de productores rurales están al frente de la movilización contra la mundialización—conocida como "el movimiento de los movimientos" antimundialización. Desde la formación de los zapatistas en el sur de México hasta el suicidio de un agricultor de la República de Corea en la reunión celebrada por la Organización Mundial del Comercio en Cancún, en 2003; las organizaciones de campesinos y trabajadores rurales han tomado la delantera en denunciar el hundimiento del sistema de mercado mundial.

Los programas de ajuste estructural patrocinados por el Fondo Monetario Internacional han reestructurado radicalmente las economías rurales locales y han orientado la producción hacia un mercado internacional de materias primas históricamente dominado por productores modernos a gran escala (con frecuencia beneficiarios de cuantiosas subvenciones) establecidos en América del Norte y Europa occidental. En este documento, Nora McKeon, Michael Watts y Wendy Wolford examinan las formas en que la liberalización y la dependencia del mercado mundial han tenido efectos en la pobreza, el hambre, y lo que Amartya Sen ha denominado "derechos"—los recursos políticos, sociales y económicos que condicionan el acceso de una persona a los alimentos y las necesidades fundamentales. Los autores se basan en la obra de Sen al analizar las formas en que las comunidades y organizaciones de campesinos pueden ser actores clave en la resistencia o la negociación de los efectos (y el carácter) del mercado. Presentan dos estudios de caso de organizaciones de productores rurales, establecidas en Brasil y Senegal, para ilustrar el modo en que pueden arrojar luz sobre el desarrollo como un derecho, y sobre lo que el propio Sen ha denominado "el desarrollo como libertad".

Los esfuerzos desplegados por grupos y comunidades para crear asociaciones y aumentar la influencia política de los productores rurales pueden considerarse un primer paso para abordar cuestiones más amplias de distribución, enfoques alternativos de la producción, estabilidad económica a largo plazo y ciudadanía. Las dos organizaciones presentadas, a saber, el Consejo Nacional de Concertación y de Cooperación Rural (Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux – CNCR), en Senegal, y el Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales sin Tierra (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), en Brasil, no representan la gran variedad de asociaciones, organizaciones y movimientos sociales existentes en las zonas rurales, pero su comparación permite examinar detenidamente las formas en que los productores rurales pueden movilizar a los participantes, elaborar una metodología y una ideología para la acción, y tener efectos en los programas políticos y económicos considerados hegemónicos tanto en el plano nacional como internacional.

El CNCR surgió en 1993, a consecuencia del fracaso de las políticas agrícolas y cooperativas rurales patrocinadas por el Estado, y de la liberalización de la economía en el marco del ajuste estructural. Durante diez años, el CNCR consiguió llevar a cabo un enérgico programa nacional, logrando el reconocimiento de los campesinos por parte del gobierno, y entablar negociaciones con este último, lo que le ha permitido defender los intereses de los pequeños productores.

El MST se creó en 1985, después de que, a raíz de un programa autoritario de modernización agrícola, se expulsara a millones de pequeños agricultores de sus tierras. Cuando el poder del gobierno militar empezó a debilitarse, los productores rurales de todo Brasil aprovecharon la oportunidad política y organizaron el proyecto discursivamente coherente de la reforma agraria. El MST se convirtió gradualmente en un actor importante en la política nacional, tras conseguir que la lucha por la reforma agraria llegara a ser una lucha por la democracia efectiva, la igualdad y la justicia social.

Las experiencias de estas organizaciones plantean una serie de cuestiones importantes sobre la dinámica de las asociaciones de campesinos, sobre las trayectorias del cambio (y sus relaciones con las cuestiones democráticas), sobre la conexión entre la sociedad civil y el Estado y, no menos importante, sobre los fundamentos fiscales (incluido el papel que desempeña la ayuda extranjera), en formas asociativas del desarrollo. Entre las lecciones más importantes, este documento nos enseña que los derechos muchas veces se cimientan en las capacidades políticas y de organización de las comunidades y asociaciones, y no de las personas o los hogares, y que las formas en que se movilizan y negocian los derechos dependen de la historia local de las relaciones entre el Estado, la sociedad civil y el mercado. En diferentes contextos, la relación con el Estado puede ser fundamentalmente polémica (como en el caso de Brasil) o estar basada en la negociación y la confrontación (como en el caso de Senegal). Para los responsables de formular y aplicar las políticas en los organismos de desarrollo bilaterales y multilaterales, cada vez más comprometidos con la promoción del “buen gobierno”, como se denomina actualmente, estos casos plantean cuestiones relativas a la tensa interrelación que existe entre los movimientos sociales y los programas de cooperación para el desarrollo.

Nora McKeon es Asesora Política sobre relaciones de la sociedad civil en la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Agricultura y la Alimentación (FAO); Michael Watts es Director del Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales y Profesor de Geografía de la Universidad de California, Berkeley, y Wendy Wolford es Profesora Asistente en el Departamento de Geografía de la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Chapel Hill. Este documento se preparó como parte del proyecto del Instituto sobre *Estrategias y movimientos de la sociedad civil para la redistribución y el mejoramiento de la vida rural*, el cual se llevó a cabo entre 2000 y 2003. El proyecto fue encabezado por K.B. Ghimire, con la asistencia de Anita Tombez.

I. Introduction

Associative democracy extends the principles of the democratic revolution of the eighteenth century to the 'private sphere' created by that revolution. The separation between public representative government and individual freedoms created the space for growth of corporate power, corporations being perceived as voluntary associations of citizens. It also extends the principles of representative democracy into state administration

Hirst (1997)

The process of “opening up” to the world market, says a character in William Morris’s novel *News from Nowhere*, “shows us at its worst the great vice of the nineteenth century, the use of hypocrisy and cant to evade the responsibility of vicarious ferocity”. In what must remain one of the great perorations on Europe’s civilizing mission, Morris excoriates the crude appetites of liberal capitalism with astonishing rhetorical force: the “homicidal madmen and desperados” in the service of the imperial project, the “ignorant adventurers” breaking up traditional society, the brute coercion of market creation (“the jaws of the ravening monster”), the robbery of exchange, the reckless pursuit of profit, and what Morris’s narrator calls “the slavery of hopeless toil”. It all makes Karl Polanyi’s (1944) sober judgment in *The Great Transformation* on the horrors of the self-regulating market—the “catastrophe of the native community” consequent upon the violent dissolution of its basic institutions, as he put it—appear positively rosy by comparison.

In the book *Late Victorian Holocausts* (2001), Mike Davis suggests that Morris and the radical critics of Pax Britannica might not have been radical enough. Davis has unleashed what is perhaps the most sustained broadside against the sinking wreck of Victorian capitalism in a century, and unearthed the horrifying costs—the holocausts—of market utopianism, and of what Beatrice Webb called the “employers’ gospel” underlying the Victorian imperial order. It is, of course, the figure of the English pauper, which looms large in Polanyi’s treatise on the antinomies of market and community in nineteenth century England. But projected onto the screen of the *fin de siècle* world market, the imperial correlate of the English pauper is, as Davis’s coruscating portrait depicts, the emaciated corpse of the Asian, Latin American and African peasant, 60 million of them, in fact, who perished in the “colonial genocide” between 1870 and 1906. Rarely was the violence of primitive accumulation granted such free reign as in the waning decades of the Victorian imperium. *Late Victorian Holocausts* is at once the veritable black book of liberal capitalism, a thundering indictment of the so-called golden age of imperialism, and a radical unmasking of the massive brutality which attended the making of global markets and the creation of a Third World proletariat.

It is the burden of *Late Victorian Holocausts* to show that the fate of tropical humanity between 1870 and 1914 was harnessed not to natural disasters or to the spectre of Malthusian grain shortage, but rather, as Alfred Russell Wallace put it (cited in Davis 2001:56), “to the most terrible failures of the century.” In Davis’ hands, this failure, the unnecessary deaths of millions, must be located at the ground zero of the late imperial order, namely a London-centred world economy. The famines occurred during what we now know to have been one of the most severe El Niño Southern Oscillation events of the last two centuries. The El Niño–provoked drought devastated China, Brazil, India and parts of Africa and proved to be one in a series of synchronous climatic perturbations between 1876 and 1902, which in turn set the environmental stage for a serial trio of global subsistence crises in 1876–1879, 1889–1891 and 1896–1902. Davis shows, however, that subsistence crises have social, not simply climatic, origins; they are best grasped through a sort of causal triangulation encompassing the depletion or loss of ecological entitlements, a radical deepening of household poverty and state decapacitation, each the precipitate of a lethal suturing of market utopianism to the neo-Darwinism of a new imperial order.¹

¹ Davis’s account of both the 1870s and 1890s famines is a blistering assault on the much-vaunted golden age of imperialism: district mortality rates of 30–40 per cent in southern India, traces of cannibalism and slavery in Africa and China, cholera epidemics in the wake of food shortage and the collapse of the ecological commons. Early in *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Davis highlights the “conjunctural” events such as cotton booms or trade recessions that both detonate, and give local shape to, subsistence crises. Later in the book he turns to what he calls “slower structural processes” such as commercialization of peasant production, colonial tax demands,

All of this may seem far removed from the subject of this paper, namely peasant associations, but it is in fact quite relevant for two reasons, one economic and the other political. First, the last two decades or more have seen a period of globalization and market deepening (under the hegemony of the United States, not Great Britain) comparable to the period described by Davis. Indeed, the neoliberal counter-revolution coupled to the programmes of stabilization and structural adjustment have once again raised problems of entitlement loss, market utopianism, the persistence of household poverty and the dangers of subsistence crises. The renewed interest in peasant associations cannot be grasped outside of this economic question. The second reason, to which Davis also devotes some attention in his book, is what one might call the Polanyian question, namely the ways in which communities, classes and social groupings resist the effects of commodification, in his case under the cloak of imperial rule. The forms of struggle were manifold, of course, but they raise interesting parallels with the growth and proliferation of civic groups, associations, non-state actors and the like—the subject of the UNRISD project on *Civil Society Strategies and Movements for Rural Asset Redistribution and Improved Livelihoods*—in the period of post-colonial development, and in the last two decades in particular.

This paper addresses the question of peasant associations and rural assets by focusing on two important case studies that are treated in depth, instances of what Clifford Geertz has called “thick description”. The question of how representative these two cases are of peasant associations in general is less relevant for our purposes than the need to use detailed cases as a way of raising analytical questions about mobilization, trajectory and impact. The paper examines two quite different sorts of peasant organizations from Africa (Senegal) and Latin America (Brazil). One, the Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (CNCR), grew from the failure of state-organized producer cooperatives and a state-controlled, commodity-oriented model of agrarian development that was torn asunder by, among other things, the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. The CNCR’s starting point was a critique of the dominant model by the peasant farmers who were suffering from its effects and a claim of their right to have a say in designing policies and programmes under structural adjustment. The CNCR’s originality and powers resided in its ability to federate and become a major voice at the level of national and subregional policy and governance, and to reaffirm the validity of a family-based agriculture and model of rural development. The other, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) emerged in the context of a post-military political opening in Brazil, and developed through the church and the organized left into a new sort of land-based popular movement. The MST was a local land-driven struggle, which grew into a national movement and spearheaded a wide-ranging drive for democratization and rethinking of governance. Each of the two movements has “scaled up” in the context of creating a particular type of political identity, a series of networks and coalitions, a particular frame or vision for the project, and a trajectory which moved from production and access to resources narrowly understood to wider concerns of democracy, empowerment and governance. The experiences of each raise a number of important questions about the dynamics of peasant associations, trajectories of change (and their relations to democratic questions), the connection between civil society and state, and, not least, the fiscal foundations of (including the role of foreign assistance in) associational forms of development.

The first part of this paper provides a brief analysis of the relations between peasant associations and development theory, particularly since 1950, and focuses on one important body of contemporary theory (the entitlements work of Amartya Sen) as a way of showing how conventional thinking can be enriched and deepened by addressing (at the theoretical level) peasant associations. Part II then turns to peasant associations in practice by examining in detail two cases studies from Africa and Latin America. Part III provides an analysis of the comparative dynamics of the two cases, focusing on five important dimensions: framing/subject formation, relations to the state, networking/alliances, trajectories and relations to donors. Part IV offers a brief discussion of the relevance of this paper for policy and donors.

the impact of the Gold Standard, the decapacitation of local systems of resiliency (for example, indigenous irrigation practices) and the corrosive effects of informal colonialism.

II. Peasant Associations in Development Theory

In normative terms, the history of development theory can be thought of as three long lines or lineages of discourse in which the state (hierarchies), the market (exchange transactions) or civil society (associations, identity, positionality) takes analytical and practical pride of place. Each of these lineages is long and complex, and the nature of the theorizing within the tradition tends to be simultaneously shaped by internal (theoretical) debates and problems that the theory confronts and generates, and external (political and economic) problems and realities that the theory must confront or explain. State-centred theorizing is often associated with the political Left and with Marxian or social democratic politics, while market theories are associated with various liberal or neoliberal strategies. Civil society is much more difficult to locate both politically and theoretically since its invocation of the powers of association, networks and civic forms can encompass quite different political and ideological positions; it has been “dusted off and deodorized to fit a variety of ideological, intellectual and practical needs” as White (1996:178) puts it. Peasant associations sit uneasily in both the civil society and state categories. Insofar as they help their members to undertake productive and economic activities, there is also an ample grey area between peasant associations and the market category. Independent peasant associations would be exemplary cases of civil society, but it is not unusual to find such associations tightly linked to both state and foreign or local donors.

Association as a conceptual or descriptive term can, of course, cover a multitude of sins and there will inevitably be some slippage between association, movement, non-governmental organization (NGO) and so on. For our purposes, we see associations as *civic organizations* that are part of what Uphoff (1993) calls the “collective action sector” (as distinct from the private and public sectors narrowly construed). Ghimire (2001) makes the important point that there is a basic distinction between associations that represent landlord, agrarian elite and mercantile interests—though their populist character may include other constituencies as the new peasant movement literature on India has shown—and movements of poor peasants, tenants and workers.² This raises two important issues. The first is that civil associations in general—and agrarian/rural associations in particular—can be of rather differing “community” forms. The second is the “boundary layer”—the frontier—between civic associations, and the public and the private. It was the porosity of this boundary that distinguished Antonio Gramsci’s analysis, and there is a need for any assessment of civic and associational politics in the arena of development to be attentive to the ways in which the non-state and non-market sector is deeply imbricated in public and private realms. One strand of thinking about the developmental potential of associations—and this has been the hallmark of some of the long history of theorizing about civil society—is to appreciate how their capacities are liberated and constrained by these sort of “transboundary” issues, what Evans (1995) has referred to as the synergistic effects of public/civic institutions.

The history of civil society theorizing—that is to say, granting a priority to the role of civic organizations and associations in the development process—encompasses a wide swath of both theory and practice from the early proto-socialist experiments in nineteenth century Europe to Spanish artisan cooperatives to Russian agrarian movements and up to more recent concerns with social capital and the role of NGOs. In the recent past, invoking civil society (by conventional development organizations, notably the World Bank) has become a way of further delegitimizing the state sector and of addressing what is now in development parlance called “governance”. There are all manner of simplifications in this sort of analysis that presumes that a flowering of associations must contribute to democracy, or that the proliferation of NGOs represents an alternative realm of freedom or economic governance in opposition to the state or market. The myopia surrounding much of Robert Putnam’s social capital debate is a case in point.

² As Foucault noted some years ago, civil society should not be seen as an intrinsically progressive counterpoint to the coercion of the state, “good living, warm and whole” (1982:225). Associationalism can breed all manner of unfreedom, coercion and class power as much as democratic impulses toward equity and justice.

This is not the place to review the debates over civil society—this has been done well in the UNRISD papers by Webster (2004) and Bush (2004). We rather wish to emphasize the following points, which pertain to our discussion of peasant associations as one expression of associational life within civil society.

First, one important originary line of thinking sees civil society as emerging within capitalism as a *reaction* to the costs of unfettered accumulation (this was central to Adam Smith's notion of civil society). In this sense, civil society cannot be productively discussed outside of political economy.

Second, as we have noted, the innovation of Gramsci's work on civil society was to explore the relations and boundaries between civil society and political economy, especially the state. Civil society could not exist without the state, and in his work the extent to which one invaded the other was key in establishing the means by which hegemony was created (that is to say, how rulers ruled and how a ruling bloc maintained its powers and attempted to manufacture a sort of political consent). In this tradition, civil society was seen less as a sphere to facilitate development than as one in which the character of rule and authority is determined and fought over. The significance is that the relations between states, markets and associations must be carefully determined to establish their "developmental" potential.

And third, civil society has often been associated with populism and populist discourses (this is as true for Russian agrarianists in the 1890s as for the World Bank social capitalists of today). Associations represent the powers of the people (in our epoch this is attached to the lexicon of empowerment and participation). As Gramsci understood it, populism is a contradictory set of ideas by which a particular subject is integrated into a ruling block. Left-leaning radical populisms may be different from authoritarian iterations (for example, Margaret Thatcher), but the *recycling* of populisms in development discourse reveals the complexity of associational ideas in the history of development. In short, we would endorse the view of Gibbon (2001:432), who says that civil society comprises

the pluralities and identities that are formed and propagated in and through the expansion of generalised commodity production, both spontaneously and as this is guided by the state...there is no one to one relation between civil society and organizational life...organizational life takes a series of wholly different forms. At one end of the spectrum can be found egoistic, privatised, exclusive and corporate forms...[which tend to preserve identities and the public private divide]. ... At the other end of the continuum can be found social, public and sometimes emancipatory forms that transcend received identities and erase the distinction between private and public existence.

Focusing more narrowly on the question of peasant associations and development theory, there is a long line of thinking, particularly since the work of the Russian economist, A.V. Chayanov, with his neopopulist vision of cooperatives (built around commodities) operating in some way in conjunction with the state.³ This Chayanovian tradition is, of course, alive and well, but in the last 50 years there has been an explosion of interest in other forms of peasant associations, from group farming in Asia, to common property institutions, to community-based resource management, to low-income credit schemes and so on. Within the circumference of actually existing socialism, there were also a number of creative experiments with relatively autonomous and independent peasant collectivization and cooperation—often in the small spaces outside of the state and at moments when the state had not compelled a particular model of socialist agrarian development. The state retreat in the last two to three decades expanded the space not only for peasant associations, but also for the proliferation of an overwhelming variety of NGOs, which now embrace everything from credit to the rights of indigenous peoples. Across this vast field, there is a huge variation and heterogeneity in the autonomy, relationship to the state, forms of political and organizational practice and so on.

³ The lineage of small farmer/peasant associations obviously predates the great Russian economist, but its history is beyond the scope of this paper. Chayanov is important, however, and marks a watershed because he provided a rigorous theoretical basis for, and a practical experience with, peasant cooperation. Gavin Kitching's (1980) book on populism reviews its earlier history.

It is impossible to review these experiences, which are as complex as they are varied. However, we have made two somewhat heroic assumptions in exploring the two case studies of peasant associations presented in this paper.

The first is that we believe (like Webster 2004) that many of what now pass as peasant associations must be located on a larger landscape of new rural social movements that are less concerned with defending ways of life or blocking the intrusions of the state than “delineat[ing] new political and cultural spaces” (Webster 2004:2). Petras (1998:10) has talked of a new generation of peasant leaders with “a sophisticated understanding of international and national politics and a profound commitment to creating a politically educated set of cadres”. In this view the state is seen as fragmented and fissured and can be contested in a variety of ways associated with a gradual and uneven deepening of democratization and extension of citizenship rights. As Webster puts it (2004:2):

The objectives of social movements are to change policies, their implementation and their outcomes, rather than to demand the retreat of state... . The idyll of a past way of life without incursions by external authorities is no longer at the romanticized core of the associated discourse. ... [R]ural social movements...have become increasingly disaggregated, more specific and more nuanced in their objectives, in the means they utilize and in the alliances of interests they attract.

And second, our view of civil society leads us to believe that peasant associations in the contemporary period must be seen in relation to the capitalist divisions of labour (the specifics of the agrarian question in the twenty-first century) associated with the neoliberal restructuring of the post-1980 period; it alerts us to the complex ways in which such associations are shaped by the state, foreign donors and local forms of class interest and accumulation.

The conceptual importance of associations—and peasant associations in particular—in relation to development discourse can be illustrated by engaging with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s corpus of work, including his book *Development as Freedom* (1999) on entitlements and capabilities. What we are highlighting here is the relation between individual and collective strategies for constructing what Sen calls “entitlement arrangements”. Sen’s analysis seems out of tune with the timbre of hard-core methodological individualism, but it also stands at an angle to institutionalist economics. The Sen lexicon is saturated with terms like public action, social welfare, inequality, capabilities and moral philosophy—all of which are somewhat foreign to cognoscenti of the economics profession. Sen begins with the individual endowment which is mapped into a bundle of entitlements, the latter understood as “the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command” through the use of various *legal* channels of acquirement open to someone of his/her position. Such entitlement bundles confer particular capabilities, which ultimately underlie well-being. The basic unit of analysis is the individual person, his/her endowment and entitlement arrangements, though there is considerable ambiguity and slippage in Sen’s analysis over the aggregation of such individuals into social assemblages such as households or communities or classes. Sen’s theory turns on the microeconomics of survival, and on the means by which such individual capabilities fail, producing as a consequence “excess” individual deaths through generalized individual entitlement failure.

Sen remains rooted, however, in a somewhat narrow and individualistic model of human behaviour, and his identification of some proximate causes of hunger does not theorize the means by which class-based entitlements arise. Sen offers a *proximate* sort of causal analysis predicated on what immediate or conjunctural forces might shift such forms of access and control, and permits a social mapping of such shifts to understand *who* dies or starves (say artisanal craftsmen versus peasants) and *why*. While Sen says that entitlements are in reality a “network of entitlement relations” (1981:159) that depend on economic class structure and a mode of production, he pays scant attention to the political economy of entitlement creation and destruction. Sen’s microeconomics can, it seems to us, be deepened by recognizing how civil

society—including what one might call associational power—is deeply constitutive of the entitlement question.

Geographer Charles Gore has noted that “command over food depends upon something more than legal rights” (1993:433). Indeed, what the geographic work on famine and food systems has shown is precisely the panoply of forms of social interaction—the complex patterns of obligation and duty within communities and households, and collectivities—by which command over food is effected, for example redistributive institutions, forms of charity, gift-giving and so on, and the multiple forms of livelihood strategy through which command of food is achieved.⁴ In part, such rules and norms may be part of a moral economy (Watts 1983), in part they may be forms of sociability which reside within civil and associational life but lie outside of the law narrowly construed. The legal bias in *Poverty and Famines* (Sen 1981) fails to accommodate the obvious fact that illegal acts (food theft by a peasant from a landlord’s granary) may be a form of food security. More precisely, Sen’s definition fails to give equal weight to *socially determined entitlements* (a moral economy, indigenous security institutions), *non-legal entitlements* (food riots, demonstrations, theft) and *non-entitlement transfers* (charity). Mike Davis, whose work was discussed in the introduction to this paper, picks up on all of these elements: the redistributive state capable of mobilizing its vast granaries and embarking upon massive infrastructural improvements, such as during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) in China; the popular protests against rising food prices and the hoarding activities of grain merchants; and the flexible forms of drought-response and agro-ecology capable of ameliorating the worst consequences of climatic variability.

To include the above under the rubric of entitlements—“extended entitlements” is the term Gore (1993) deploys—highlights a rather different way of thinking about entitlements. First, entitlements are socially constructed (not just individually conferred); they are forms of social process and a type of representation. Second, like all forms of representation, entitlements are complex congeries of cultural, institutional and political practice that are unstable: that is to say, they are both constituted and reproduced through conflict, negotiation and struggle (the *locus maxima* of associational life). And third, “social” entitlements confirms Sen’s unelaborated observation, quoted above, that the relations between people and food must be grasped as a “network of entitlement relations” (emphasis added). Food security or famine proneness are the products of historically specific *networks of social entitlements*.

Using the work of de Gaay Fortmann (1990), one can conceive of a simple mapping of the sources of these extended entitlements along the following four dimensions.

1. *Institutions*: affiliation to semi-autonomous, rule-making entities in which social networks and positionality determine whether, and what sorts of, entitlements are available; peasant associations fit here.
2. *Direct access*: direct access to forms of legally derived access which turn on property and contract (in Sen’s work, ownership and property rights, exchange of labour); membership in a peasant association could influence access, but not always within the bounds of legality, as we shall see in the Brazil case.
3. *State*: forms of instrumental state law (in Sen, social welfare) which identify need and categories of the poor⁵ and which in turn are rooted in citizenship rights as a bedrock of the modern nation-state; bringing collective influence to bear on the state is an objective of both of the peasant movements examined in this paper.
4. *Global legal order*: forms of humanitarian assistance grounded in human rights discourse and general principles of freedom, equality and solidarity for all people as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—see Alston (1994) on the international “right to food”; here too in both of our case studies the

⁴ Richards (1986); Swift (1993); Webb and von Braun (1994).

⁵ Compare Fraser’s (1989) discussion of discourses of need or dependency in welfare in the United States.

movements concerned have appealed to international solidarity and rights discourse to legitimize their claims.

The strength, depth and density of the entitlements in each of the four realms will of course vary (one could depict this graphically in terms of the size or shape of the space of each broad category of entitlement), and this differing patterning of entitlements shapes what one might call the architecture of the “food security system”. Put simply, the geometry of the network for a rural worker in Kerala in south India will look very different from that of a northern Nigerian peasant. In the former, a regulated agrarian labour market and forms of institutionalized bargaining between state and landlords provide a wage sensitive to price increases; there is in addition a credible and relatively accountable public distribution system, which operates effectively in rural areas; and, not least, there are a number of regional and local civic institutions which provide credit, food for work and other assistance (see Mooij 1998; Heller 1999). For the Nigerian peasant, state-derived entitlements are almost non-existent, direct access to land is compromised by the small size of land holdings incapable of providing self-sufficiency in staple foods, and local food security turns, in some degree, on his/her position with respect to local forms of support through lineages, extended families, village redistributive offices, Islamic alms, and the village moral economy (Watts 1983).

The concept of endowments thus embraces not simply assets (land, labour) but *citizenship* (the right to state support), *local group membership* (civic identity in village or community association), and *universal human rights*, as well as the actual transformative process by which assets, citizenship, group membership and other claims are rendered into effective (that is, meaningful) entitlement bundles. Put differently, actual state support depends on accountability and transparency (what Sen [1999] simply refers to as democracy). A functioning moral economy rests upon the forms of governance—what others have called social capital (see Evans 1996)—within self-organizing heterarchies. This is precisely what peasant associations, among other forms of networked entitlements, stand for.

III. Peasant Associations in Practice: A Comparison of Cases from Senegal and Brazil

The purpose of this section of the paper is to examine two cases of peasant associations—one drawn from Senegal, the other from Brazil—to highlight something of their genesis, their politics, their dynamics, their relations to forms of local and foreign funding, and their potential to defend their members’ interests in a context of neoliberal development practice. The two cases have been selected deliberately, as a study in contrasts. One emerged in the context of a powerful newly industrializing state, and a legacy of massive landholding inequality and military authoritarianism; the other from an archetypical African “peasant export economy” of the sort described by Samir Amin three decades ago, with a postcolonial history of some sort of democratic politics, and a rather different status and position in the world economy. We make no claims about their representativeness of peasant associations in general. Our purpose here, in the manner of the book *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdams et al. 2001), is rather to see, through a detailed examination of two cases, the operation of some similar dynamic patterns and processes, and in so doing, to shed light on the interface between peasant associations and contemporary development practice.

The Farmers' Movement and Peasant Associations in Senegal⁶

One night in January 1993, just a few weeks before vociferously contested national elections were to take place, towns and villages throughout Senegal were papered with posters announcing a national forum, *What Future for Senegal's Peasants?*, a politically delicate topic since 70 per cent of the electorate were rural dwellers drawing their livelihoods from agriculture. Much to the surprise of the president's office, which had ignored the organizers' invitations for weeks, the poster asserted that the president himself would open the forum. When representatives of the farmers' federation responsible for the event were asked about this, they replied by taking rhetoric at face value and turning it to their advantage, a twist that has come to characterize them: "We represent the majority of the Senegalese people. It would be inappropriate for us to meet in the absence of the Father of the Republic."

The forum was opened by the prime minister on 18 January 1993, at the president's instructions. It sparked the creation of a unified platform of rural federations—the CNCR—that came to impose itself, in the space of a few years, as an unavoidable interlocutor of government and major donors in policy and programme negotiations. In the 10 years following its establishment, the CNCR accumulated a remarkable list of accomplishments. It bound a disparate series of rural federations into a national platform. It overcame a century of oblivion and won recognition for peasant farmers by the government and development partners, and a place at the negotiating table. It used this position to achieve a real impact on policies and programmes affecting rural development. In a political context marked by the rule of a single party, it weathered the *alternance*⁷ and demonstrated that its role was an institutional one, not dependent on party relations. It spearheaded the construction of a regional peasant movement and made its presence felt in key global forums. This is not to say, of course, that the record was unmitigatedly positive, as the CNCR itself is the first to point out (CNCR 2000). But it is an extremely impressive record and probably unique in sub-Saharan Africa.

Peasants and the state: Colonial and postcolonial roots

Before the groundnut came, every village was self-sustaining and managed its own affairs. The inhabitants cultivated millet, sorghum, maize, sweet potatoes and cotton, which they needed for their own use, and the millet stores were open to all during the pre-harvest period (Gaye 1982:4). This changed when farmers began cultivating the groundnut as a cash crop.

We grow lots of groundnuts, but little millet, niebe and manioc, which used to nourish us better. ... We sell groundnuts to have money, but we never have enough. ... We are slaves of money and the outside world. ... Everyone fends for themselves. The head of the family doesn't dare open his mouth.⁸

Any understanding of peasant associations in Senegal must start from the broader colonial and post-colonial political economy. The pre-capitalist character of pre-colonial Senegal is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief account of the transformative effect of the French colonial project is indispensable to situate the emergence of peasant associations in the late twentieth century. The impact of colonialism on West African peasant societies, in its simplest terms, was to usurp these societies' control of their environment and their economy and, more intimately, to transform their very sense of their own identity.⁹ Unlike the transition from a pre-capitalist to

⁶ This case study by Nora McKeon is based on three ingredients. The first is over two decades of familiarity with the rural areas and the peasant associations of Senegal, numerous trips to the country, participation in assemblies and workshops including many of those evoked in this study, visits to local groups and farmers' fields, interaction with leaders at international level, and networking with organizations and individuals supporting the movement. The second is a close reading of the literature, above all documents produced by the farmers' organizations themselves over the past decade. The third is a series of individual and group interviews, conducted during a mission undertaken for the FAO in January 2002, with CNCR members and respondents from other categories of organizations with which the council interacts at national level: government, private sector, local authorities, NGOs and development partners. The effort made here was to record and to "cross" different viewpoints regarding the trajectory of the CNCR, its achievements, its weak points and the challenges that face it. Quotes from these interviews in the following text are referenced in footnotes.

⁷ The presidential elections of May 2000, in which Abdoulaye Wade ousted Abdou Diouf of the Parti socialiste, which had governed Senegal since independence.

⁸ ENDA (1985:50). All translations from texts in French and Portuguese are by the authors unless specified otherwise.

⁹ See for, example, Copans (1975); Dupriez (1980); Franke and Chasin (1980); Watts (1983).

a capitalist society in the West, the deep changes which took place in Africa were not the product of an internal dynamic of capitalist accumulation. The colonial state and merchant capital combined to expand the class prerogatives of some local ruling elites, and to deepen commodification in a way that extracted peasant surplus through complex mercantile systems, often deeply imbricated with religious networks.

Cash cropping of groundnuts was introduced into Senegal in 1841. By 1865 most of the area of modern Senegal was under French control. Groundnut production rose from 45,000 tons in 1884–1885 to 600,000 tons in 1936–1937 (Franke and Chasin 1980:76). The advent of cash cropping disrupted both the ecological and the socioeconomic equilibrium of West Africa. Monoculture consumed soil fertility and provoked erosion of the fields, previously protected by traditional practices like intercropping and minimum tillage, which European agronomists condemned as messy, lazy and primitive. The pressure of cash cropping, coupled with population increase, provoked a curtailing of fallow periods and subverted the complementary activities of cultivation and livestock.

The major inducement brandished by colonial administrations to convince or coerce farmers to grow cash crops was the introduction of taxation and monetization. The monetary demand exercised on peasant producers in the form of taxes and the prices charged for manufactured goods and staples outweighed the monetary value of their agricultural produce,¹⁰ and the prices they received were subject to unpredictable fluctuations. Precariousness had previously been a function of natural hazards which farmers could foresee to a large degree, and against which they had developed an arsenal of defence. Now it depended on the interests of the mother countries and on market mechanisms, which totally escaped their ability to strategize.

The unequal exchange and the advance credit system practiced by merchants and money-lenders provoked a no-exit spiral of debt in rural areas, prevented farmers from accumulating capital to invest in increasing productivity and exploded the extended family unit. The family head found it increasingly difficult to fulfil his responsibilities toward the members of his entourage, and the depleted collective grain reserves no longer sufficed to meet the collective needs. The position of women deteriorated. Their workload was intensified while the cash revenues passed into the hands of the men, introducing a dualism between “modern” cash and “invisible” domestic subsistence sectors that persists today. Colonialism and the cash nexus also generated new socioeconomic inequalities, which were no longer subject to control by stable norms and values, and a class of administrators who owed their position to the favour they culled with the foreigners rather than the consensus of their people. Even when colonial administrators were obliged to recognize the multiplication of food shortages and famines, their reaction was not to buttress local coping mechanisms but to introduce “effective modern” grain stores (Copans 1975:12–13) and to organize the rural population into *Sociétés indigènes de prévoyance* that were highly dependent on the administrative authorities.

In a very pervasive way, the colonial experience discredited African people’s knowledge, skill, culture and values. As concluded at a workshop on Tradition and Modernism, which brought together some of the most prestigious West African intellectuals shortly after independence: “We have tried objectively to see what our traditional values, as we call them, could contribute to our economic advancement. Not much, to tell the truth. It is from Europe that we have borrowed those values which can lead to progress” (*Rencontres internationales de Bouaké* 1965).

The wave of independence which swept across the African continent in the early 1960s was saturated with hope that the end of colonialism would signal significant changes in the conditions of Africans. In practice, however, the Senegalese state—like others on the continent—was weak and more attentive to the threat of uprisings by discontented urban dwellers than to the interests of a dispersed rural population. Producer prices were kept low to hold food costs down in the cities, while the state continued to siphon off profits from the rural sector through

¹⁰ See Dupriez (1980) for extremely interesting calculations in this regard.

mechanisms such as marketing boards. The towering Marketing Board building in Abidjan, whose elevators shoot officials up to their comfortable twentieth-floor offices—when the electricity is functioning—is a symbolic monument to the way in which West African peasants have funded a style of development whose fruits they are the last to taste. The new states' margin of manoeuvre to create a policy environment conducive to healthy rural development was limited, in any event, by their dependence on the former mother countries for investments and subsidies to their running budget, their rapidly growing foreign debts, and the unfavourable and fluctuating terms of trade they encountered on the international market. The pressure to organize the rural world—in function of export crops—was strong.

The history of agricultural and rural development policy in Senegal since independence can be divided into two major blocks: two decades of determined but increasingly vacillating state interventionism, followed by two decades of initially reluctant but increasingly thorough liberalization under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.¹¹ One of the first issues to which the newly independent government turned its attention was the organization of rural producers. Behind the agricultural cooperatives decree of 1959 was the vision of a prosperous mechanized agriculture, which would “raise the productivity of the African peasant, liberating him from the bondage which is so out of place in the twentieth century”.¹² The 800 cooperatives established with the flourish of a pen—which the farmers were totally unprepared to manage—assumed responsibility for marketing the country's major cash crop. They were intended to replace one of the most visible signs of the colonial economy: the foreign traders who circulated throughout the countryside purchasing groundnuts and selling their merchandise to the villagers in return. The cooperatives were to be flanked by the Animation rurale service of the Promotion humaine, established at the same time, which was expected to promote “the growth of an entire network of development cells destined to become the cadre of the local population's economic, social, cultural and political activity.”¹³ The Promotion humaine, however, was phased out following Prime Minister Mamadou Dia's ouster in 1962. Standing alone, the cooperatives functioned as a system imposed on rural producers rather than as an instrument of their self-expression. Managed by government technicians and largely controlled by local elites affiliated with the ruling party, they were hardly designed to foster participation and oversight by the rural producers who were obliged to be their members.

In 1961 a four-year development plan was presented for negotiation to Senegal's major partners—France and the European Union at the time—who declined to consider support for it as a package. The programmes that did receive funding were those aimed at promoting the production and marketing of single export crops through the establishment of specialized parastatal regional development structures: the Société d'aménagement et d'exploitation du Delta (SAED) for rice production in the Senegal River valley in the north; the Société d'assistance technique (SATEC) and the Société de développement et de vulgarisation agricole (SODEVA) in the “groundnut basin” in the centre; the Société pour le développement des fibres et textiles (SODEFITEX) for cotton in the east; and the Société pour la mise en valeur de la Casamance (SOMIVAC) for the rice of the South. Whatever the crop, these societies shared a disregard for the polyvalent nature of peasant agriculture, for the socioeconomic logic of the extended family unit, for the knowledge and skills of the farmers, and for the impact of monoculture on the environment. They also shared an extension approach based on armies of *encadreurs* hired to convince or oblige farmers to adopt the “modern” technical packages they recommended. The system was undergirded by the Office national de la commercialisation et de l'assistance au développement (ONCAD), which supervised the cooperatives, marketed the crops, and provided farmers with inputs and equipment on a credit basis (with subsidies for fertilizer use in the groundnut basin): the “agricultural programme” on which Senegalese farmers came to depend. The impact of the development approach that characterized this period has been described by the farmers' movement in the following

¹¹ On the evolution of official policies and the farmers' movement in Senegal see, among others, Lecomte (2001); Barbadette (2001); McKeon (1999); Jacob and Lavigne Delville (1994).

¹² Mamadou Dia, 1957, quoted in Lecomte (2001).

¹³ Ben Mady Cisse, quoted in Lecomte (2001:13).

terms: “All told, the peasant didn’t even need to think anymore. The state took care of everything, convinced as it was that only a centralized state planning system could ensure the rapid development of the country” (FONGS 1991:2).

The genesis and federation of autonomous peasant associations

By the early 1970s the system was in crisis, provoked by a decline in export commodity prices on the world market, the weight of the state structures, the progressive indebtedness of the farmers and the severe droughts that ravaged the Sahel in 1973–1974. A quantitative drop in marketed production combined with a reduction in producer prices drove farmers’ revenues down dramatically. The fall in the price of groundnuts, the primary source of agricultural monetary revenue, was caused by the termination of French subsidies on this product following France’s entry into the Common Market, the general drop in prices on the international market due to the increased productivity of competing products like soya, and the escalating costs of intermediaries along the commodity chain (Duruflé 1995:77–78).

In this context, the first autonomous peasant associations began to spring up in various regions of Senegal, as rural people broke with a habit of fatalism to seek solutions to problems with which the all-provident state was impotent or unwilling to deal.¹⁴ In some cases, the initiative came from young people who had travelled outside of the village and returned home with ideas and energy. The membership was dominantly women and young men, the “powerless” in the traditional structures, and the associations had to negotiate their space with the elders of the village, on the margins of the main agricultural activities of the family units. They also had to strike an uneasy peace with the local administrators, who saw them as subversive antagonists of the official cooperative structures. In some cases, the leaders of the associations could call on the support of political parties,¹⁵ but such relations were not without their problematic aspects.

By 1974 the associations were exchanging visits and meeting among themselves, initially brought together by their common external partners. In 1976, at the initiative of a Senegalese NGO whose president, Diedhou Famara, had been an official in the extension service, 12 associations formed a national federation, which obtained legal status in 1978 as the *Fédération des ONG sénégalaises* (FONGS), a title imposed by the government to distinguish them from the official cooperatives.¹⁶ Famara has described what lay behind this initiative in the following terms:

I felt there was a threat to the peasant associations which were springing up throughout the rural areas. The state could perfectly well play them off against each other, in the context of its policy of domestication of the rural world. So we engaged in a process of reflection to counteract these tendencies of the state (Diedhiou 1998:64).¹⁷

The federation’s objectives were to reinforce solidarity among peasant associations; meet its members’ training and communication needs; support their development initiatives; and serve as a facilitator between its members and the outside world (FONGS 1991:4–5).

Where did the fledgling peasant movement receive its funding in these early years? In most cases the individual groups received small amounts of assistance from European non-governmental and church-linked organizations, whose presence in the Sahel was stimulated by the drought of

¹⁴ The names these groups were given by their organizers were often expressive of their determination to overcome a difficult situation: “Hope is for tomorrow” or “Together we will grow”.

¹⁵ A multiparty system was introduced in Senegal in 1974.

¹⁶ Famara’s organization, *Maisons familiales rurales* (MFR)—the Senegalese version of a French association—was a contact point for advice to new groups and also helped direct the first European NGOs on the scene to initiatives they might support. ENDA Tiers-Monde (Environnement et développement du tiers-monde), headquartered in Dakar, was another early advisor. The Centre d’études économiques et sociales de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CESAO), a subregional training centre in Burkina Faso founded by the White Fathers, provided training for a whole generation of association leaders.

¹⁷ At the same time, it should be emphasized that Senegal’s relatively good record of guaranteeing civic liberties has a lot to do with the fact that the peasant movement developed earlier and more strongly here than in other West African countries.

1973–1974.¹⁸ The international NGO, Six-S, was without a doubt the most original and significant support mechanism.¹⁹ This international NGO, established in 1977 with funding from several European NGOs and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, was designed specifically to support emerging village-based groups in West Africa and encourage them to federate.

The Six-S strategy has been described in these terms:

On the one hand, it was the epoch in which development assistance was channelled only through enormous projects; whereas the village groups grew from day to day, by undertaking small and extremely variable actions. On the other hand, democracy was not exactly the main preoccupation of the government leaders and agencies: an organization which revealed its desire to help autonomous groups unite would have been unacceptable to the authorities (Gueneau and Lecomte 1998:75).

In consequence, Six-S operated unobtrusively by providing village groups with a flexible and renewable fund, co-financed and managed by them. From 1977 to 1992, Six-S supported thousands of village group activities, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, and helped to establish 73 unions of groups and two federations, the Federation of Naam Groups in Burkina Faso and FONGS in Senegal.²⁰ Six-S was also a source of discreet and respectful technical assistance, and its general assemblies offered an important occasion for farmer leaders in the subregion to meet and strategize.

Structural adjustment and the evolution of FONGS

For practically a decade FONGS limited itself to operating training and exchange programmes for its members. The onset of structural adjustment and state retrenchment, coupled with the drought of 1984–1985, opened a new phase in its history.²¹ By the end of the 1970s, the government had been driven close to bankruptcy by the declining income from groundnut exports, the high costs of the agricultural support policy and the growing external debt burden. In 1979 the bankrupt ONCAD was abolished,²² and in 1983 the government signed an adjustment credit with the IMF. The Nouvelle politique agricole (NPA) of 1984 obliged the state to withdraw from the interventionist role it had played heretofore. The parastatal regional development societies were to be dismantled, extension and other services reduced, prices liberalized, subsidies for input purchase reduced or eliminated, credit reorganized and downscaled. Finally, peasant farmers were to be “responsibilized” and their organizations—along with the private sector—were expected to take over the functions and services that the state was abandoning. One of the measures taken in the context of liberalization was the establishment of a new category of legally recognized organizations, the Groupement d’intérêt économique (Economic Interest Group, or GIE), whereby as few as two individuals could obtain credit for a profit-making activity. GIEs began to federate nationally in the late 1980s along commodity lines, adding another component to the national panorama of rural producers’ organizations. The stated objectives of the NPA were laudable: remunerative producer prices, reinforced producers’ organizations, liberalization and rationalization of the commodity chains, natural resource protection (Duruflé 1995:79). Their attainment, however, was hardly guaranteed, and in the mean-

¹⁸ See Siré Soumaré (2001) for a detailed autobiographical description of a group of young Malians and Senegalese workers supported by a French association that was among the earliest sources of small amounts of funding for endogenous initiatives, Association champenoise de coopération inter régionale (ACCIR).

¹⁹ *Se servir de la saison sèche en savane et au Sahel* (Taking advantage of the dry season in the savana and the Sahel), co-founded by Bernard Lecomte and the Burkinabe farmer leader, Bernard Ledea Ouedraogo. The decision to focus activities on the long dry season was dictated in part by a desire to take advantage of an unexploited opportunity and to fight against rural exodus, but also to avoid conflict with the dominant agricultural calendar and, in consequence, the village and administrative authorities. (Unpublished interview with B. Lecomte conducted by the author in the context of this case study, 6 April 2001.)

²⁰ Six-S funded the FONGS training programme, run by Mamadou Cissokho, who was to emerge as the undisputed leader of the West African peasant movement.

²¹ For an account of the dynamics of peasant action in the words of village associations belonging to four of the FONGS regional members, see ENDA (1985). See also ENDA (1988); Descendre (1990); CIRAD (1993).

²² Leaving behind it a debt of some 100 billion FCFA. See Utting and Jaubert (1998:33).

time this profound change was seen as a dramatic abandonment by the farmers, who had come to depend on the omnipresent state and the omnicomprehensive agriculture programme.

Stimulated by this situation, FONGS began to undertake more ambitious national activities such as cereal banks, “triangular” exchanges between village associations in areas of surplus and deficit production, and support to members to establish savings and credit programmes. In 1988, drawing on members’ savings and support from Northern partners,²³ FONGS became a shareholder of Caisse nationale de crédit agricole du Sénégal (CNCAS) which had been created under the NPA. In retrospect, FONGS has attributed this intensification of initiatives to a series of factors. State retrenchment had created problems no single association could handle on its own. The drought of 1984–1985 had stimulated increased solidarity between associations in better- and worse-off areas. Northern NGOs were pressuring FONGS to operate as an intermediary structure, processing the thousands of individual microprojects that were landing on donors’ desks (FONGS 1991:5–6). The result was a rapid period of growth as FONGS took on a series of functions for which it was not necessarily prepared and which escaped the control of its member associations. A crisis of confidence broke out in 1989. It led FONGS to engage in a self-evaluation, which paid off in a strengthened and refocused organization. In 1991, at a roundtable between FONGS and its partners, key challenges facing the movement in a rapidly evolving environment were identified: mastering the economic sphere; access to land and protection of natural resources; the issue of power, both internal leadership and participation in the political life of the country; maintaining social and cultural values and developing new forms of solidarity; building partnerships with outside actors; and developing capacity to formulate and defend proposals (FONGS 1991:37–41). The importance of gaining access to the resources of national rural development programmes of which peasants were the intended beneficiaries was highlighted for the first time (FONGS 1991:48–49). These points, as we will see, lay behind the creation of the CNCR two years later and helped to determine its agenda for action.

The roundtable led to the establishment of a consortium of donors who agreed to fund an overall package of FONGS activities.²⁴ This introduced a new phase and modality in the movement’s relations with donors, with the obvious advantages of being able to count on medium-term support for a global strategy, and increased confidence and transparency among partners (see GRAD 1998).

The establishment and development of the CNCR

The timing was opportune. The World Bank/IMF-promoted Agricultural Structural Adjustment Program (ASAP) was in the offing in Senegal, as it was in countries throughout the region, and farmers were nowhere near the negotiating table. FONGS had expanded by then to include 24 regionally based associations throughout the country, totalling over 2,000 village groups with an active membership of about 400,000. But the government rejected its requests to take part in the ASAP discussions on the grounds that it was not the only national federation representing rural people.

In any event, FONGS and its members realized that, in order to advance, they needed to develop their own understanding of the crisis of Senegalese agriculture and make alternative proposals. FONGS, in keeping with its strategy of creating alliances, requested the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to extend to the farmers’ movement the kind of technical assistance it normally reserved for member states (McKeon 1993). The FAO agreed and helped FONGS to translate the language of structural adjustment into terms comprehensible to farmers, and to carry out a reflection on peasant reactions to the NPA (von der Weid 1992).

²³ The development cooperation programmes of the Canadian and Swiss governments, the Ford Foundation, the Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), SOS-Faim and Recherches et applications de financements alternatifs au développement (RAFAD).

²⁴ SOS-Faim (Belgium), Cordinamento di Iniziative Popolari di Solidarieta Int. (CIPSI, Italy), Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungsschilfe (EZE, Germany), NOVIB (Netherlands), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the European Commission through its NGO co-funding window.

The results of this process were presented at the national forum (mentioned at the beginning of this section on Senegal), the first time that the peasant movement had called representatives of government services and donors to a public debate. FONGS was the convener, but it invited all the other national federations that could claim to represent a portion of the rural population. In the farmers' analysis as presented at the forum, the NPA and the drought had simply exposed the failure of the agricultural development model applied in Senegal since independence, which had been maintained under artificial conditions of state services and subsidies that were now being withdrawn. Although FONGS did not have a full-fledged substitute proposal, its member groups were experimenting with elements of an alternative involving diversification of crops and greater integration between agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry. They were aiming at an integrated approach which would make economic, social and environmental sense at the level of the household, the village and the agro-ecological zone, in contrast to the prevailing tendency to think in terms of commodities. The membership of FONGS did not oppose the state retrenchment that accompanied structural adjustment. But it claimed the right to participate in the redefinition of policies and programmes, and the support it needed to take on new functions (FONGS 1993).

The farmers were right in accusing the NPA of not fulfilling its promises. Rural revenues had continued to drop, from a base of 22,000 FCFA in 1960 to 10,000 FCFA in 1985 and further still to 8,000 FCFA in 1990 (Kasse 1996:31). The rates and procedures of the CNCAS were out of phase with the realities of small producers. The state's overly abrupt retrenchment had resulted in a dramatic decline in the use of inputs, fertilizer in particular. Above all, the political and economic interests which benefited from the status quo opposed extremely powerful resistance to any real change in the control of the revenues generated by the commodity chains.

In political and institutional terms, the forum's main agenda was to promote the establishment of a platform of national federations of rural people.²⁵ Over the weeks following the forum, assemblies were held in all regions, and intensive negotiations took place between the FONGS leaders and the other federations. On 17 March 1993, the CNCR was established at Thiès by seven national federations of farmers, pastoralists, fishworkers, horticulturists and rural women. They were joined in 1995 by two federations of forestry workers, bringing total membership up to an estimated three million.²⁶ The CNCR's stated aims at the outset were to promote dialogue and exchange of experience among its members, encourage the pooling of resources and skills, and speak for the peasant movement vis-à-vis the state and its donor partners.

The CNCR membership was a very mixed bag of state-established cooperatives, national federations of GIEs, and the autonomous associations of FONGS. Among them, FONGS was the only organization with sufficient vision and village-level roots to play a federating role at the national level. The decision to establish a platform including all national federations that could claim to represent some portion of the rural population—irrespective of their organizational legitimacy and the nature and interests of their leadership—was certainly in part a tactical one, aimed at overcoming government resistance to allowing peasants to be represented in the ASAP negotiations. But it was very likely a strategic choice as well. It took into account the fact that the membership of the various national federations was overlapping and that there were different interests at play even on the part of the same farmers.²⁷ It recognized that—in the view of those leaders who championed the establishment of the CNCR—the stakes could not be higher. The future of Senegal's agriculture, its villages, its rural society and culture, risked being irremediably compromised by what they considered to be a short-sighted policy of agricultural "modernization" and "professionalization".

²⁵ As CNCR President Mamadou Cissokho recalled in his opening speech to the Second CNCR Congress in June 2001: "We were menaced, discouraged, divided, awaiting miraculous solutions from outside our families and our organizations. The CNCR was our only chance, our project based on our ideas, our experiences, our strengths and our weaknesses. We had no other option: our backs were to the wall."

²⁶ Out of a total population of about eight million. Estimating membership, however, is a difficult exercise since very few of the federations have a documented dues-paying membership.

²⁷ Farmers might well belong to a cooperative to obtain credit and inputs, to a member association of FONGS to seek a community space relatively autonomous of traditional hierarchies and state control, and to a GIE to promote a small-scale enterprise of some kind.

The strategic choice, in this perspective, was to privilege obtaining a place at the negotiating table in order to influence policy decisions and gain access to national programmes. The expectation was that the nascent platform's advocacy action could generate sufficient recognition by government and development partners, and sufficient awareness and mobilization at the base, to enable Senegal's farmers themselves to play a major role in progressively renovating their representational and support structures – and Senegalese society – from the local level up.

This strategy was not universally accepted even among the leadership of FONGS, some of whom felt that the Union des coopératives agricoles du Sénégal (UNCAS) was unredeemable and that the new platform would be better off without it. As for the other member federations of the CNCR, the unifying factors were universal respect for FONGS President Mamadou Cissokho, and the hope that an alliance with FONGS would open up channels of funding. The only exception was UNCAS, whose management was able to perpetuate itself²⁸ thanks to the cut-off it received on the groundnut crop and which was destined to disappear sooner or later with privatization. They tagged along, hugging the past and their privileges to their chest, out of fear of isolation.

Almost three years elapsed from the Declaration of Thiès to the constituent assembly of the CNCR in December 1995. A slow, methodological approach was necessary in order to build a basis of consensus among the disparate members of the council, to demonstrate that membership brought benefits and to move the more recalcitrant along in the direction of renewal and democratization of their organizations. It was also needed to build a solid negotiation agenda, to construct alliances with other sociopolitical actors, and to avoid antagonizing a suspicious state.²⁹

From the outset, emphasis was placed on a self-critical reappropriation of the peasant farmers' identity and responsibilities. One of the CNCR's first published documents stated the case strongly: "We rural people must recognize our share of responsibility for the situation in which Senegal finds itself. We have not repaid the debts we have contracted. We have lacked determination in our productive activities, thanks to an attitude of abusive dependence on state assistance" (CNCR 1993). Decades of colonial and post-independence history had robbed Senegalese peasants of the control of their destiny. To recuperate it required rebuilding their self-confidence and self-esteem for their role in society, their culture, traditions and religion, and their work. This was the first, most basic, building block of the CNCR project.

The council commissioned studies and organized forums on issues of concern to rural producers: credit and savings; training, research and extension; subsidies; and the constitution of a fund to provide for calamities affecting production. Increasingly, the focus was on the basic production unit in Senegal, the family farm, and the logic of its socioeconomy, ignored for decades both by the commodity-oriented official agricultural services and programmes and by the autonomous associations of FONGS, which had grown up on the margins of mainstream agricultural production (CNCR 1994). The vision of a family-based agriculture able to hold its own in a context of liberalization was the CNCR's second building block. Gradually the council built consensus among its members around a lobbying platform aimed at creating a favourable policy environment for family farming and directing resources and appropriate services to producers.³⁰ This vision also facilitated the establishment of alliances with other national institutions and with an important political category, the local elected representatives.³¹

²⁸ UNCAS had not held an electoral assembly since 1983.

²⁹ From the outset, the CNCR has emphasized recognition of the state as "the only institution authorized to draw up a development policy for the agricultural sector" (Declaration of Thiès).

³⁰ An FAO capacity-building programme helped the CNCR to develop its first comprehensive agricultural policy proposal in the document titled *For a Productive and Sustainable Family-Based Agriculture in a Liberalized Economy*, which was debated at a national seminar in October 1999. Proposals have served as a platform for CNCR input into subsequent policy and programme negotiations both nationally and subregionally.

³¹ Senegal was undergoing a rapid and thorough process of decentralization in this period. In 1990, important management authority was transferred to the *Communautés rurales* (which had existed since 1972). A revision of the Constitution had been voted in 1994, creating local "collectivities", followed by a law in 1996 detailing their attributions and regional, municipal and local elections.

A meeting held in Kaolack in December 1995 brought the elected presidents of the Communautés rurales together with representatives of the CNCR federations and government services to agree on a basic philosophy of local development and define modalities of dialogue and partnership among local actors. The relationship between the farmers' movement and political processes was clearly a significant and delicate question. The CNCR itself has carefully avoided identification with any political party. Many farmer leaders, however, are involved individually in regional and local politics. The local authorities wield decision-making power in a number of domains of importance to the farmers' movement, from natural resource management to the preparation of local development plans. The CNCR has been concerned from the outset to increase the weight of the "development" agendas of the local authorities relative to the purely "political" agendas, and to avoid manipulation of the farmers' movement. The Kaolack forum provided the basis for a joint approach to government by these two actors in negotiations relevant to local development.

Negotiating with the state

At the same time, the CNCR was thrown into a series of negotiations on policies and programmes, stretching its extremely limited human resources to keep up with the rapid pace of change.³² ASAP negotiations, in which the CNCR was invited to participate, led to the publication of the *Lettre de politique de développement agricole* in 1994³³ and a multiplication of technical committees and policy forums in which the CNCR was called upon to voice the rural producers' views or to backstop member federations in their lobbying efforts.³⁴ The establishment in 1995 of the Association sénégalaise pour la promotion du développement à la base (ASPRODEB), from which the grassroots member groups of practically all of the CNCR federations benefited, was another important achievement. For the first time, the government agreed to retrocede public funds to a mechanism in which the decision-making authority on how to allocate them was vested with the representatives of the intended beneficiaries, the CNCR and the Association des présidents des conseils ruraux (APCR). In December 1995, the CNCR Constituent Assembly consolidated this hectic activity. It adopted a four-pronged priority action programme aimed at achieving 25 per cent self-funding by 1998; institutional reinforcement of the CNCR and its member federations; an effective communication programme linking the centre and the base; and support to investment and agricultural development through ASPRODEB, alternative approaches to credit and the establishment of a calamity fund (CNCR 1995).

By 1996, the CNCR was deeply engaged in the negotiation of the World Bank-promoted Agricultural Structural Investment Program (ASIP), which was intended to provide support for the implementation of the ASAP and to guide investment in the agricultural sector generally. Despite the rhetoric of stakeholder participation that accompanied the liberalization process, Senegal was one of the very few sub-Saharan African countries in which farmers' organizations were seriously involved in determining the content of the ASIP.³⁵ The negotiation process was interrupted in June 1996, however, when the CNCR announced a boycott of all official negotiations. The walkout was prompted by the government's failure to respect its commitment to take action, in time for the coming agricultural season, to equip farmers with the tools, inputs and credit they needed to block the continued deterioration of production. The World Bank refrained from continuing negotiations in the absence of the CNCR. The stalemate lasted for four months, until the situation was brought to the attention of the president. A meeting held on 27 February 1997 between 150 CNCR representatives and the president, surrounded by all of his ministers, resulted in important gains: agricultural credit interest rates were reduced from 12.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent per annum, agricultural inputs and equipment were exonerated from

³² For a detailed account of the negotiation processes in which the CNCR has been involved, and an assessment of its impact, see McKeon (2002).

³³ The CNCR's mastery of the art of negotiating agricultural policy was still limited in 1994–1995, yet it successfully advocated recognition of peasants as actors and indispensable participants in all negotiations regarding the rural milieu and commitment to reinforcing their capacity.

³⁴ In 1994, for example, the National Federation of Fishermen's Economic Interest Groups, with CNCR support, accompanied the government delegation in its negotiation on fishing agreements with the European Union for the first time and gained access to the resulting counterpart funds.

³⁵ As noted at the Second International Workshop on ASIPs held in Malawi in November 1997.

import taxes, a five-year moratorium on farmers' debts was declared, and regular meetings between the farmers' organizations and the minister of agriculture, the prime minister and the president were instituted.

Peace was made and the negotiations started again. At the heart of the ASIP was the *Projet des services agricoles et des organisations de producteurs (PSAOP)*, intended to redesign the entire institutional map of the rural sector. The CNCR invested a great deal of its efforts and human resources into ensuring that this programme reflected the farmers' interests, with considerable success. The PSAOP vision reads as though it emerged from a CNCR pen: strong and effective producer organizations; extension services accountable to producers and responsive to their demands through a new agency³⁶ in which their organizations are destined to become majority shareholders and decision makers; and a separation of research funding from research execution with final decisions regarding allocations to be taken by a management committee with a majority representation of research users.³⁷ One component of the PSAOP, concerning support to producers' organizations (POs)³⁸ was directly inspired by a FONGS programme which had abandoned traditional extension and "training of trainers" approaches in favour of a more democratic management of knowledge based on identifying peasant associations' needs and capacities and organizing direct exchanges among them. The CNCR won acceptance of the idea that it was up to the producers themselves to identify their capacity-building needs and to select the forms and the service providers whereby these needs would be met, with emphasis on farmer-to-farmer exchange. A fund was established to finance training and technical innovation activities proposed by POs. Committees were set up at local and regional levels, bringing together representatives from local and regional POs,³⁹ to agree on common priorities and review and select PO project proposals. The initial phase of execution of the programme, however, highlighted the difficulties to be expected when an effort is made to mainstream a participatory programme of this nature. The programme's work plan and budget paid inadequate attention to careful selection and preparation of the facilitators, on whose skill and motivation the process depends, and dedicated insufficient resources for strategic activities like communication and monitoring. The procedures and the rhythm of planning and execution militated against "losing time" to make sure that the local community had really developed ownership of the structures and initiatives proposed by the programme. We will return to these problems and the challenges they pose in the concluding section of this paper.

The ASIP was the most exacting national negotiation in which the CNCR has taken part over the past five years, but by no means the only one. Others included the Special Programme for Food Security initiated by FAO, the World Bank-promoted Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the government's operational strategy and action plan for the agricultural sector, and the current reform of the land tenure system. In all cases, the CNCR has succeeded in making its mark on the final product in defence of the interests of peasant producers and family-based farming.⁴⁰ The CNCR is also helping its member federations to negotiate the delicate process of privatization of the commodity chains currently under way.⁴¹ The council's Second Congress, held in June 2001, distinguished clearly between the peasant movement's political mission, assigned to the CNCR, and its economic mission, for which ASPRODEB has responsibility. Among the 10 new members admitted, several are experimenting with ways in which producer organizations can gain greater control of the commodity chain and retain a higher proportion of the added value. A major

³⁶ Agence nationale de conseil agricole et rurale (ANCAR), in which FONGS has invested, becoming a shareholder on behalf of the CNCR.

³⁷ Fonds national de recherche agricole et agroalimentaire (FNRAA), whose president is a farmer leader.

³⁸ \$20 million over 10 years.

³⁹ Irrespective of whether or not they are members of a CNCR federation.

⁴⁰ The final version of the operational strategy and action plan for the agricultural sector, adopted in January 2002, incorporates the essential aspects of the CNCR policy proposals: recognition that Senegalese agriculture is dominated by family farming, which provides sustenance for 60 per cent of the population and occupies 95 per cent of the land devoted to agriculture; criticism of the concentration of public investment on adopting technology for capital-intensive irrigation, which excludes the vast majority of small farmers; positing as the basic strategic objective of agricultural development that of "promoting the progressive evolution of family farming towards a more competitive, entrepreneurial form while maintaining the specificities and the richness of the family model so that this evolution can profit the greatest possible number of rural people".

⁴¹ See McKeon (2002). On the particularly complex question of the groundnut chain, see Freund et al. (1997).

challenge in this connection is that of making the link between the economic and the social spheres, between the resource-generation capacity of the commodity chains, the global strategies of family farms, and social values like solidarity that the movement champions.

The regional question⁴²

At the same time as it was building its presence on the national scene, the CNCR was playing a leadership role on the regional scene. The West African states began to take regional integration more seriously during the 1990s under the stimulus of globalization. Increasingly, decisions that strongly conditioned national agricultural and rural development options were being taken at supranational levels. As the CNCR saw it, responsibility and accountability were moving in an upward spiral, and it was important to seek institutional interfaces with the various inter-governmental forums in which important negotiations were taking place.

The Comité inter Etats de lutte contre la sécheresse au Sahel (CILSS) and its Northern supporters grouped in the Club du Sahel offered the farmers' movement an opportunity to act regionally at a conference in Praia, Cape Verde, in 1994, where governments were requested to include representatives of civil society organizations in their delegations. The Senegalese farmers' organization representative, the co-ordinator of the CNCR, took advantage of the occasion to propose the establishment of a Platform of Sahelian Peasant Organizations.

After a series of preparatory encounters, the platform was formally constituted in 1996. It was recognized by the CILSS Council of Ministers and received institutional support through the CILSS secretariat. Its objectives were to bring farmers' voices to bear on policy decisions at regional and international levels and to facilitate the growth of autonomous, representative national platforms in countries in which their emergence was less favoured than in Senegal. The platform represented Sahelian farmers at international forums dealing with issues like food security, the impact of development assistance to the Sahel, the revision of the Lomé Agreement and the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The platform's autonomy, however, was limited by its close ties to the CILSS. At the same time, the Union économique et monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) was emerging as a strategic interface. Created in 1994 by eight states with a common currency administered by the Central Bank of West African States, the UEMOA was moving ahead toward the establishment of a common external tariff in 2000 and the negotiation of a common agricultural policy. The promoters of the Platform of Sahelian Peasant Organizations began to reach out to farmers' organizations in non-Sahelian UEMOA countries like Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. The first major activity of this larger grouping was a workshop in September 1999 aimed at enhancing farmers' involvement in the formulation of ASIPs and of the common agricultural policy (*Organisations paysannes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* 1999). This was an opportunity for the CNCR to share its experience with farmers' movements in other countries where the ASIP negotiations were getting under way.

The process of exchange and reflection that began with the preparation of this workshop culminated in an assembly in Benin in July 2000, which saw the creation of a 10-country⁴³ network, the Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA).⁴⁴ Membership in the network is reserved for a single platform per country, which is expected to group all of the existing national federations. The aim, as in the case of the CNCR in Senegal, is not to annul the diverse tendencies and histories of these federations—a strategy which would hardly be likely to succeed in any event—but rather to constitute a forum where

⁴² See Lavergin (1997).

⁴³ Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

⁴⁴ Its declared objectives are to promote the development of productive and sustainable peasant family-based agriculture; organize training and information programmes and exchange of experience among network members; support the growth of strong peasant/producer organization structures in each country; promote solidarity among member organizations; represent its members at regional and international levels; and promote dialogue with similar networks in other parts of the world. See Réseau des organisations paysannes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (2000).

they can take part in a dialogue on common problems and agree on positions that can be negotiated in a unitary fashion with the state and other interlocutors.

In the months following its establishment, seeking emancipation from donor conditionalities, the network tried to establish a regional fund for capacity building to be managed by ROPPA itself.⁴⁵ UEMOA common agricultural policy was its other immediate target. A series of national seminars culminated in a regional workshop in October 2001 on Common Agricultural Policy and Family Farms within the UEMOA Area. The memorandum adopted at this workshop (ROPPA 2001) is a lucid denunciation of the unequal competition to which African agriculture is subjected by the exports of industrialized countries, which benefit from subsidies denied to African farmers. Two months later it was presented to the Summit of UEMOA Heads of State by a ROPPA delegation backed up by 500 farmers from all countries in the subregion. Taken by surprise, the heads of state received the delegation and incorporated the measures advocated by ROPPA, including that of placing family-based agriculture at the heart of the policy, in the agricultural policy document they signed on 19 December 2001.⁴⁶ ROPPA is currently seeking to ensure that small producers' interests are reflected in the agricultural component of the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the trade agreement which the European Union is gearing up to negotiate with West African states.

An assessment⁴⁷

Ten years after its creation, the CNCR has an impressive, if mixed, record of progress toward its objectives. It has achieved its first and most basic goal of attaining political recognition of peasant farmers as indispensable interlocutors in the formulation of national policies and programmes. Up until 1993, policies that impacted profoundly on the agrarian economy and rural communities were promulgated without any participation by rural people. Since 1993 no national⁴⁸ negotiation process has been undertaken without the involvement of the CNCR. This achievement, by no means self-evident, has been the result of a carefully constructed strategy including unambiguous recognition of the state's sovereignty,⁴⁹ maintenance of a unified platform despite the diverse nature of its membership,⁵⁰ construction of alliances with a range of actors at different levels, and disciplined use of protest and social mobilization on key occasions.⁵¹

The CNCR has used its place at the negotiating table effectively. It has influenced agricultural and rural development policies and programmes in line with the interests of family farms and peasant agriculture. The path from the *Lettre de politique de développement agricole* of 1994 to the ROPPA memorandum of October 2001 on the UEMOA agricultural policy traces the farmers' movement's progress in conceptualizing strengthened family farming as the basis for agricultural development and rural society in West Africa. The CNCR and ROPPA have succeeded in gaining government acceptance of this concept and their in-principle agreement that putting it into action will require commitment to policies which protect local production from unfair competition, develop local and regional markets, defend family farmers' access to land and other productive resources, and help them to secure added value from their production. The CNCR has had an undeniable influence on the shape that major initiatives like the ASIP have taken in Senegal and has shared the fruits of its experience with other West African farmers' platforms through ROPPA.

⁴⁵ The proposal was launched at a high-level Club du Sahel meeting in Yverdon, Switzerland, in September 1999, on the theme of Transferring Responsibility for Development to Sahelians. The fund has since been established and subscribed to by several Club du Sahel members.

⁴⁶ *Acte additionnel No 03/2001 portant adoption de la politique agricole de l'UEMOA*. ROPPA is now joining with other African farmers' organizations to demand the right for African farmers to contribute to the design of NEPAD's agricultural component.

⁴⁷ This assessment draws on the results of the interviews with a broad range of respondents from within and outside the peasant movement carried out in January 2002 in the context of a mission for FAO. Much of this material appears in McKeon (2002).

⁴⁸ Or, increasingly, subregional, thanks to ROPPA.

⁴⁹ "The CNCR's principle of recognizing the political mission of the State has enabled the State to develop a positive complicity with it", stated a representative of the prime minister's office in an interview in January 2002 (McKeon 2002:29).

⁵⁰ "The CNCR has managed to keep us together, and when we are together we intimidate the authorities", as a leader of a member federation put it. (Unpublished interview with CNCR members conducted by the author in January 2002.)

⁵¹ The 1993 forum, the boycott in 1996 and the demonstration at the UEMOA summit in 2001 are prime examples.

Work toward the long-term objective of building an effective and credible peasant movement is still very much in progress. Examining this issue requires distinguishing among three concepts often referred to in discussions of this nature: representativeness, legitimacy and accountability. It is also necessary to differentiate between the formal base of the CNCR, constituted by its member federations, and its social or ideal base, the rural people of Senegal who make up the majority of the country's population and are largely dependent on small-scale agriculture and related activities. As we have seen at the outset of this section on the Senegal case study, the relationship between the social base and the formal base is far from neat. Many rural people are formally members of more than one CNCR federation, many others are not members of any, and the meaning of membership itself is elusive.

Applying the Western concept of representativeness to the CNCR would imply that the leaders of its member federations should be elected through transparent processes involving the majority of the rural population of Senegal. This is clearly not the case. But the appropriateness of a concept of this nature in a non-Western culture and a situation in which even the national government has difficulties in making it work is doubtful.⁵² In any event, the CNCR is making efforts to improve the representativeness of its member federations by insisting that elections be held to renew their governing bodies and by helping to resolve anomalies in leadership.

As far as legitimacy is concerned, two factors which attest to the CNCR's credentials have already been cited: its success in creating a single platform recognized by all national farmers' organizations and by the state and development partners, and its capacity for social mobilization. Another is the fact that the CNCR has, by all accounts, acted in the interests of peasant farmers even though it has not systematically consulted nor explicitly received its mandate from them. On other common criteria of legitimacy, however, the CNCR and its member federations score less well. Only a very few of the federations can claim documented, dues-paying membership and regular means of communication with members. Both a cause and a result of this situation is the fact that these federations do not now provide services that could induce resource-poor farmers to invest time and money in membership. The CNCR has had difficulties in accessing resources from development partners to support the restructuring and strengthening of the federations.

The CNCR has at least four different lines of accountability to respect. It is accountable to the government, since it has received formal recognition from the state, and to the development partners who provide support for its activities. It is obviously accountable to its member federations. And it is ultimately accountable to the rural people of Senegal. This form is the most difficult to put into operation. The chain of accountability to the base should pass through the CNCR's member federations but, as we have seen, very few federations have structured membership and communication chains. Again, the resources required to address a universally acknowledged weakness have not been forthcoming from donors.

This study opened with the hypothesis that the strategic choice that lay behind the CNCR's establishment, and its activities during its first years, was to privilege political recognition. The aim was to create the conditions whereby Senegal's farmers themselves could play a major role in progressively renovating their representational and support structures from the local level up. The first part of this agenda has been attained. Now the CNCR needs to exploit the policy and programme victories that have been won in the interests of peasant farmers. The consensus that has been formed around the centrality of family-based farming for the future of Senegalese agriculture and rural society has to be translated into action by improving infrastructure and amenities in rural areas, supporting the evolving strategies of family farms and training the farmers of the future. This is no place for slogans. It requires going beyond generic discussions to formulate a modulated approach that takes into account the ecological and socioeconomic diversity of family-based peasant farming and involves the farm families themselves in the strategizing. This process is key to building accountability to and control by rural people from

⁵² We might note that even some Western governments are invested with their authority by elections in which little over 50 per cent of the potential voters participate. On the general subject of applying the concept of democracy to Senegal, see Schaffer (1998).

the base up. The battles that the CNCR has waged thus far have tended to appear far-off and abstract to farmers—with some exceptions, like that of the reduction of interest rates for agricultural credit, which responded to immediately felt interests. The more policies are translated into concrete stakes, activities and services of direct concern to farming families, the more the idea of responsible membership in peasant organizations will take on meaning.

The CNCR leadership knows where it wants to go. It has identified many of the instruments needed to get there: a strengthened and decentralized economic arm in the form of effective services provided by ASPRODEB to family farms and local associations; democratized and renovated member federations dealing with the various commodity chains and transversal issues nationally; inclusive peasant association structures at the level of rural communities and regions acting as the socioeconomic interlocutor of the elected local authorities; and effective communications linking all levels. The CNCR leadership is working in these directions, but it is dependent on the government and development partners for the resources to make it happen.

The impact of aid on the evolution of the farmers' movement in Senegal

Throughout the developing world, the impact of structural adjustment and international trade agreements has taken over primacy in conditioning the situation of rural producers. In Africa, however, the aid system—linked to the external debt burden it has generated—continues today to weigh heavily. Two major periods need to be distinguished in analysing this relationship: pre- and post-structural adjustment. Until the mid-1980s, official multilateral and bilateral aid was directed almost exclusively to the state and to the parastatal societies whose operations we examined above. As one of the most acute observers of the aid process in the Sahel has remarked, it is just as important to look at what aid has *not* financed as at what it has: in the case of Senegal, for example, the *animation rurale* programme just after independence, which was intended to promote an aware and responsible peasantry.⁵³ From the mid-1970s on, support for the growth of autonomous farmers' associations came, as we have seen, from a certain number of Northern NGOs and one official bilateral cooperation programme, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and from some national and regional NGOs (the Centre d'études économiques et sociales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest/CESAO, Maisons Familiales and ENDA-Tiers Monde, in particular). It was, in other words, decidedly marginal with regard to mainstream overseas development assistance.

Although this form of support made an essential contribution to the emergence of autonomous village-based associations in the Sahel, it suffered from a number of defects, which the Six-S initiative described above set out to overcome. These defects were summarized in the following terms in a synthesis of African evaluations of NGO aid to grassroots initiatives in five countries during the drought of the mid-1980s:

Donor preferences distort the *content* of projects. Intermediaries and peasant associations present projects in conformity with the donors' desires rather than with locally perceived needs. The *modalities* of project formulation and funding are also criticized. Grassroots movements get pushed into taking decisions quickly in order to meet donors' deadlines, forcing decisions to be made at the top rather than at the base. Deeper still, it is the very *concept* of project aid, which is questioned. African peasants have reacted to a difficult situation by coming together to reflect on their problems and evolve alternative solutions. Initially, project aid stimulates this process by providing means the associations need to put their ideas into action. Soon, however, people learn to create groups to receive aid, which becomes an end in itself rather than a means to attain self-determined objectives. ... The net result is to reinforce the idea that salvation comes from outside (McKeon 1988).

No wonder that FONGS placed such emphasis on developing a programmatic consortium relationship with its outside supporters and a concept of partnership designed to help associations

⁵³ Unpublished interview with Bernard Lecomte conducted by the author in the context of this case study, 6 April 2001.

master the aid process. Not an easy task, as a whole range of interests began to organize themselves to “capture” part of the value of the aid process⁵⁴ and as donors and projects began increasingly to seek to “root” their activities at the local level by creating village-based groups *ex novo*. Paradoxically, the mode of “participatory approaches” to development programmes, which has gained almost universal credence over the past decade, could be considered in some ways more detrimental to the autonomy of farmers’ associations than the benign neglect of the past.

At the same time, from the early 1990s, several factors were combining to multiply the variety of aid actors interested in the farmers’ movement and to scale the level of interest up from the local to the national: structural adjustment policies; liberalization and privatization accompanied by greater recognition of the roles of producers’ organizations and other non-state actors; and donor concern for “good governance”, decentralization and the institutional dimensions of development generally. During this period, NGOs have been joined by major multilateral agencies (such as the World Bank, the European Union, the FAO), a larger number of bilateral cooperation programmes stimulated in particular by the Club du Sahel, and regional intergovernmental structures (such as the CILSS, the UEMOA and the Banque Ouest Africaine de développement/BOAD). The question of how the rural world should be organized has become an important item on the mainstream aid agenda from economic, political and social points of view.

The influence of the aid system on the peasant movement is, of course, not only exercised through programmes specifically targeted to farmers’ organizations. The development of rural peoples’ movements is very strongly affected by the overall policy framework regarding the agricultural sector and issues such as decentralization, land tenure and trade. It is also conditioned by the operations of a wide range of national programmes and projects dealing with various aspects of rural development. And in Africa, in particular, policy frameworks as well as national programmes are subject to donor conditionalities. We have examined in earlier sections the ways in which the CNCR and ROPPA are attempting to influence decision making in these spheres.

Donors’ concern with state retrenchment, good governance and grassroots participation has not automatically inclined them to provide support for the self-determined growth of structured farmers’ movements. Instead of working directly with emerging farmers’ federations, many development partners have tended to privilege funding of NGOs on the assumption that they constitute the most effective channel to reach the grassroots and promote local people-oriented development. With some notable exceptions, the standard model of rural development project documents in West Africa in the 1990s tended to divide the scene into community-based organizations (CBOs) on the one hand, and national NGOs on the other, the latter expected to discern villagers’ needs through participatory assessments and to meet them with appropriate services in dialogue with newly constituted local authorities, often with the support of more experienced international NGOs.⁵⁵ What this vision of participatory institutional development ignores, intentionally or not, is the process whereby rural people build up their own structures beyond the local level and their capacity to identify and defend their own interests. Many NGOs—but not all—are doing their best to perpetuate the CBO/NGO model because of its obvious advantages in terms of facilitating their access to funds and visibility. But it is increasingly contested by organizations like the CNCR and ROPPA, which are demanding farmers’ right to speak and act for themselves, and are pushing for a clearer definition of identities and responsibilities within the vague universe of “civil society”.

The past few years have, however, also seen a growth of programmes aimed specifically at strengthening farmers’ organizations. The tendency of many aid agencies⁵⁶ is to emphasize support for the economic and technical functions of these organizations.

⁵⁴ See Gueneau and Lecomte (1998:157–178) and Bierschenk et al. (2000).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Gubbels (1993).

⁵⁶ For example, the World Bank and United Nations agencies, and those of the European Union, Canada, France and the United States.

The reasoning behind this approach is that the legitimacy of producers' organizations...is based on their ability to provide their members with technical and economic services, that progress in the technical area in practice emancipates their members, and that economic success naturally leads to a stronger position for farmers and their participation in policy-making, and finally an improvement in governance. Its limitation is that until the farmers' movements reach 'political maturity' it allows other players free room to take key decisions that will in the long term influence the future of rural people (Snrech 1999).

This approach is most often centred on a single commodity and is justified in terms of the need to "professionalize" farmers' organizations and "modernize" agriculture. The alternative focus emphasizes support for the political and representational functions of POs. While not excluding interest for the economic and technical functions of farmers' organizations, this approach tends to privilege the capacities of a traditionally underrepresented social category to formulate and defend the interests of farming communities in a global manner, including social, cultural and environmental aspects as well as technical and economic ones. It is promoted above all by a number of NGOs and by some bilateral development cooperation programmes like those of Switzerland, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, which have traditionally been concerned with social, environmental and political issues of development. This approach, too, is not without limitations:

it may disconnect PO leaders from the grassroots, because they are dealing with macro issues that seem distant from members' day-to-day problems; there is a risk of high dependence on external funding...which might end up limiting the autonomy of the PO; finally there is a real risk of such movements being taken over for political purposes (Snrech 1999:9-10).

Behind this divergence lurks the most insidious threat to the growth of an autonomous farmers' movement, that of interference by the aid system in determining the form and evolution of the movement rather than facilitating a process whereby the movement can determine its own trajectory, in interaction with the state and other national and regional actors. The World Bank is perhaps the strongest player in this game through the ASIPs being formulated throughout West Africa, with their attention to privatizing rural services and stipulating how farmers should organize to participate in the new institutional scene. In Senegal, as we have seen, the CNCR has been able to play a strong role in the negotiations. But this example was reported to be unique in West Africa at the workshop organized by peasant organizations in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in September 1999 to review their experience regarding the ASIPs (Organisations paysannes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest 1999).

The World Bank, however, is not the only player, and the lack of coordination among different donors pulling in different directions is part of the problem. The European Union is investing heavily in programmes for structuring rural organizations. The French cooperation programme is strongly promoting the professionalization of farmers' organizations around commodity chains and the establishment of Chambers of Agriculture inspired by the French model.⁵⁷ In Senegal the CNCR has been strong enough to oppose the imposition of a chamber purporting to serve as the government's interlocutor regarding the rural world. In other countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali, however, this has not been the case, and farmer leaders report that they are losing time and effort battling against imposed structures. It would have been better to invest in building up an autonomous movement starting off from the existing farmers' federations.⁵⁸

Donors have championed the concept of "stakeholder" participation in negotiations on policies and programmes, and governments have been obliged, more or less willingly, to take this idea on board. Passing from declaration of intent to practice, however, is another question. As an all-

⁵⁷ Whereas in France the Chambers of Agriculture were the product of a strong and well-structured farmers' movement, in West Africa they are criticized by POs for being imposed from the top down on a rural world which is engaged in its own autonomous process of structuring. The chambers are heavily conditioned by the administration and often managed by former government officials.

⁵⁸ While this complaint is undoubtedly founded, it is also true that the task of building dialogue and national cadres among federations with different histories and often antagonistic leaders is not an easy one, and the appearance on the scene of important national stakes like the ASIPs can be an incentive to seek consensus.

African forum of farmers' organizations organized by the CNCR in 1998 concluded, the participation of farmers' associations in policy dialogue was hampered by a series of constraints that risked transforming participation into window-dressing or co-optation:

Governments and donors tend to be bound into a bureaucratic logic of budgets, timetables, and sectoral dossiers, whereas farmers' associations are concerned about the agricultural calendar and the survival of families and communities. Dialogue most often takes place in an *ad hoc* fashion around specific pre-prepared dossiers on which farmers' organizations are asked to comment immediately, with no time for reflection or consultation. There is a need to promote structured, permanent fora in which farmers' organizations can propose as well as reacting. Civil servants are used to giving instructions rather than listening and dialoguing; restructuring and decentralizing administrative services is not enough: a culture change is needed. Peasant associations generally do not have sufficient information, organizational strength and human and material resources to consult their base, formulate their own autonomous views and proposals, and exercise accountability to their membership (McKeon 1999:2).

What are the chances of seeing significant changes introduced in the relations among aid agencies, governments and the farmers' movement? This is an open question. The farmers' movement in West Africa has made some strong opening moves through CNCR and ROPPA interactions with the aid system, and the governmental and intergovernmental structures of their own region. This interaction has begun to have an impact within the European NGO world. ROPPA has sought to dialogue with Northern partners, not individually regarding project support, but collectively on trade and development policies affecting both North and South. This is stimulating the establishment in European countries, in turn, of platforms of national NGOs concerned with agrarian issues and with promoting the emergence of the farmers' movement in West Africa. These platforms are extending their relations beyond the traditional circle of development NGOs to bring in farmers' organizations and other sectors of European civil society. NGO lobbying in countries like Italy and Belgium has begun to have an impact on governmental cooperation policies and programmes affecting farmers' organizations in West Africa (Collectif stratégies alimentaires 2001).

At the same time, change is under way within the official aid agencies, nudged along by the pressure of the structured farmers' movements, the advocacy action of NGOs and the inside operations of individuals.⁵⁹ The policy statements of practically all of the major multilateral and bilateral cooperation agencies and programmes now underline commitment to dialogue with concerned social actors. The institutional set-ups have followed suit by establishing offices charged with promoting cooperation with civil society and, in some cases, civil society focal points in field offices. Some agencies are giving priority attention to farmers' organizations as key actors in attaining food security and rural development goals. Decentralized decision making on cooperation programmes is bringing aid offices closer to farmers' movements. But what is more difficult, and has not yet been achieved, is for this dynamic to break through the barriers of accumulated procedures and habit, and the reticence of some governments, and to become institutionalized corporate practice. The World Bank is a good example. Thanks to its partnership policy, enunciated at the very highest management level, and the action of a number of allies within the organization at both field and headquarters levels, the World Bank accepted the CNCR's participation in the negotiations on the ASIP and an executing role for the component on capacity building for farmers' organizations. But this has not significantly spread to World Bank practice in other countries where the farmers' movement is weaker. In fact, even in Senegal, the CNCR has lamented the fact that partnership intentions are undermined by inimical procedures and not all World Bank staff share the same attitudes.

The European Commission (EC) is another major donor in West Africa. The NGO co-funding programme of the European Union (EU) has been providing support to build capacity of farmers' organizations—here too with the help of internal allies—but this action has been

⁵⁹ Who are tending more and more to establish informal networking arrangements among themselves.

relatively marginalized with regard to the EC's mainstream cooperation programmes. Now the recently concluded Cotonou agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries emphasizes the importance of decentralized cooperation and, in this context, participation by civil society in the definition and execution of policies and programmes. At a recent workshop on Peasant Visions of Food Security and Relations with the European Commission, the staff responsible for the EU's policies and programmes on food security and rural development admitted candidly that they were instructed to practice "social dialogue" but really did not know how to go about it. The report of the workshop noted that

there is always a gap between the texts and their intentions, on the one hand, and reality on the other. The application of these new modalities depends also on the degree to which the non-state actors will be able to take advantage of the new tools which are being put at their disposal (assuming they are informed about them) (Collectif stratégies alimentaires 2001:5).

In this context, how is the CNCR faring in terms of obtaining resources for its own operations? During its first few years the CNCR operated with a practically non-existent budget. Only the human and financial resources it received from FONGS and the volunteer efforts of a number of Senegalese cadres allowed it to survive. It was not until 1995 that the council was able to recruit a permanent officer and secretaries. This situation was due in part to the CNCR's reluctance to compete with its member federations, FONGS in particular, by seeking funds from their traditional donors. The intention, instead, was to obtain support for the core activities of the council from the government and national programmes in recognition of the CNCR's public functions. For a few years, a donor contribution made it possible to take on three programme officers. At the beginning of 2002, however, the staff of the CNCR had shrunk to the head of the technical unit, an administrator, a secretary and a chauffeur. It is not the ambition of the CNCR to set up an extensive establishment, but a minimum and relatively stable nucleus of support staff is clearly indispensable.

Equally pernicious in terms of its capacity to implement a strategy is the fact that the CNCR has found it difficult to access the external funds required to finance some key elements of its action plan, in particular its communication programme, the promotion of dialogue among farmers' organizations in different regions of Senegal, and the democratization and "re-dynamization" of its member federations. There is an element of fragility inherent in the fact that the CNCR is dependent on external sources to implement a strategy which, in the long-term, could render it self-sufficient. According to the CNCR's financial report for 2000, only five of the council's nine member federations paid their annual dues and the amount received, 520,000 FCFA, covered only about 10 per cent of the running costs.⁶⁰ Yet the federations' contributions cannot be expected to increase unless they are helped to develop services, which induce producers to become dues-paying members in their turn. We will return in the final section of this paper to the contradictions inherent in the encounter between social movements and development programmes.

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Brazil⁶¹

Over the past 17 years, a movement that began with 400 people in southern Brazil has grown to become the largest grassroots social movement in the history of the country.⁶² Created in 1984,

⁶⁰ The sources other than members' dues from which the CNCR has drawn support for its core costs and programme activities are primarily the government of Senegal, the World Bank, the cooperation programmes of the Swiss and the French governments and the Walloon Region of Belgium, Agence internationale de la francophonie, the West African Rural Foundation, SAED and the Panos Institute, for a total of 102,045,807 FCFA in 2000.

⁶¹ This case study draws upon field and archival research conducted by Wendy Wolford between 1995 and 2001. The results from this work have been published previously (see Wolford 2003a and 2003b). The research was generously supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the Institute of International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Institute for the Study of World Peace. It was conducted at various times between 1996 and 1999 with a follow-up in 2001. Six months were spent in each region, and interviews were conducted with approximately 200 MST settlers, as well as many MST leaders, local politicians, small farmers in the regions surrounding the settlements, agrarian reform agents, and agricultural day-labourers living in urban peripheries. These interviews are quoted from in the following text.

⁶² For a good discussion of MST's formation and development, see Rocha and Branford (2002). For a good analysis of how MST fits into the historical and geographical context of land distribution in Brazil, see Wolford and Wright (2003).

in the wake of a repressive military dictatorship, members of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) began to occupy “unproductive” land as a way of pressuring the Brazilian government for rights to property. Over time, government administrations responded to the MST’s actions with an erratic combination of violence and diplomacy that generated a frightening list of rural victims (CPT 2000), but also led to the redistribution of over 1,000 rural properties. Today, the MST represents approximately one million people (350,000 families) who have won access to land through the movement’s struggles. Another 80,000 families are currently living in temporary squatter camps awaiting the government’s ruling on the legality of their claim to land. The MST has successfully “scaled up” its struggle to become a major voice in national debates over agrarian policy and the distribution of resources to those marginalized by the long history of unequal economic development. The MST is one of the most active movements (Navarro 2000) in a national “web” (Alvarez 1998) of civic organizations concerned with the deepening of democracy and the empowerment of the excluded in Brazil. In what follows, we outline the context of the MST’s formation and describe the ideologies and methods employed by the movement.

Historical background: A movement in the making

The MST’s call for agrarian reform is not a new idea in Brazil, and the movement’s high profile in contemporary Brazil can only be understood in the context of colonial development policies. Land distribution has been both contested and inequitable since the Portuguese began to settle the new colony in the early 1500s. Because the Portuguese crown was unwilling and unable to colonize Brazil directly, the area’s known territory was divided into 15 captaincies in 1534, and considerable rights over these areas were bequeathed to hereditary captains (Johnson 1987). The captains oversaw land distribution within their territories, and people who had connections to the captains were able to obtain large plots. Smaller plots of land were also set aside for poor settlers who were convinced to emigrate to Brazil, but the successful captaincies relied on wealthy men who produced export crops on large rural properties. Access to land could also be obtained through the act of squatting (*posseiro*), which was practiced by wealthy and poor colonists alike. In general, however, these two mechanisms of land distribution (patronage and squatting) favoured the wealthy, and this bias is reflected in Brazilian land tenure patterns today (Stein 1985).

Until the 1930s, Brazil’s economy was dependent on the production of a few primary commodities.⁶³ In the early colonial years, sugar cane dominated, but when competition from Dutch producers in the Antilles lowered demand for Brazilian sugar (Schwartz 1985), new commodities such as gold, rubber, cocoa, dairy and coffee became increasingly important. Sugar cane and coffee were the principal crops in the densely settled areas of the country – the northeast and the south/southeast. Produced for export, both crops were grown on large-scale plantations owned by wealthy elites and worked by slaves until the mid-1800s (Dean 1976; Eisenberg 1974).⁶⁴ The plantations, which were often better off economically than the towns, were set up as individual communities, with the owner – the *senhor do engenho* – at the head, followed by a group of skilled or semi-skilled employees, and surrounded by a mass of unskilled workers. The hierarchical paternalism of sugar and coffee plantations shaped social and economic development in Brazil, and the agrarian elite continue to dominate local politics in rural areas as well as forming a powerful *bancada ruralista* (the agrarian elite in the legislature) at the level of national politics. In spite of the restrictive conditions keeping indigenous and African slaves at work in the sugar mills, a surprising number of runaway slave communities called *quilombos* were set up in remote areas as refuge communities. The most famous *quilombo*, called Palmares, was actually a network of settlements that ran throughout 200 square kilometres in the northeast, an area now known as the state of Alagoas. Palmares existed for

⁶³ In the 1930s, the political-economic basis of development shifted from a fairly exclusive focus on agricultural commodities to include industrial manufacturing. See Warren Dean’s (1969) work on the transition from coffee to industry in São Paulo in the early twentieth century. Despite this shift, rural elites continued to have a strong political voice.

⁶⁴ Between 1500 and 1850, when the slave trade was finally abolished, over 3.65 million slaves were shipped into Brazil, more than to any other region in the Americas (Skidmore 1999:17). These numbers vary, depending on the historian, as it is difficult to produce reliable figures after 1830 when the slave trade (though not slavery) was abolished and Africans were smuggled into the country illegally.

almost 100 years until the Brazilian government succeeded in destroying the *quilombo* in 1695, decapitating its leader Zumbi and imprisoning those women and children who were not killed during the military operations (Schwartz 1992). The existence of Palmares, a community based on very different rules from those of Brazilian society, threatened the colonial rulers and provoked a violent reaction.

When Brazil was granted independence from Portugal in 1821, members of the newly established government debated the issue of land distribution (Viotti da Costa 2000). Access to land was an important subject because Brazil still had considerable territory open for settlement, and distributing property was seen as a way of encouraging immigration. Immigration was increasingly viewed as necessary to supplement the domestic labour force in the event that slavery was abolished or became prohibitively expensive (Dean 1976). The two most popular proposals for regulating land distribution were market-based (making land available for sale) and government-based (making land available for public distribution) (compare Viotti da Costa 2000). In 1850, the land issue was resolved with a new land law that theoretically moved land onto the market, although in practice, wealthy elites were able to continue claiming land through possession (Wright 2001). The government and plantation owners agreed to promote immigration by making frontier areas available for colonization, particularly in the southern end of the country.

In 1886, planters from the state of São Paulo organized the Sociedade Promotora de Imigração (Society for Promoting Immigration) and the number of immigrants to Brazil increased from 33,000 in 1886 to 132,000 in 1888 (Skidmore 1999:72–73). Migrants received some private and public subsidization of travel costs, but the conditions they found in Brazil were far from the paradise they had been promised. The planters found it difficult to re-conceptualize their relationship with labour as a voluntary wage contract (Stein 1985; Viotti da Costa 2000). The planters also worked to frustrate the settlers' desire for land because the plantations were only economically viable with a steady source of labour. If the immigrants were free to settle elsewhere, it was unlikely they would choose to stay on the plantations, and so planters restricted their mobility through debt peonage and intimidation (Dean 1976; Stolcke 1988).⁶⁵ Descendants of these immigrants, some of whom found their own land, would be among the first members of the MST in the following century.

By the early 1900s, Brazil's economy was beginning to diversify as coffee production laid the necessary groundwork for industrialization, particularly in the southeastern state of São Paulo (Dean 1969). Rural elites still controlled national politics to such an extent, however, that the presidents between 1898 and 1930 were referred to as *café com leite*, or coffee with milk, because most of them came from either the coffee plantations in São Paulo or the dairy ranches in Minas Gerais.⁶⁶

As industrialization increased, government officials discussed the "agrarian problem". The large-scale properties and plantations in rural Brazil were seen as backward and traditional (Stein 1985), and it was doubtful that they could satisfy the growing demand for cheap food from urban workers and employers. The large estates were seen as a barrier to modernization in both the rural and urban areas. By the 1950s, the call for land redistribution was growing stronger, although the method was debated. Two classic opinions were presented by Ignácio Rangel (1956) and Caio Prado Júnior (1945, 1966). Rangel believed that industrialization would naturally lead to land tenure change and agricultural modernization, while Prado Júnior believed that a state-led socialist reform was necessary for both production and development. During the 1950s and early 1960s, grassroots organizers with the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB), rural trade unions, and members of the Catholic Church increased their presence in the rural areas and advocated for a distributive agrarian reform. In 1954, the PCB included agrarian reform as part of its strategy for carrying out a democratic bourgeois revolution, and in 1957 it formed a national union of peasants and rural workers in São Paulo (União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil/

⁶⁵ In 1902, the Italian government officially prohibited its citizens from accepting subsidies for travel to Brazil, and the Swiss Consul in Brazil was actively investigating several accounts of persecution (Lesser 1999).

⁶⁶ See Fausto 1999:148–160; see also Bethell 1987.

ULTAB). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the PCB organized rural trade associations in several states, particularly Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Bahia (Maybury-Lewis 1994).⁶⁷

In 1955, rural sugar cane workers in the northeastern state of Pernambuco founded a society that came to be known as the Ligas Camponesas (peasant leagues). The rural workers, led by a plantation-born lawyer, formed their society in protest over the plantation owner's decision to violate traditional practice and withhold money for a coffin intended for the burial of a worker (Pereira 1997). The Ligas Camponesas grew rapidly and their development, combined with the activities of the PCB and trade unions, stirred suspicions that a left-wing revolution was imminent.⁶⁸ In the early 1960s, the fear over revolution in the countryside was heightened by then President João Goulart's decision to announce a radical agrarian reform.

In March 1964, the armed forces of Brazil seized power, forcing Goulart into exile and establishing military rule over the country. Once in power, the military instituted a programme of rapid industrial modernization, and between 1967 and 1973 Brazil experienced such rapid economic growth that the period was dubbed the "economic miracle" (Burns 1993). Gross domestic product increased at an astonishing annual rate of 11.2 per cent during this period (Fausto 1999:291), and inflation fell from 58.2 per cent per annum in 1965 to a low of 16.4 per cent per annum in 1970 (Skidmore 1999:178). The government focused on domestic manufacturing in an attempt to make the transition from an underdeveloped agricultural economy to a developed industrial one.

In the countryside, the military adopted an approach that would solve the agrarian problem by redistributing land through colonization and modernizing agricultural production. The military believed that it could satisfy the demand for land that was generating unrest in the northeast and south of the country by moving "men without land" to a "land without men." The plan involved settling 200,000 families in the sparsely populated savannahs of the centre-west and the Amazon basin. In this way, the military could also secure the northwest border of the country through effective possession.⁶⁹

As the second part of its agrarian reform project, the military government targeted large-scale producers for subsidized modernization.⁷⁰ The government poured millions of dollars of subsidized credit into the hands of private producers. Rural credit increased five times in real terms between 1968 and 1978 (Goodman et al. 1984:198). During years of high inflation, the credit earned a negative rate of interest and financed the soybean and wheat boom in the southern and central-west states. Agricultural technology moved increasingly toward mechanical threshers, direct planting and chemical inputs. The use of irrigation equipment, pesticides and fertilizers all expanded production at an unprecedented rate.

The modernization of agriculture restructured land and labour relationships in the countryside. Mechanized production reduced the need for workers, and without the money to pay for land of their own, millions of rural workers left for the urban areas (Graziano da Silva 1982). Between 1960 and 1980, the population of Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, rose from 4.7 million to

⁶⁷ When the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (CONTAG) was formed in 1964, replacing ULTAB as an umbrella movement representing rural workers, the PCB was one of its most active leaders. Although the military government banned the PCB later that year, CONTAG continued to organize rural workers, focusing primarily on securing workers' rights.

⁶⁸ See Forman (1975) for an interesting discussion of the Ligas Camponesas. Forman argued that there was no revolutionary organization because the leagues, and Julião himself, lacked an overall vision of change for the area.

⁶⁹ The planned colonization projects were largely failures because they did not provide the necessary infrastructure, and basic services such as health and sanitation services were never offered. The military managed to create only 43 settlements for 8,000 of the 100,000 people expected. The colonization experiment brought international condemnation because of the difficult conditions experienced by the settlers and because of the environmental damage caused to the Amazon region (Schmink and Wood 1984).

⁷⁰ According to José de Souza Martins, "five months after the coup and some time before the Land Statute was sent to Congress, the North American representative for the Alliance for Progress, Walt Rostow, was in São Paulo speaking animatedly with industrialists about the issue of the internal market. [He emphasized] that the industrialists should take an interest in transforming and modernizing their agriculture" (Martins 1981:94).

12.6 million.⁷¹ With such an influx of labour, real urban wages fell by two-thirds from 1960 to 1976 (IBGE 1990). Large farmers out-competed small, traditional ones, making it more difficult for the latter to earn a living. Land concentration worsened, with the Gini index of land distribution increasing from 0.731 in 1960 to 0.867 in 1985 (Cardoso 1997). In 1985, just over 10 per cent of the landowners in the country controlled almost 80 per cent of the land. In this way, through selective modernization and transfer of workers from the rural to urban areas, the military government effectively “solved” the agrarian problem. Agricultural production increased rapidly and Brazilian producers became internationally competitive in several lucrative commodities, including soya, wheat, orange juice, poultry and cattle.

During the military’s rule (1964–1982), the Catholic Church grew into a force for radical organization and change in the Brazilian countryside. In 1961, the Church officially decided to focus on land tenure issues in Latin America, publishing a series of educational documents to inform rural workers in Brazil of the biblical statement that “the land is a gift of God”. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Brazilian episcopate was one of the most progressive religious clergies in the world (Mainwaring 1986). In 1963, the first Comunidades Ecclesiales de Base (CEBs) were created as a means of enabling communities to hold Sunday service without a priest and in 1972, the Church formed the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) to protect landless workers in the Amazon. By 1975, the CPT had extended its activities to peasants all over Brazil. By 1985, it was estimated that there were over 100,000 CEBs in local communities. Because of their integration into local communities and connection with a wider network of reform-minded activists, the CEBs were an ideal channel for grassroots organization.

In 1982, the military formally withdrew from government. They had stepped into office “temporarily” in 1964 to restore order to the country and had ended up ruling for 18 years. The gradual end of authoritarian rule was characterized by economic crisis. The Brazilian state was deeply in debt, and hyper-inflation threatened even as society clamoured noisily for a piece of the country’s economic wealth. When José Sarney was inaugurated as president in 1985, he remarked, “I have inherited the greatest political crisis in Brazilian history, the largest foreign debt in the world and the greatest internal debt and inflation we have ever had” (quoted in Selcher 1986:7).

The establishment of the MST

The same year that José Sarney became president (1985), the MST held its first national congress. Over 1,000 people attended the meeting, establishing a short-term goal of securing “land for those who work it”, and a long-term goal of creating a just, socialist society (Poletto 1997). Tracing its roots back to the *quilombos* and the Ligas Camponesas, the movement grew out of several different land disputes taking place in southern Brazil during the late 1970s and early 1980s (compare Fernandes 1999). MST members argued that the military had not solved the agrarian problem, but had created new ones. The movement employed an aggressive method of land occupations but justified its actions with an appeal to Article 186 of the federal Constitution, which stated that “land had a social responsibility to be productive”. Land occupations were organized by activists, many of whom came out of the Catholic and Lutheran churches. Activists travelled through poor rural and urban areas, informing people about their rights to land and organizing occupations.

Church leaders and union workers often helped the activists by using their connections within local communities to spread word of the movement. When a group of interested people was organized, the immediate goal was to occupy land that was not fulfilling its “social responsibility”, setting up temporary *barracos* (barracks) on the property. The squatters often had to re-occupy a given area several times as the government and/or private landlord often responded with violence before negotiations (Fernandes 1999).⁷²

⁷¹ In 2000, the population of São Paulo was estimated at 17.8 million. These figures almost certainly underestimate the actual population given the difficulty of counting heads in rapidly changing urban squatter settlements.

⁷² Occupations usually take place late at night. The location of the occupation depends on a number of factors, of which available land is only one (see Petras 1998). Participants in an occupation immediately put up temporary barracks made out of heavy plastic and wood. Word of the occupation usually spreads quickly, and the members rarely wait long before being visited by government officials

The MST's methods have been extremely effective. Since it was first formed, the movement has carried out approximately 230,000 occupations, secured over 1,000 settlements and expanded its base from three states to 22 of Brazil's 26 states. For the first time in Brazilian history, a social movement organized across the country's highly differentiated geographic regions, and united movement members under a single set of ethical and practical guidelines.

The MST's guidelines have changed in the 19 years since it was formed, but the movement has consistently maintained its positioning as a grassroots social movement that is both autonomous from the state and invested in an alternative to the traditional market economy. The MST is defined by its belief that the struggle for agrarian reform is a class struggle.⁷³ The movement argues that as small farmers in rural Brazil, the settlers are exploited by a capitalist system whose chief engineers are large landowners, politicians and corporations. The *sem terra* are landless because others (capitalists, bankers, politicians, etc.) stole, misused and abused property that should naturally belong to society as a whole. Participation in the MST is presented as an expression of a class *for* itself: "we aren't fighting against one land-grabber, we are fighting against a class, the land owning elite" (Stedile and Fernandes 1999:35). Although the movement has moved away from a dogmatic reliance on Marxist-Leninist theory, a recent anthology of Marxism in Latin America cited the MST as one of the most important "new tendencies" in the region (Löwy 1999:63). According to the MST's outline of class conflict in Brazil, the land-owning elite is supported ideologically and practically by the Brazilian state, and so at the movement's first national congress in 1985, delegates decided to take a stand against the New Republic (1985-1989). The MST has rejected every government since on the grounds that the administrations represented "a bourgeois state...invested with class interest" (Stedile and Fernandes 1999:36, 51).

The other side of the MST's class positioning is that within the movement, all members are theoretically equal, part of a class *in* itself. The ideal of equal representation among members is deliberately based on the socialist ideal of egalitarianism and embodied in the concept of "union", or unity. In the words of one MST member: "*è a união que faz a força*" (it is unity that makes us strong).⁷⁴ Leadership in the movement is carefully structured to be as horizontal as possible and all positions are technically temporary. At the 1985 national congress, the members decided against electing people to individual positions, such as president, and instead chose a national coordinating committee to be the highest political unit within the movement. The committee consists of one elected member per state who serves for a two-year period. By creating a committee of representatives, the movement hoped to keep particular individuals from dominating positions of power. From the settlements up to the national coordinating committee, the MST is relatively decentralized, consisting of hierarchically nested levels that carry decisions from individual households to *nucleos* (groups of 10 to 15 families), to settlement associations, to regional associations, to state committees and, finally, to committees at the national level. At each level, decisions are made as democratically as possible, and MST activists travel regularly between households and settlements to try and keep everyone informed and actively participating. Although there are inevitably accusations of favouritism, neglect and elitism, this emphasis on democratic decision making has a positive influence on how people see the political space around them. Through this ideal of equality, members across the country are encouraged to feel kinship with, and pride in, their unknown – but imagined – *companheiros* (companions).

Through documents and rituals, MST leaders carefully embed the class nature of the movement's imagined community in historical structures and experiences. The historical tradition that MST draws upon goes back 500 years to injustices that are depicted as a direct consequence

or by representatives of the landlord. Although the negotiations between the occupiers, the government and the landlords may be unsuccessful or last anywhere from six months to six years, the planting of food crops begins immediately, as federal law protects the rights of the planter to the plant regardless of the legal claim to the land. Aside from territorial occupations, MST also organizes general demonstrations in favour of land reform, nationwide marches, and occupations of important political offices.

⁷³ For a complete discussion of how MST has framed "community" within the movement, see Wolford (forthcoming).

⁷⁴ Interview No. 10, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

of the way in which Brazil was colonized.⁷⁵ The MST consciously unites time and space by invoking the past to explain, and justify, the present. In a document prepared for discussion, an MST leader argues:

If agrarian reform was originally justified because it was necessary for overcoming feudal relations in the countryside...in 'modern Brazil' it is justified for even more important reasons. Not only do feudal social relations remain, but [so do] production relations that are effectively slavery (Teixeira 1999:17).

MST activists emphasize their belief that the movement is only the most recent expression of discontent in the rural areas. They call upon Zumbi, the leader of the *quilombo* Palmares, and the Ligas Camponesas in order to establish a noble line of predecessors.

The historical tradition extends globally to include heroes of Marxist-inspired resistance around the world. Posters of Che Guevara and Vladimir Lenin are regularly present at MST meetings. During a 1999 meeting in Pernambuco, the large red flag stretched across the stage pictured Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Rosa Luxemburg and Nelson Mandela, among others. The words framing the flag read: "Proletarians of the World Unite".

Notwithstanding the coherence of MST's organizational structure at the national level, the particular messages supported by movement members are worked out on the ground through constant negotiation, struggle and manipulation in accordance with local histories and contexts. MST members have come to the movement from many different backgrounds, and they bring with them varied experiences of community. In this section we compare the dynamics of associational mobilization and movement in two different parts of Brazil.

Santa Catarina

The southern state of Santa Catarina is considered the breadbasket of Brazil. The subtropical climate and well-distributed rainfall combine with fertile, iron-rich soils to create an active agriculture.⁷⁶ The state is also the heart of small family farming in the country. In 1995, smallholders with less than 50 hectares of land accounted for 89.7 per cent of the total farms in the state and 40.6 per cent of the total farmland area in the state (IBGE 1996:32). Many of the small farmers in the state are descendants of European immigrants who came to Brazil in the late 1800s as part of the Brazilian government's attempt to colonize, civilize and "whiten" the southern part of the country (Lesser 1999; Viotti da Costa 2000). German and Italian farming communities have a strong presence in Santa Catarina, and there are several prominent cities in the state with names like Blumenau and Joinville where the street signs are in German as well as Portuguese (Seyferth 1990). Intra-ethnic marriage among small farmers is a common form of community preservation, and working the land is intimately tied into notions of cultural continuity (Renk 1997).

The MST community in Santa Catarina presented as a case study in this paper will be referred to as Vento.⁷⁷ Vento is a land reform settlement with 97 families located in the centre of the state. Most of the 97 families were previously small farmers who owned or rented land in western Santa Catarina. They came to the settlement in 1989 after living in MST squatter camps for several years. On the settlement, the families were given 18 hectares of land, where they built simple houses and planted a combination of corn, beans and vegetables while raising chickens and a few head of cattle.

⁷⁵ A popular MST slogan reads: "500 Years of Injustice".

⁷⁶ Average annual rainfall in the state is 16 centimetres. Rainfall is relatively evenly distributed throughout the year, and temperatures range from 13 to 25 degrees Celsius. Twenty per cent of the total surface area in Santa Catarina is considered of "superior" fertility and 68 per cent of the potential agricultural land is currently in use. "Potential agricultural land" is defined as land that is not covered by alternate infrastructure, water or protected forests.

⁷⁷ Not the community's real name.

Pernambuco

The northeastern state of Pernambuco sits at approximately 8 degrees south of the equator.⁷⁸ The region was the heart of the colonial sugar cane economy, and sugar cane plantations continue to dominate the landscape today. The sugar cane industry has generated incredible wealth for some and poverty for most. The legacies of slavery are evident throughout the region, materially manifested in poverty, racial discrimination and political corruption. The rural areas of Pernambuco are some of the poorest in all of Latin America.⁷⁹ Local people rely on an inefficient and exploitative sugar cane industry for their survival.

The MST community in Pernambuco presented as a case study in this paper will be referred to as Flora.⁸⁰ Flora is a land reform settlement with 47 families located in the coastal region of the state. The settlement area had originally been a sugar cane plantation but had not been producing cane for over three years when MST members occupied the plantation in 1996. The Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) expropriated the plantation in 1997 and gave 13 families affiliated with MST access to land, saving the rest for redistribution among the 33 families formerly associated with the plantation.

According to federal law, everyone who worked or lived on the plantation and did not own (or rent) land elsewhere was eligible to receive land. Although the population associated with the plantation included a wide range of social classes (for example, the bosses, administrative heads, team leaders and workers), most of the people accepted the land because few alternatives existed in the region. Incredibly, this meant that the former *patrão* (boss) of the plantation remained on the settlement because his wife and son both received land. Regardless of their former social standing, each family received approximately nine hectares. Production on the land varied greatly, but manioc—a hardy tuber that required little supervision—was the most common plant in 1999.

Becoming “landless”: Who joins the MST and why?

Communities in southern and northeastern Brazil clearly have very different political, cultural and environmental economies. Setting them side by side allows us to understand better how economic restructuring, political transition and religious organization actually played out on the ground—and whether or in what ways they were responsible for people deciding to join the MST. In southern Brazil, where the movement began and where it is the strongest today, people joined the MST primarily because they decided they valued farming as a way of life, and possession through occupation was a well-established method of finding new land for young families. In northeastern Brazil, where the MST faced significant hurdles in building membership, agricultural modernization pushed the sugar cane industry into a deep crisis and the subsequent exodus of plantation elites opened up new spaces of organization for the rural workers.

Santa Catarina

In the southern state of Santa Catarina, farming among families who owned or rented small plots of land was inherently expansive, and migration was a traditional survival strategy in the face of that expansion. Roberto’s story is a typical one. Roberto was the son of Italian immigrants. His parents came from Italy in the early 1900s and settled in a small town, Campinas do Sul, in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul. Roberto grew up in an Italian community of small farmers, and he remembered speaking his parent’s language as a child. Roberto had 11 brothers and sisters, and his parents did not have enough land to support all of them. When Roberto married Isa, the daughter of neighbouring smallholders, the two moved north to find land of their own. They moved to Quilombo, a small community in western Santa Catarina

⁷⁸ Annual median temperatures in the coastal region of the state are above 25 degrees Celsius, and an average of 20 to 30 centimetres of rain fall per year, mostly between May and August.

⁷⁹ Sugar cane producers from Pernambuco are notoriously inefficient vis-à-vis producers from southern Brazil, and they have only been able to maintain production by manipulating incredibly exploitative labour conditions and securing access to very generous government subsidies.

⁸⁰ Not the community’s real name.

where the land was still covered in forest and belonged to a “colonizing company” called Bertasco. Colonizing companies were common in Santa Catarina during the 1900s, when the state government made territorial colonization a priority. The state put private companies in charge of selling land to the immigrants who arrived regularly from Europe, looking for land in Brazil’s still untapped south (Seyferth 1990).⁸¹

Roberto and Isa bought four urban blocks and five rural hectares from Bertasco. Soon after, they sold their urban blocks and moved into the countryside to build a small wooden house on their five hectares. This was a good time, according to Roberto, a time when the couple had no children and “didn’t have to worry about anything”.⁸² Five hectares of land was enough to provide a good living because the soil was better than it had been in Campinas do Sul. Roberto was soon able to buy a used car, which he parked beside the simple house.

But, gradually, the couple ran out of land. They took some land out of production to build the house. Then when they had children, they gave some to them and “it all started to go”.⁸³ The couple did not have enough land for themselves and all of their children: “and we had such a dream of having land for the kids”.⁸⁴ Roberto and Isa lived with their two sons and three daughters in Quilombo until 1987 when an MST militant approached them and began talking about agrarian reform. Roberto and Isa saw the MST as a way to solve their problem of finding land for the children. They encouraged their sons to join in an occupation: “We can’t give you land, but we will help you until you do manage to get land of your own. When you have land, then you are on your own.”⁸⁵ The two sons received land on Vento after living in MST occupation camps for two years.

As Roberto and Isa’s story suggests, family farming was expansive because of the so-called demographic lifecycle of the farming household (compare Chayanov 1966). Due to both necessity and tradition, the children of small family farmers in the region had to have access to land in order to begin their own households.⁸⁶ It was common for new generations to travel far from their parents in search of new land. The families on Vento had migrated twice on average prior to joining the MST.⁸⁷ They decided to join the movement because the spatial frontier in Santa Catarina (and in southern Brazil more generally) had come to an end, and they were at the point in their demographic cycle where some members of the family needed new land.⁸⁸ As one settler said: “I always say that [joining the MST] was a decision made out of necessity. We had 13 brothers and sisters and so where were you going to put all these kids? For this, we joined the movement.”⁸⁹ Parents often helped their children through occupation periods because they felt it was their responsibility to see them successfully set up a new household.

Even farmers who did have sufficient land to farm joined the movement, primarily as a way to escape the position of sharecropping. Farmers who rented land usually saw tenancy as a “stepping stone” to owning their own land, but as the territorial frontier in Santa Catarina closed, sharecropping became increasingly common (Cazella 1992:19). In 1995, 28 per cent of small farmers (those with fewer than 10 hectares) were renting the land they worked (IBGE 1996:21).⁹⁰

⁸¹ The state of Santa Catarina made colonization a priority because of territorial disputes with the neighbouring state of Parana. These disputes culminated in the *Contestado War* (1912–1916) (see Diacon 1991).

⁸² Interview No. 1, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁸³ Interview No. 1, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁸⁴ Interview No. 19, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁸⁵ Interview No. 1, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁸⁶ See also Cazella (1992); Metcalf (1992); Paulilo (1996).

⁸⁷ Paulilo (1996:124) found that the settlers she interviewed in Santa Catarina had moved an average of three times before joining an MST occupation.

⁸⁸ Western Santa Catarina was an area of relatively recent colonization in Brazil. The region offered a seemingly generous spatial frontier that began to attract people—primarily small farmers—in the 1920s and did not fill up until the 1970s.

⁸⁹ Interview No. 12, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹⁰ The contracts mediating rental varied considerably, although they generally exchanged usufruct rights to land for anywhere from one quarter to one half of production income.

Rent was a highly visible outflow of productive resources and became a source of conflict when times were difficult. Many of the settlers described paying their landlord as an unfair imposition and said that they joined MST in search of land *of their own*: “You can’t really survive by renting land in the countryside. The rent is so high and just when you start to do well, the landlord kicks you off.”⁹¹

The demographic nature of small family farming in western Santa Catarina not only *pushed* people into MST, it also *pulled* them in. Families were pulled into the movement by the encouragement of sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, uncles, etc., who left for the movement and called their relatives to join them. Often, one person winning land through the movement was enough to encourage the entire extended family to join as well. Many settlers on Vento argued that they had joined the MST at the urging of other family members. Some saw their brothers and sisters win land and joined an occupation to “stick with” the family and “see what would happen”.⁹² One woman on the settlement, to whom everyone referred affectionately as “the little old one”, had joined MST with her husband in 1984 and by 1998 seven of her nine children had also joined the movement. Each household on the settlement had an average of four relatives living on MST settlements somewhere in the state.

The search for new land was also a legacy of the environmental degradation associated with small family farming in western Santa Catarina. When small farmers originally colonized the area in the 1920s, the region boasted excellent natural soil fertility and ample trees for both construction and sale. By 1990 a government-sponsored report, *Sustainable Development in Western Santa Catarina* (Testa et al. 1996), judged that 41.5 per cent of the former agricultural land was totally inappropriate for cultivation due to soil loss, hillside slope and the prevalence of rocks.⁹³

The land in western Santa Catarina was no longer able to support the extensive method of cultivation practiced by many of the small farmers. Years of planting corn and beans on hillside slopes led to deteriorating soil conditions and lower yields. As one MST settler said: “In western Santa Catarina, the land has been abandoned because it is so bad. Full of insects, little bugs.”⁹⁴ When the land in one area became exhausted, the families were forced to move on and look for new land (Paulilo 1996). Between 1980 and 1991, 70,000 people left rural western Santa Catarina because of the end of the territorial frontier, high demographic density, and the decreasing size of smallholdings that were inevitably situated on the worst land in the region.

A sense of the moving frontier as providing unlimited land combined with the families’ relative isolation from state development agencies to perpetuate traditional farming techniques. These traditional techniques relied on burning the forest as a way of clearing the land for planting. Burning forestland was a sustainable practice on the edge of a new frontier, but became less sustainable as the frontier closed up. Although several farming extension programmes existed in the state, most of them were geared toward medium and large farms whose owners had the capital to experiment with new crops and who were easier to reach than the owners of smaller farms. A survey of agricultural producers in 1995 showed that only 55 per cent of smallholders received any kind of technical assistance, while 76 per cent of the large landowners received assistance.⁹⁵ Over the years, the land in Quilombo worsened: “There were so many rocks, and it seemed like there were more every year.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Interview No. 6, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹² Interview No. 29, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹³ The project was titled Sustainable Development in Santa Catarina and conducted by the Center for Small Farm Research in 1996. Information on the environmental conditions of western Santa Catarina was taken from pp. 22–25 of the report.

⁹⁴ Interview No. 2, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹⁵ This information was taken from the report cited previously, *Sustainable Development in Western Santa Catarina*. During interviews with small farmers in the municipality of Campos Novos, it was clear that the vast majority received little or no technical assistance. The families expressed bitterness when asked about the local veterinarian or extension agent, arguing that they were charged so much for each visit that they could not afford to ask for help unless there was an emergency.

⁹⁶ Interview No. 1, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

Because of this historical experience with mobility as a productive and reproductive survival strategy, the settlers understood and accepted the MST's seemingly radical methods. The periodic need to migrate in search of new land created a perception of the frontier as "empty". And "squatting" was considered a legitimate solution to limited land, degraded soil and usufruct impositions perceived as unfair. The settlers felt that as predominantly white small farmers, they had brought civilization to the Brazilian nation, and they passed this conviction on through the generations with stories about grandparents who had turned the woods into a productive area "with their bare hands".

Immigration and colonization patterns also created strong rural communities composed of distinct ethnic groups, and solidarity was based around relative homogeneity (Papma 1992). Economic ideas about production on the land were reinforced by notions of cultural continuity (Renk 1997; Woortmann 1995). Seyferth (1990) argued that the Germans who immigrated to southern Brazil created a "home-away-from-home"—a community characterized by adherence to an ethic of hard work. Members within the community were important sources of information as families often met on Sundays in church or for a game of soccer and exchanged news. Community centres also represented a familiar public forum for discussing ideas that were often considered dangerous.

Strong communities helped to spread word of the MST's mission and encouraged people to join the movement (Papma 1992). Local leaders who were able to tap into social networks among neighbours and friends provided important links between the radical ideas of resistance and the settlers' own desire for change. Many of the settlers heard about the MST from known and trusted members of the community. As one settler said: "In the beginning, it wasn't the MST, it was just community leaders."⁹⁷ Communities were hardly unanimous in their support or rejection of the MST, but neighbouring families often created networks of people who would support one family's decision to join the MST: "At that time, no one knew anything about the movement and these occupations. Then it began with some people who lived there and they were the first. And then one person began to pull on the other and pretty soon everyone went."⁹⁸ The more people in any given community who supported the MST, the easier it was for them to join an occupation.

While the historical search for new land was motivated, in large part, by productive and reproductive concerns, the desire to continue farming was embedded in deep cultural notions of a simple, honest life. The settlers had a real love for the land—land was a tradition in and of itself and a means for continuation of a life many found extremely valuable. Having land meant having "citizenship, and the dignity of being able to produce. Land is life."⁹⁹ For many of the settlers, the city meant chaos, insecurity and violence as opposed to the stability, security and peace of the countryside:

Living on the land means not having to live in the city which is full of commotion and it is difficult to bring up a family. In the country you work the whole day, rest at night and it's calm. The country is free of a lot of bad things. It's easier to survive because you plant everything you need and don't buy very much on the market.¹⁰⁰

The farmers who joined the MST used the tools of their traditions to carve a new frontier out of unproductive land and wrongful owners. This new frontier would have unique implications, however, because it was a *political* one instead of an agricultural one. The family farmers' normative understandings of space, formed on the moving frontier, helped them to think of private property in the hands of wealthy owners as illegitimate at the same time as they then thought of

⁹⁷ Interview No. 45, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹⁸ Interview No. 18, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

⁹⁹ Interview No. 5, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

¹⁰⁰ Interview No. 6, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

private property in the hands of poor owners as morally just. By occupying the former type of private property, they de-sacralized what had been preserved by powerful traditions of domination for the last 500 years. Their act also served to re-sacralize private property as “a gift of God” and a right every impoverished Brazilian citizen deserved. Although these acts of resistance may have been more difficult to carry out without the right political opportunity and social resources, the MST most certainly would never have been formed without individuals who needed land and saw occupying private land as a legitimate means to an end.

Pernambuco

The situation on settlements in the sugar cane region of northeast Brazil was very different from that of the south. In this region, local traditions of work, family and community made it very difficult for people to imagine joining the MST until they were pushed in by agricultural restructuring and pulled in by the opportunity for political advance.

The majority of the plantation workers in Pernambuco had little experience with family farming, and there were no generational obligations attached to land ownership. As Maybury-Lewis (1994:34) wrote, “the attitude of the rural workers towards land was less intense than in the South...unlike southern peasants, they had no tradition of a shared and common relation with, and independent access to, the land”. The workers had occasionally been allowed to plant subsistence crops by their houses inside the plantation, but permission to do so was always at the discretion of the plantation owner. When the price of sugar or alcohol was high, the plantation owners exercised their right to reincorporate the land and plant sugar cane wherever they could: “When you left your house, you opened the door and you were already right on top of the cane.”¹⁰¹ Many plantation owners simply refused to ever allow their workers access to land. According to one settler:

This mill where we were working never gave anyone land to plant, no, never. Even the trees that the workers planted, the mill-owner would knock them all down. They planted cane and threw the workers out. The mill didn't want to give anything to the worker because they thought that the worker would take over their lands.¹⁰²

Even after they had been given land on the settlement, many women were reluctant to venture “inside” the area because they thought it was *esquisito* (odd). Many parents on the settlement also vehemently opposed the idea that their children might choose to stay on the land. Living *na enxada* (by the spade), as it is called, is considered a hard life and not one that is chosen – rather, it is a fate that is accepted. This experience with landed production has shaped perceptions of the frontier as “covered in woods and fit only for the Indians”,¹⁰³ a perception quite different from that expressed by the settlers in southern Brazil.

Without access to land, workers were dependent on employment in the plantations. The work was not easy, nor was the pay very good: “I didn't like it. The cane cut us a lot, and there were always ants and snakes. And it is very heavy work – weeding cane is work for animals. And you earn very little!”¹⁰⁴ Although life in sugar cane production was difficult, the workers learned to prefer receiving a salary to working on their own land. People who received land on Flora were nervous about how they would continue to pay their bills and feed themselves without their salaries. As a local leader in the region said:

When you go to them with an idea about going after land...they measure the time [that they would spend in a land occupation] against the time that they would spend employed. If they started a job today, in five days they would

¹⁰¹ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰² Interview No. 5, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰³ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰⁴ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

already have money in the pocket. And so if you go to them and ask if they want land or a job, they are going to say a job.¹⁰⁵

The rural sugar cane workers of the northeast also had very different notions of family and community than their counterparts in the south. The monopolistic production of sugar cane created a tradition of mobility that had nothing to do with the search for land and actually weakened family ties across generations. Young men often began work with their fathers at the age of eight or nine. A few years later they left in search of their own fortune: "When we were grown up and came into our own and were going to bring up our own families, we left to go out into the world and my father stayed there with his family."¹⁰⁶ Family labour on the plantations was segmented and men often worked in the fields by themselves while women took care of the home. Because of this segmentation, mobility in search of work often meant that the men left their families on one plantation, or in town, while they found work elsewhere. And because plantation owners accepted labourers as they chose, larger extended families rarely moved around together. As a result, families on the settlement tended to be small and there were very few extended families on the settlements. There was no strong tradition of investment in either land or jobs for the future generations.

Community ties were also extremely tenuous as the workers tended to move regularly from one plantation to another in search of the best wages or working conditions. Mobility was the most effective means of expressing discontent with a plantation.¹⁰⁷ Working contracts were usually informal and open to interpretation, so exit was often the only effective resistance to difficult working conditions perceived as "unfair". The option to move formed part of the workers' sense of autonomy, of freedom: "at that time, there wasn't anything holding you in one place. ... I would spend two or three years in one place and when that started to get bad, I was already leaving for somewhere else".¹⁰⁸ At the same time, expulsion was a strategy used by the mill owners to maintain labour flexibility:

Sometimes I liked [my bosses], and I would spend two years, three, with them, living in the mill. Sometimes we would disagree and they would order me to leave and what were we going to do? We didn't have land, we didn't have anywhere to live, the house there wasn't ours, so we would head our lives off in another direction; that is how it was in the mills.¹⁰⁹

The communities that did develop within the plantations were extremely hierarchical because social networks reflected the labour process. The way that sugar cane was produced on the plantation required a few skilled *empregados* (employees) and many unskilled *trabalhadores* (workers). The employees managed the estate and oversaw the work crews. The workers cut the cane, weeded the fields and loaded the trucks. Wages were calculated relative to individual productivity measured by a *cabo* (team leader). The more cane a person cut, loaded or planted, the more he or she earned and there was little to gain by cooperation.

Labour segmentation was enforced formally, in the sense of occupational difference, and informally through traditional norms attached to rights and privileges. Rights and privileges were negotiated constantly as the informal nature of labour contracts left the details open to constant reinterpretation. One indication of status was the size and kind of residence a worker had on the plantation. Most of the common *trabalhadores* lived on the plantation in small, one-room houses connected by side walls, while the more important workers either lived in larger stone houses in the mill's centre or they lived on *sítios* (small farms located inside the plantation) allotted to them

¹⁰⁵ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰⁶ Interview No. 9, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰⁷ Another strategy used by the mill owners was to order workers to do jobs for which they were either not qualified or which were below their previous position (compare Sigaud 1977). As one former cane worker said: "I stayed there for four years all at once, I worked with the tractor there. And...something happened there—the tractor broke down—and the man said 'if you want you can go cut cane' and so I said, 'if it's to cut cane, I will do it somewhere else, but not here in your mill'" (Interview No. 19, Flora, Agua Preta, PE).

¹⁰⁸ Interview No. 21, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹⁰⁹ Interview No. 9, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

by the plantation owner.¹¹⁰ Community ties were largely built around proximity, in terms of geography and status. Workers who were contracted seasonally, or without their working papers, occupied the most insecure, unstable positions within the plantation.

The traditional construction of community shaped the way that people thought about their options in general and the MST in particular. The people most likely to join the MST were those who had the weakest ties to those around them. None of the people on Flora had joined an occupation with members of the same original community. Even when two people from the same community joined the MST, they made their decisions independently and did not consciously maintain social ties after receiving land. These people also lacked the option of attaching themselves to communities already established in the city or another rural area.

The ideology and act of occupying land was generally considered incompatible with traditional ideas of work and ownership. There is no historical process legitimizing the act of occupation, as there has not been an open spatial frontier in the northeast since 1500. Land has always been a commodified space; it always belonged to someone, even if it was unproductive. Landlords who did provide their workers with land for planting did so as a *dom* (gift) and: “the workers were not—and perhaps are still not—used to considering land as a right equal to other rights” (Sigaud 1979:84).

In spite of the many factors discouraging rural workers from joining the MST, the movement began to build its membership in the region when agricultural restructuring in the 1980s generated a massive crisis in the sugar cane industry.¹¹¹ State subsidies that had propped up the industry for years were withdrawn, and many plantations and mills found themselves saddled with huge debts and unable to continue production (Lima and Silva 1995; Buarque 1997). In 1995, 44 per cent of the sugar cane refining distilleries in Pernambuco were classified as “paralyzed or functioning with difficulty” (Lins 1996:2).

The people most affected by the crisis were those who had not been given housing within the plantations and were living in the cities. Many of these workers were seasonally employed as casual “uncertified workers”.¹¹² Being forced to live in town made their position within the plantation that much more unstable, and they often had to do the most menial tasks of the harvest for a fraction of the pay they were promised. They had little recourse to complaining, however, if they wished to be contracted again the following year.¹¹³ An MST activist in Pernambuco described the uncertified workers’ plight:

Today, no matter how much you work, you have just enough [to survive]. There are people who work sixteen hours a day and they don’t have enough to eat. Most of them go to sell their labour without having eaten. In the afternoon, they go to the little plantation shop and get some packages of cornmeal, flour, and fish to have something to eat that night. The next day, they are going back to work without anything to eat again.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ The importance of a worker was determined both by occupation and by the favour of the plantation owner. Plantation owners often rewarded long or good service with a *sítio*, or offered one to a worker whom they hoped to entice to work in their plantation.

¹¹¹ After the first national congress in 1985, MST activists attempted to establish a branch of the movement in Pernambuco. The movement saw the sugar cane region of Pernambuco as important because of the region’s history of rural organization and because of the return of Miguel Arraês (in 1986 and 1994) as governor of the state. Arraês, who had been governor of Pernambuco at the time of the military coup, became known as a friend of the rural poor because of his support for rural workers’ rights. MST’s efforts to organize in Pernambuco during the 1980s were unsuccessful, however. The leaders attributed their difficulties to a surprising lack of support from Arraês and to an unwillingness to organize among the local population.

¹¹² According to federal law, the mill owners are expected to sign working papers for every person employed on the plantation. The papers are intended to ensure that the workers receive their rights, that they are eligible for union membership and that they have their years of service counted in the interest of receiving their benefits. Uncertified workers, on the other hand, did not receive any of the public or private benefits of being registered as a legal worker.

¹¹³ The uncertified workers were also kept from joining the rural unions, a traditional source of protection for the plantation workers. The unions were hurt badly by the region’s sugar crisis because when there were no jobs, nobody paid the union fees. The unions were also deeply implicated in the sugar industry and highly ambivalent about supporting MST: “In seven or eight cities around here, it’s the mill owner who controls the unions, so the president of the union does whatever the boss says” (Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE).

¹¹⁴ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

For those who were most severely affected by the crisis of the sugar cane economy, agrarian reform offered them a chance at a better life, even if many of them felt uncomfortable with the act of occupying land and attending public demonstrations against the state: “Today, sugar cane is finished...and so, the way we were living; if it hadn’t been for agrarian reform, we could say that we would have been dead. There were no jobs, there was no work—how were we going to live?”¹¹⁵ One worker described the meeting an MST activist held by the side of the road where a number of workers were resting:

He talked to us to find out if we were wanting to involve ourselves with the movement—if we wanted to get a plot [of land], and if we wanted to be part of the movement. I said to him: ‘Buddy, I am for whatever works and for what comes my way.’ At that time I was unemployed—not just me, a lot of people.¹¹⁶

At the same time, another group of people in Pernambuco who were not as badly affected by the sugar cane crisis joined the MST. These were the people who had been offered land as a right of association rather than as a result of having joined an MST occupation. These settlers were often doing a little bit better than the uncertified workers, but not well enough (in most cases) to leave the plantation. They joined the MST because the movement came to their new settlement and aggressively began to organize. The movement’s organizing efforts, together with the promise of money and the desire for a political voice, provided powerful incentives for joining. These people did not *have* to join the MST after receiving land, but many decided to do so because membership provided them with political leverage that they would not otherwise have.

The settlers who had been living and working on the plantation at the time of the occupation were drawn into the movement almost against their will. When the MST members were settled on a plantation, there were brief conflicts between the two groups of people (the MST members and the original occupants of the plantation): “In the beginning [the residents] didn’t support the movement, because they think that we messed up their lives, because when they worked for the boss, they had work, every week they had a little income, and after we got there, they didn’t have this any more.”¹¹⁷ But the residents were drawn into the MST because the movement became the most obvious vehicle for organizing the settlement.

The demise of the sugar cane industry brought with it a reorganization of local power structures. As sugar cane industries went bankrupt and many of the old sugar elites pulled out of the region altogether, the local elites were no longer able to protect or control the workers politically. Once a plantation had been expropriated, the settlers could not approach their former *patrão* for assistance. The unions, which had been an important organization for workers in the region during the 1950s and 1960s, were also suffering as a result of widespread unemployment on the plantations.

In this new political environment, the MST offered the best representation vis-à-vis both the local mayor and the state government. According to a settler: “The movement helps us. They put pressure on the government to make the projects happen for us, it’s always the strength of the movement.”¹¹⁸ Because of the elitist character of politics in the northeast, a political voice is often synonymous with an economic voice. For a community that often feels as marginal as the plantation workers, the opportunity for a political opening is extremely significant. Not everybody is happy about the change, however. Some settlers argued that they joined the movement unwillingly but felt they had to because “whether I want to or not I have to be part [of the movement] because we arrange things within the movement”.¹¹⁹ In spite of the clear clashes between the MST’s peasant-based ideology and the rural workers’ perception of the good life in the sugar cane region of Pernambuco, so many people have joined the movement in this area that the MST considers it a focal point of their organization in the northeast.

¹¹⁵ Interview No. 21, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹¹⁶ Interview No. 23, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹¹⁷ Interview No. 40, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹¹⁸ Interview No. 14, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹¹⁹ Interview No. 2, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

The MST and the donor question

The MST is funded by four main sources: local/federal government programmes, charitable donations (national and international), member contributions and product sales. These four funding sources are directed toward three main activities. Charitable donations tend to finance particular projects, which are clustered into human rights, education, gender and sustainable agriculture/environment issues. Government programmes tend to finance agricultural production and infrastructure development. Member contributions and proceeds from the sale of MST-related products tend to go directly to mobilization activities (funding demonstrations, marches, national meetings, etc.). Of course, monies from one area can be directed into others—this occurs particularly in relation to political organization, which many MST leaders consider their number one priority.¹²⁰

Over the past 19 years, the most consistent and important source of funding for the MST has been the Brazilian government. This has shaped the movement's struggle in important ways. Even as MST members work with very different understandings of the movement's community and purpose, members continue to attend meetings and demonstrations in large part because the MST has successfully linked material resources to ideological resources by situating itself as the mediator between the settlers and the state. Although the MST has theoretically and practically organized itself in opposition to the Brazilian state, one marked consequence of winning land through the movement is increased interaction with the state. The settlers' relationship with the state begins during the occupation period, when they rely on the local government to send food and health supplies. Even though the act of occupying property is portrayed by the media and government as illegal, people living in MST encampments usually receive basic support from the local government. Activists organizing occupations tell participants to bring enough food to last a few days, until the government and settlers who have already won land begin to contribute.

Once the MST members receive land, the government becomes their landlord, creditor, educator and overseer. Technically, the agrarian reform process establishes the state as a landlord because the settlers are given use rights, not title, to the land, although they are expected to begin paying for the land in 10 years. Both the MST and the settlers militate against being "liberated" from the government in this way. The MST argues that the state has a moral obligation to give the settlers their land because wealthy landlords were able to acquire land for free. The movement also recognizes that being liberated from the government would cut the settlers off from an important source of support. The state acts as the principal creditor for agrarian reform settlers because it provides significant funds for start-up and investment. Start-up funds include money to build a house and buy an initial set of supplies for production. Subsidized funds for short-term and long-term investment are also provided on an annual basis, although these are continually being reduced.¹²¹ The state is also invested in maintaining basic infrastructure on the settlements, including roads, primary education, health services, etc. In providing these goods and services, the state establishes itself as the ultimate overseer of settlement life and activities. If settlers want to move to a new settlement, experiment with alternative production practices, or request additional assistance, they need to go through agents of the state.

Working on the land, most settlers believe they need access to these resources in order to survive. The government agrees, estimating that a majority of the settlers in the country would be

¹²⁰ International donors have complained that funds are diverted from specified activities to political organization, particularly when the specified activities involve MST extension agents who are often the most politically engaged MST actors. A British NGO, ActionAid, began working with the MST in 1999 on a local project in the northern state of Maranhão. ActionAid donated £28,000 to the project and although they were not dissatisfied with the results, they concluded that the MST was only able to implement about 60 per cent of the project's goals: "Due to the nature of the partner, the MST's demands for political mobilization has divert[ed] the time of key technical staff from some activities to political mobilization." For more information, see www.actionaid.org.br/p/pdf/areport.ag.pdf. ActionAid carried out other projects with the MST that the organization evaluated more positively.

¹²¹ Until 2001, each settler had the right to almost 20,000 Brazilian reais (R) when they received land through INCRA. This money included an initial amount of R340, to be spent on emergency food supplies, which many of the families need when they arrive in the settlement. The emergency money is followed by a grant of R740 for start-up supplies such as a hoe, wheelbarrow and seeds and as soon as boundaries between plots are legally documented, each of the settlers received R2,000 to build a house. The remainder of the R20,000 consists of long-term investment funds from the Programa Especial de Crédito Para Reforma Agrária (PROCERA), which was created in 1985. Since 2001, settlers have been incorporated into the Programa Nacional de Agricultura Familiar (PRONAF), where they are treated as small family farmers (instead of settlers) and eligible for less generous funding.

forced to give up their land if they did not have access to government assistance. A study conducted in 1998 estimated that only the settlers living in Santa Catarina had the resources to pay back their state-subsidized loans (Buainain 1998). The settlers are always nervous that the government will reduce their access to resources. As one settler in Santa Catarina said: “[The state is] going to abandon me, and I will only get resources from the PRONAF [Programa Nacional de Agricultura Familiar]. And this is how one loses the land.”¹²²

The MST’s ability to maintain participation in the movement turns on its presentation of the movement as the primary mediator between an “uncaring” state and the settlers. The state is depicted as uncaring because it is biased toward the large landowners and, movement leaders argue, has no desire to see agrarian reform actually succeed. The state’s own visibility in the settlements makes it a good target. Poor roads, insufficient electricity and a lack of resources all vividly maintain the impression that the government needs to do more in the settlements. As a settler on Vento said, “Even though we have a lot of things now, we cannot stop yet because the situation is not easy.”¹²³ Having promised a regular supply of resources, the federal government has had a very difficult time fulfilling what have come to be seen as its obligations. The short-term investment credit, for example, habitually arrives late or in the wrong season altogether.¹²⁴ When this happens, settlers either have to simply give the money back or plant in the off-season and suffer significant production losses. MST activists and leaders continually warn the settlers that the state will only fulfil its promises if constant and forceful pressure is applied. When resources are successfully secured from the state, the movement argues that they are products of organization within the MST community

The movement’s positioning between settlers and the state has been very successful. During interviews with settlers on six settlements in the southern state of Santa Catarina and the northeastern state of Pernambuco, the main reason given for supporting the MST and continued participation in its activities was the movement’s position of influence vis-à-vis local and federal governments. As one older settler on Vento said: “Nothing would function without the movement. If it weren’t for protests, the struggle, everyone participating together, then we wouldn’t get anything.”¹²⁵

Resources such as credit are seen as coming from the MST rather than coming from the state. One former rural worker on Flora who was a spokesperson for the settlement in its struggle for state resources said: “The federal government is obligated to settle us, to provide infrastructure for the settlement and to give us credit. Unfortunately, it takes too long to do this—you only get [these things] through pressure, we only receive something after the government has been pressured, and this is done by the movement.”¹²⁶ Most of the settlers feel that they won their land because of the MST’s strength as an organization and they continue to see organization as an effective means of pursuing resources. Movement demonstrations are considered largely responsible for ensuring a government-funded supply of credit in the first place: “Today the movement is respected because we have won some of the things that we wanted. Our credit is subsidized, for example, and not even the union got that!”¹²⁷ Movement activists continually remind the settlers of the debt they owe the organization. And most people agree because they believe that “the people who get land through agrarian reform will be guaranteed a better life”.¹²⁸

Another important source of support for the MST has been religious organizations, particularly those associated with the Catholic and Lutheran churches. The MST was formed in the early

¹²² Interview No. 2, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

¹²³ Interview No. 42, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

¹²⁴ Beginning with an economic downturn in 1999, the federal government began to hold back the funds for agrarian reform more and more regularly. There was a noticeable deceleration in the number of settlements created and the amount of support disbursed overall in 1999.

¹²⁵ Interview No. 10, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

¹²⁶ Interview No. 3, Flora, Agua Preta, PE.

¹²⁷ Interview No. 2, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

¹²⁸ Interview No. 36, Vento, Campos Novos, SC.

1980s and was one of many different organizations to participate in the transition from dictatorship to democracy. As a movement that grew out of the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, the MST received most of its early funding from religious partner organizations. This went through two stages, local and global. Many of the first MST occupations and meetings were mobilized by individual priests who provided food, space and people. Almost all of the people who joined the MST in the 1980s either found out about the movement through the church or spent time camped out on church grounds as they waited for an opportunity to return to their occupation site.

The religious community within Brazil had ties to an international donor community that was probably the single most important non-governmental supporter of MST activities between 1985 and 1995. International Catholic, Lutheran, and non-denominational organizations had access to information about the MST because of the Catholic Church's privileged place in the countryside, which provided religious organizations with information about the MST and made them logical supporters of the movement (Smith 1991).¹²⁹ Notable contributors included Christian Aid, a British Protestant organization involved in organizational activities in Brazil since the mid-1970s when the military's grip on such activity began to loosen; Bread for the World (a US Christian organization); Catholic Organization for Development Cooperation, Evaluation and Research Department (CEBEMO, later known as Balance, Netherlands); Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO, a Protestant organization, Netherlands); Mani Tese (an NGO, Italy); Development and Peace (a Catholic relief organization, Canada); Caritas; and Frères des Hommes (a non-denominational charity organization, France).

The early MST material reflected its close links with religious organizations, particularly in the strong reliance on liberation theology, Christian populism and a spiritual form of participation in movement activities called "mysticism". The religious emphasis in MST material and activity was both cause and effect of its association with local, national and international church groups. By the early 1990s, this emphasis was changing. The movement visibly distanced itself from organized religion and religious principles as the intellectual leaders shifted toward Marxism/Leninism and the Catholic Church became more conservative.

In spite of the move away from a specifically religious perspective, there is little reason to believe that the MST's funding diversified significantly between 1985 and the mid-1990s. There was not sufficient internal activity to generate revenues, and outside support did not extend into the mainstream urban areas or international community. In 1995, it was estimated that 62 per cent of the MST's operating budget came from international donors (primarily Christian Aid and Scandinavian church organizations), 28 per cent came from internal sources such as member contributions and sales of MST products. In the early 1990s, battered by encounters with conservative presidents José Sarney (1985–1990) and Ferdinand Collor de Melo (1990–1992), the MST redirected its attentions inward and began to focus on internal development. The MST began to actively develop production collectives on the settlements, which were seen as key to providing the movement with a critical mass of political and economic support. In 1992, these collectives were drawn under an umbrella MST organization called the Confederação das Cooperativas de Reforma Agrária no Brasil (CONCRAB). MST cooperatives were located mostly in southern Brazil and became a significant source of revenue for the movement, although never to the extent hoped for.¹³⁰ Their contributions are possibly increasing, however, with the attempt to industrialize agricultural production and sell processed goods such as meat, milk and fruit jams. The first *loja de reforma agrária* (agrarian reform store) was inaugurated on 14 January 2000, selling goods produced on the settlements. A portion of the store's revenue is to go to the MST headquarters.

¹²⁹ Secular international support was probably relatively low because transnational NGO activity was still in its relative infancy and MST was one of many movements to form in the wake of the military government.

¹³⁰ In order to plan political activities, MST activists hold meetings on the settlements and ask for donations of time, food and money.

Internal contributions also come from another source, which has generated significant media interest in recent years. The MST requests a “voluntary” membership fee of somewhere between 2 and 4 per cent of the funds the settlers receive from the government. Those opposed to the MST have argued that the membership fee constitutes criminal activity. In 2000, high-ranking officials within INCRA accused the movement of diverting approximately R600,000 in this way.¹³¹ As mentioned previously, internal contributions are generally gathered to support political activities such as demonstrations, marches, activists’ daily stipend and new land occupations.

By the mid-1990s, the MST began to attract more attention, and this was reflected in a significant increase in national and international support. The attention was due primarily to three things. First, the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration provided more space for MST-related activities than any previous administration. Second, the MST had achieved a level of organization by then that allowed it to efficiently utilize public space. Third, two violent episodes occurred (one in 1995, the other in 1996), which served to highlight the plight of the rural poor and impunity of the Brazilian police.¹³² Because the second incident was captured on videotape, it was publicized and immediately drew a strong reaction from the national and international communities. Although the MST insists on retaining a high degree of autonomy whenever it receives funds from outside organizations, four key areas have received financing that may be largely a result of donor concern. The international community is not particularly interested in agrarian reform per se; many people have difficulty empathizing with the issue as they probably have difficulty understanding its relevance in modern society. The international community has shown sustained interest, however, in human rights, education, gender and sustainable agriculture/environment issues.¹³³

The MST is concerned about human rights because, as a movement that organizes poor people to operate outside of normal legal channels, its members are often threatened by severe human rights violations. Donor funds, particularly from the European Community, have been important sources of support for securing legal advisors, training internal legal specialists and mobilizing the international community around such issues. International organizations such as Global Exchange, Amnesty International and Grassroots International hold regular letter-writing campaigns to try to prevent abuses committed against MST members. This attention is important as it forces the Brazilian government and agrarian elite to be accountable for their actions (as witnessed in the case of the Corumbiara and Eldorado de Carajas incidents).

Educational activities have probably received the most outside funding of all MST activities. Organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have targeted their funding toward education-specific activities, including primary education and adult literacy. Other organizations such as Global Exchange have focused on programmes for activist training and legal education. The MST’s educational activities continue to receive external support as they are recognized for their efforts to include the most marginalized sector of the rural poor and for their innovative approach. The movement won a prize from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in 1995 that came with a considerable monetary reward, as did a 1997 award for international development from the king of Belgium. In a recent publicity and fundraising trip to the United States sponsored by Global Exchange, the MST announced that it has reformulated the ways in which it will solicit international assistance in the future. The movement has begun to formulate specific large-scale, long-term projects, which could be funded by multiple outside donors. In this way, MST activists can

¹³¹ There has also been conflict among MST members as to whether or not such contributions are legitimate. Many people do not pay them and this is a major bone of contention.

¹³² In 1995, military police invaded an occupation camp for the landless in Corumbiara, Rondonia. Ten people were killed, including a seven-year-old girl and two police officers. In April 1996, military police broke up a peaceful MST demonstration in Eldorado de Carajas, Para, and ultimately executed (shot in the back of the head) 19 of the demonstrators. There is no question that these two violent episodes mobilized the Brazilian and international Left.

¹³³ These are stated priorities of many agencies that fund MST’s activities. NOVIB lists four areas of priority: human rights, gender empowerment, education and sustainable livelihoods. ICCO lists human rights, gender and the environment as its key issues.

approach donors with a proposal in hand. The main campaign at the time of writing was a project that would train movement activists throughout the country.

The MST has also received considerable attention and funding for activities related to the environment and sustainable agriculture. Although pro-environment principles are highly contested within the movement's grassroots base, MST leaders have thrust the movement into the centre of issues such as agro-ecological production methods and genetically modified (GM) foods.¹³⁴ The MST has recently become a major actor in the incipient anti-GM movement within Brazil. MST activists in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul have led the fight against genetically modified soya, which Monsanto would like to see planted throughout the southern region of Brazil. This drive is supported by international donors such as Christian Aid, which recently distributed a document titled *Selling Suicide* about genetically modified crops. Christian Aid cited GM foods as the biggest consumer issue in the United Kingdom. Agro-ecological concerns have received attention in particular settlements, but tend to be feasible only when supported financially by an external donor.

Gender-related activities can also generate international attention and funding, and, although the MST has been concerned about gender equity since the mid-1980s when it articulated women's rights as necessary components of the "new society" the movement envisioned for the future, women's issues did not become a specific concern until much later (because movement leaders preferred to focus on class rather than gender divisions). By the mid-1990s, however, gender-related activities were prominently featured in movement publications and demonstrations (Deere and Leal 1999). This push was complemented by support from international donors. Oxfam International suggests that its support and influence were major factors promoting the MST's capacity to address gender inequities. In 1996 the MST established a National Women's Collective, and local gender collectives are present throughout MST settlements (although it is not always clear how effective they are).

Finally, international funding has been the most important impetus and avenue for further international recognition. Organizations such as Global Exchange, Christian Aid, ICCO, the Institute for International Cooperation and Development (IICD), Grassroots International and Food First! have all made awareness of MST-related issues in their own countries a top priority. Global Exchange regularly hosts MST activists who tour the United States and give presentations on the MST's goals, methods and accomplishments. In 1997, Christian Aid financed a report on the 1997 National March that was featured on the front page of the British newspaper, the *Guardian*. Sebastião Salgado, the world-famous photographer, put together a beautiful photographic account of what he called "the only political movement really fighting for human dignity in Brazil". The photographs were organized into a book titled *Terra* that was on the bestseller list for several months in Brazil and eventually published in seven other countries.¹³⁵ The photographs were also arranged into an exhibit that travelled all over the world. Proceeds from the book (sold for \$50.00 each), the exhibit (sold for \$500.00) and the accompanying CD (also called *Terra* and compiled by Chico Buarque, sold for \$20.00) were donated to the movement for the express purpose of establishing an activist training centre. In 2000, ICCO, Bilance, and BR Petrobras¹³⁶ financed the production of a film called *O Sonho da Rosi, Dez Anos Depois* (Rosi's Dream: Ten Years Later), a popular film used to familiarize national and international audiences with the movement.

In conclusion, the MST is funded primarily by government programmes, charitable donations, internal contributions and product sales. When the movement was first formed, religious organizations were its main supporter but since then the donor community has widened and

¹³⁴ This stand generates disagreement, of course, because many MST members are more interested in producing quickly in order to feed the family than in preserving the long-term environment or rejecting seeds produced by multinational corporations. Agro-ecological production methods make enormous sense, of course, particularly given that the MST members need to retain their land for more than just one generation as has been the custom.

¹³⁵ The 109 photographs included in the book depicted life in the occupation camp, scenes of rural poverty and experiences on the settlements.

¹³⁶ BR Petrobras is Brazil's biggest oil company, not a charitable organization.

deepened significantly. How the MST uses these monies varies considerably depending on the source and ongoing internal concerns. Funds that come from charitable donations tend to be targeted toward specific activities, particularly those involving human rights, education, sustainable development and gender awareness. Government programmes tend to be directed toward agricultural production and internal contributions tend to be used for political activities. Each of the 22 states in which the MST operates participates in activities coordinated at the federal level, such as organized *dias de luta* (days of struggle), coordinated occupations throughout the country, and interstate marches. The constant political organization depends heavily on resources generated locally and internally.¹³⁷

IV. Associational Dynamics: Senegal and Brazil Compared

The two case studies under consideration illustrate the power and potential of peasant associations, and are exemplary models of the sorts of “new rural social movements” invoked in the introduction to this paper. The forms of organization—and the institutional and political character—of the two associations are a study in contrast, however. Both became national organizations, growing from essentially local origins (in one case the small farmer crisis in southern Brazil; in the other the bankruptcy of interventionist agricultural policies and state-led cooperatives which sparked local reactions that gradually spread throughout Senegal). But in their scale and impact they differ markedly. We have chosen here to emphasize five themes that strike us as important in any discussion of associations.¹³⁸

Framing

Both the MST and the CNCR, in the context of quite differing sorts of political openings and socio-economic contexts, were successful in framing a powerful sort of political subject. In the case of the MST the question of access to land in the context of unprecedented inequalities, and of a new constitutional commitment to equality and justice, provided the political backdrop for the framing of a particular identity. The aim was to recuperate a smallholder model of agriculture by appealing to the poorest of the poor (the landless), though at the onset the socialist orientation of the MST envisioned a strong collectivist vision to the project. A combination (and critique) of church and Left ideologies combined to make access to land and smallholder production a key part of the political identity: a citizen’s right to unclaimed land was a sort of clarion call of the movement. As this case study has shown, however, the framing, and the political identification itself, was shaped by essentially local ideologies of the participants and settlers. A strong smallholding tradition in the south of Brazil reinforced the type of MST framing; in the northeast a very different relationship to land and the market resulted in a rather different interpretation (and set of practices) marked by some conflict and struggle. But at the heart of its vision was agrarian reform and the democratization of the Brazilian countryside.

The analysis provided here focused especially on the tensions within the process of mobilization and on the creation of a political subject. In spite of the decreasing importance of agriculture and small farmers to Brazil’s economy and society, the MST was uniquely positioned within the vast array of new civil society actors to transform the struggle for formal democracy into a struggle for deepening democracy. The agricultural restructuring promoted by the military government had encouraged mechanization, capitalization and vertical integration without altering the distribution of land or wealth, thereby alienating people from production in the countryside and creating a “landless class” that could be mobilized around the struggle for agrarian reform.

This landless class was particularly strong in southern Brazil, a region with a strong peasant culture based on access to land. As the spatial frontier in southern Brazil came to an end and it became harder for the sons and daughters of small farmers to find new land, those who valued

¹³⁷ The only truly national element of the movement’s structure is, as João Pedro Stedile says, “*a linha política*” (the political line).

¹³⁸ The analytical approach adopted here is inspired from that proposed in McAdam et al. (2001).

farming as a way of life joined the MST. Their “cultural toolkits”, established in the historical practice of colonizing empty land by squatting, resonated with the MST’s call to occupy illegitimately owned land. These landless farmers provided the material and ideological resources that transformed the first squatter settlements into a national movement.

The MST adopted methods aimed at disrupting the normal political and social order, recasting spaces of private and public property as illegitimate by inserting members’ own bodies into them. Movement occupations (of land, public spaces and government buildings) have come to represent not just the struggle for agrarian reform, but a struggle for the “right to have rights”. When MST members occupy a rural farm property, they claim to be asserting the right of every Brazilian citizen to adequate land and food for subsistence. Jaime Amorim, an MST leader from the state of Pernambuco, characterized this process of creating citizens as giving people excluded from the economy and society a voice:

We work with the people who are marginalized by the bourgeoisie, they are the...thieves, the people who lie around, the idiots. The movement takes those people and turns them into citizens. The person who was living there in the city, going around making trouble—well, when the movement goes back [to the city] with him in two years, the people who used to not care about him at all, they begin to see him as an authority, where before he lived without a voice in society.

Of all the rural social movements that developed in southern Brazil as the military government lost and loosened its hold over the country, the MST perhaps had the most potential for building grassroots democracy within its membership. The MST directly challenged one of the most politically and socially entrenched groups in Brazil—the rural land-owning elite—positioning the movement at the crux of anti-democratic practice and exploitation in Brazil. As Caio Prado Júnior would have argued, because injustice and inequality are most prevalent in rural Brazil, the potential for revolutionary change was also the greatest there. The MST argued that the equitable distribution of land in Brazil was a necessary step toward building grassroots democracy at the national level.

The MST’s trajectory has had a strong class dimension in which a particular vision—of access to land, equity, justice and smallholder agriculture—was pursued in often militant ways through highly mobilized networks and communities. The land/production focus was coupled to an ambitious collectivist model and to an effective process of networking and alliances that became national in scope, effectively won battles with the Brazilian state, secured state support, and ultimately came to play a role in the wide-ranging debates over democratization.

The CNCR paints a rather different picture. Here the association spoke to the need to construct a collective peasant voice and vision amid a diverse and varied set of farmer communities and federations (some of which were themselves a product of earlier state interventions) capable of playing an active role in the context of a restructured Senegalese state. The story is one of federation and lobbying, institutionalization and capacity building through alliances and networking, and input into the policy process. It represented a sort of deepening of rural/peasant citizenship rights and the gradual formulation of a distinctive approach to agricultural and rural development, rather than a pattern of local-level mobilization around access to productive resources (as in the Brazilian case). The CNCR considers itself the voice of the 70 per cent of Senegalese people who are still based in rural areas and largely engaged in family-based peasant agriculture and related activities. The success of the movement it has piloted, it could be argued, is due in good part to the emphasis it has placed on reconstructing and developing the identity of the peasant farmer. A leader of FONGS said that when he started his mobilizing activity, people who stated their occupation as “peasant farmer” when responding to official forms were told that this reply was unacceptable. The FONGS and the CNCR have worked to make being a peasant farmer an object of pride. And since the Senegalese citizens who recognize themselves as falling within this category constitute a good proportion of the population, the political clout of this reinvention is evident.

From the 1993 national forum's initial demand for the right of the silent majority to participate in national decision making and a denunciation of the impact of structural adjustment on peasant agriculture and the environment, the CNCR has moved on to frame its claims in the form of alternative proposals. Much of this activity, however, has taken place in the context of national strategy and programme negotiations, in terms which have seemed remote and abstract to rural people. Exceptions have included the reduction of the interest rate on agricultural credit and local-level consultations on land tenure. But generally speaking, the pace and modalities of national negotiations and the CNCR's scarce resources for networking and communication have combined to create a gap between local perceptions and central claims-making. The disparate nature of the CNCR member federations and the fact that most of them are not linked to the base has also affected the nature of the CNCR's framing process. Progressively, however, the CNCR reflection and discourse has come to focus on a theme which does speak to the majority of the rural population: the defence and promotion of family-based agriculture as opposed to concentrating investment on an industrial, "entrepreneurial" model as the future for Senegalese agriculture. This principle has been accepted at the level of national policy.¹³⁹ Translating it into specific stakes and concrete action proposals will involve the CNCR and its member federations, if they have the necessary force and resources, in intense framing activity at local and regional levels with a consequent increase in the identification of the base with the "CNCR project", something which is now largely lacking.

The focus on family-based agriculture amounts to a rediscovery of the basic unit of Senegalese society, still alive although stressed to its limits by the economic, political and social changes of the past century. As the ROPPA memorandum puts it, in West Africa "the family farm is the basic unit of production, consumption and natural resource management. It is the locus of the links of solidarity, which constitute our system of 'social security'. It ensures the food security of our countries as well as the bulk of employment and investment" (ROPPA 2001:4). What appears, in the final analysis, is an effort to help reweave the torn fabric of Senegalese society and renegotiate a social compact from the smallest unit up, a contribution to what McAdams et al. term the process of democratization. A recent study of democracy in Senegal (Schaffer 1998:75-76, 95-96)¹⁴⁰ suggests that

the notions of *demokaraasi* held by many non-French-speaking Wolofones appear to be largely conditioned by the repertoire of normative and institutional strategies used by this largely poor and vulnerable population to respond to their precarious life conditions. ... In an electoral system shot through with clientelism, many Senegalese citizens regard participation in the electoral process as a form of economic exchange in which political patrons offer money or food in return for votes. ... No clear distinction is made between the public good and private benefit or between corrupt and legitimate mechanisms of distributing the material wealth of the *buur*.¹⁴¹

The farmers' movement is working against this kind of perception through its progressive efforts to render the attribution of national resources transparent and accountable, to demonstrate that the CNCR can function as an effective instrument of claims-making for rural people, that the local and national arenas can be linked in meaningful ways, and that values like solidarity, self-respect and responsibility can be painted on a broad social canvas. The same can be said for the MST in the context of a widespread culture of political corruption in Brazil, both within the government and indeed within and among political parties. The MST was about "doing politics differently", about a scepticism toward government and formal parties, and about a process of democratic deepening from below. In this sense the MST became, as much by default as design, a hub organization in the democratization movement in Brazil.

¹³⁹ In the government's operational strategy and action plan for the agricultural sector referred to in the Senegal case study. A clear and coherent statement of how it intends to implement this strategy—including the privatization of the groundnut chain—is, however, still awaited from the administration.

¹⁴⁰ See also Bayart (1993).

¹⁴¹ Wolof word roughly equivalent to "king" or "ruler".

Relation to the state

The two cases reveal two rather different trajectories as regards the Gramscian question, namely the boundary between association and state. From the outset the MST was clearly (and strongly) *oppositional* to the state, and the land occupations themselves were regarded as illegal by state operatives. The cadre/membership approach of the MST was precisely about the dangers of state co-optation and the corruption of the state machinery. In presenting the state as the settlers' primary enemy, the MST is able to take advantage of necessary state resources without allowing individual members or the movement as a whole to be co-opted through incorporation. Contrary to David Lehmann's (1990) argument that social movements have to choose between state resources and autonomy, the MST's discursive separation of the state from a socially just democratic society has allowed it to access government resources while retaining organizational and ideological autonomy. Even as the political environment in Brazil has changed over the past 20 years, and observers have argued that negotiation would be more productive than opposition, the MST has maintained its contentious character. This emphasis on opposition is both a product of the historical difficulties of fighting for agrarian reform and a reflection of the instrumental position the MST occupies between its members and the state. Since the mid-1990s, and particularly since the massive march on Brasilia in 1997, the picture has looked somewhat different: the MST helped push through a package of concessions for the landless, and indeed the movement now has substantial resource support. It has retained, it needs to be said, clear autonomy (with certain costs as we see below), but there has been a shift toward more active engagement with the state and indeed a dependence upon it—something that reflects an important shift.

In the case of the CNCR, the picture is different. Some components of what was to become the CNCR were created by the government and remained strongly dependent on it throughout the 1980s. The autonomous FONGS and its member federations, on the contrary, tended to keep their distance from government until the crisis of peasant agriculture with the NPA in the mid-1980s obliged them to engage. The CNCR itself has made it clear that it considers the state its primary partner and has consistently defended the sovereignty of the state as national policy maker, even when the World Bank has tempted it with offers to bypass the government in programme negotiations. The CNCR has sought to put dialogue and negotiation on an institutional basis. In one of its earliest documents (CNCR 1993), the CNCR requested periodic consultations with the government, a goal that was attained when the first audience with the president took place in February 1997.¹⁴² Another plank in its platform is the establishment of a national council of rural development with representatives of government and all concerned stakeholders. The CNCR has used confrontation sparingly, only in situations in which it felt that government action was unacceptable and continued dialogue untenable.¹⁴³ Several factors may help to explain this difference between the MST and the CNCR. One is the fact that the Senegalese state is far weaker than the Brazilian and its weight on the world scene is less significant. The CNCR perceives dialogue and negotiation with government interlocutors at national and subregional levels as an essential defence mechanism for West African peasants in a context of globalization, and an arena in which it is reasonable to expect common interests to be identified, such as defending West African agriculture from unfair international competition and slowing down the tide of urban drift. Another differentiating factor is the lower level of repression, violence and socioeconomic skewing in Senegal as compared with Brazil. A third, related, factor is the fact that the CNCR's ideal social base is the majority of the country's population and its demands, in consequence, have to do with the entire orientation of agricultural and rural development policy. The MST's base, on the contrary, is more class-specific and its immediate claim—occupation of land—has been more focused and confrontational.

¹⁴² The periodic meetings with the president, the prime minister and the minister of agriculture have been interrupted but not abrogated by the new administration. The CNCR is lobbying strongly to have them reinstated.

¹⁴³ The CNCR's boycott of national negotiation processes in June 1996 is the major example.

Networking and alliances

The record of the two associations in regard to networking and alliance building is rather different. One of the great strengths of the MST—rooted in the organizational capacities that emerged from left-wing parties and the progressive wing of the church—was its national networking ability within the organization itself. Only in this way can one understand its success in mobilizing around the country and in organizing complex land invasions and resource mobilization. The record with respect to alliance building is more uneven. On the one hand, the MST has garnered an international following and has been quite successful in gaining international visibility through transnational NGOs based in Europe and North America. On the other, within Brazil the picture is more complex, and Navarro (2000), for example, sees the question of relations to other actors in the “popular arena” as one of the major issues confronting the MST. In part because of ideological rigidity by some MST cadres, coupled with internal dissent among MST activists, the ability and willingness to reach out to other organizations has been compromised. Furthermore, in several states a number of other civic associations are competing with the MST for support by landless workers. As Navarro puts it (2000:39), the MST “has not coordinated its actions with other organizations of the rural poor—which would strengthen the movement politically”.

The CNCR has considered the construction of alliances and partnerships with other socioeconomic and political actors at all levels an essential element of its strategy from the outset. The creation of the CNCR itself was an act of alliance building through the identification and magnification of common interests among federations of disparate history and composition. We have already alluded to relations with the state at a political level. Building operational partnerships with government services and agencies has been more problematic, since the government agents’ training and cultural preparation has not predisposed them to treat farmers as equals, and the transfer of responsibilities away from the state with privatization is experienced as a loss of power. At an individual level, however, the cultivation of “accomplices” within government has given the CNCR access to strategic information it would otherwise have found difficult to obtain. The APCR has played an essential role in the political legitimization of the CNCR. Equally important but much less publicized has been the farmers’ movement’s quiet but constant efforts to keep the powerful religious authorities informed about and benevolently inclined toward their activities. Another ally has been the Senegalese media, whose independent reporting has helped to bring the CNCR’s message to the country’s citizens even during the most difficult phases of negotiations. The CNCR has made less progress in building relations with national NGOs, many of which tend to speak for rural people and seek resources from donors on their behalf. Some efforts have been made to find common ground with private sector operators along the commodity chains, but this is difficult terrain (McKeon 2002). Consumer organizations represent an insufficiently cultivated ally in terms of the need to build dialogue between rural and urban populations around the CNCR platform.

The CNCR’s efforts to build alliances beyond national boundaries have been important to the movement. The case study traced the time and effort that has been dedicated to the construction of a West African peasant farmers’ network. Dialogue with farmers’ organizations in other parts of the world is also high on the CNCR/ROPPA agenda. It is worth noting that both the MST and the CNCR are members of the international Via Campesina network. ROPPA and Via Campesina have taken joint stands on the impact of international trade agreements on peasant agriculture and other issues. Internationally, the CNCR and ROPPA have built up an informal support network in international organizations and NGOs throughout Europe and North America, which has had a significant impact in terms of furthering the movement’s objectives and constructing more formal, institutional partnerships. The CNCR has been skilful in articulating its relations at different levels and in using advances in one set of relations to bring pressure to bear at other levels.

Trajectory

In the two cases, of course, the associations reveal some common developmental trajectories. Both took advantage of political opportunities and new spaces, retrenchment of the omnipresent state in the case of the CNCR and the democratic transition in the case of the MST. Both were concerned to create a new political actor, to articulate—as Stuart Hall calls it—a “new identity”, and to frame claims and vision in particular ways. In both cases this involved different types of “scaling up” through networks, alliances and institution building. Both attempted to provide an alternative to clientelistic and corrupt business-as-usual politics. Both movements employed distinctive forms of “certification” and “brokerage” (to return to the language of McAdam et al.). And not least, both depended on foreign donors and international networking in rather different ways (the CNCR through its more formal linkage with larger international NGOs and foreign assistance, the MST with its international solidarity connections).

Both associations stand at important points in their rather different trajectories, and in their engagement with the state. At one level the cases seem to be a study in contrasts, but there are some striking points of similarity. The MST has already achieved a growing national presence, relative success in obtaining its social demands through the state, and some degree of financial autonomy. At the same time, there are compelling challenges turning on internal democracy (as the organization grows, the question of organizing a coherent struggle without resorting to centralized decision making becomes more important), relations with other rural movements, and the problem of how and whether productive solutions to smallholder agriculture can be found. The CNCR has achieved political and institutional recognition on the part of the state and development partners, has succeeded in having a significant influence on national policies and programmes affecting rural areas, and has made more progress than the MST in the direction of putting content into the call for promoting productive smallholder agriculture. Its weakest points are insufficient rootedness at the base and dependence on outside resources to implement its strategy.

Donor relations

There are both similarities and strong differences in the two cases. One similarity, not surprising in terms of the overall history of the relation between aid agencies and peasant movements, is the fact that both the MST and the CNCR’s predecessor and founding member, FONGS, have received strong support from NGOs. In both cases, the NGOs concerned were ones that took a bold interest in issues of social justice and combined financial support with advocacy. A number of them figure on the list of donors of the MST and FONGS and its member associations. Both associations have had to contend with donor influence, reflected in the case of the MST in the way donors have “signified” the movement’s objectives in their own categories: human rights, gender and sustainable agriculture/environment. The strongly political nature of the MST has defended it from undue conditionality on the part of donors who pride themselves on their solidarity relations. FONGS has defended itself by building a tradition of collective partnership with a consortium of donors, which have agreed to support it on a programme basis rather than project by project.

The differences begin with the CNCR’s explicit orientation toward engaging with the state and major development partners and negotiating access to national programme resources for peasant farmers and their associations. The long-term goal is to build financial autonomy for the CNCR, the economic arm of the movement, ASPRODEB, and the member federations by progressively reinforcing the economic base of Senegal’s family farms, strengthening the capacity of the federations to provide services for which small-scale farmers are willing and able to pay, and winning the battle to establish a national rural development fund.¹⁴⁴ But attainment of the goal of self-sufficiency is more distant than in the case of the MST. In the meantime, the CNCR’s capacity to move ahead with its strategy for building the movement is dependent on the outcome of its negotiations with the government and aid partners.

¹⁴⁴ This will be funded on the basis of levies on major agricultural products, import taxes on cereals, and a portion of the resources generated by compensation funds in the context of international agreements concerning agricultural subsectors.

Summary

To return to our question of state and civil society and the autonomy of such associations, it is clear that the MST has pursued a more independent path, one that engages with the state and yet attempts to limit its influence; the same might be said of its relations to donors and the basis of its finance. The CNCR, rooted in a very different context, has entered onto a terrain of brokering with and through state agencies and powerful donors and has developed less financial autonomy. This has given each movement a specific trajectory and generated rather different sorts of challenges and contradictions.

Both associations have revealed something of the ways in which entitlements can be won and expanded, and capabilities deepened – to return to Sen and development theory – on the terrain of democracy and on the ground of what is loosely called empowerment. Both illustrate the need to move beyond the focus on the entitlement arrangements of individual persons and households¹⁴⁵ to look at how they relate to social movements, which can act on the structural factors determining these arrangements. In one case (the MST), however, the momentum came from a powerful set of social movements and vectors, a focused and confrontational primary objective – occupation of land – and a dramatic political opening; this has given the colour and force to the movement. In the Senegalese case, the CNCR was more diffuse and less easily mobilized, and the reformist trajectory is built upon a rather different history of peasant identity and politics, which is now being reinvented and refigured through complex patterns of state building at national and subregional levels.

Coda: Policy and the interface between social movements and development cooperation

The case of the CNCR, in particular, raises the issue of the interface between social movements and development cooperation. Up until the 1990s, the worlds of social movements and mainstream development programmes were practically non-communicative. Over the past decade, the development agenda has been fundamentally recast in terms of structural adjustment, liberalization, privatization, institutional development, decentralization, good governance and now poverty reduction with an accent on civil society actors. In this context, there is a general consensus within the development community regarding the necessity of building legitimate, well-structured producer movements capable of representing the interests of rural people and providing them with the agricultural services they need. Nudging this process along has become an object of great interest to development partners. Views of what form a structured farmers' movement should take and what functions it should perform, however, vary from donor to donor, and the agricultural and rural development programmes they fund tend to become instruments whereby each donor promotes the implementation of its own vision. At the same time, the political implications of a strong organization representing the interests of the rural population are not lost on governments. Donor conditionality intervenes to complicate positioning between governments and farmers' movements.

In the view of organizations like the CNCR, responsibility for building the farmers' movement can only be vested in the movement itself. Other actors can give advice, they are encouraged to follow the process with a critical eye, and it is their prerogative to refuse to support initiatives in which they do not believe. But their efforts to condition the process are not welcome. As the farmer leader Mamadou Cissokho puts it: "For us the negotiations are not about funds, but about who has the right to take initiative on behalf of rural people." Defending this principle in negotiations with powerful actors like the World Bank is no easy task, but the CNCR's case is not the only example of success.¹⁴⁶ This point leads on to another challenge, that of addressing the incongruities between the logic, the rhythm, the methodology of building a social movement and those governing the formulation and implementation of development strategies and

¹⁴⁵ See the "sustainable livelihoods" trend in current development cooperation thinking, championed in particular by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID).

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Fox and David Brown (1998).

programmes. As the account of the first 10 years of the CNCR has demonstrated, the overall social and political vision which animates a budding social movement tends to become disarticulated by the project logic, chopped up into pieces, and forced into a mould which is not congenial to it. The pace and the way in which national negotiation forums operate is inimical to consultation with the base. The methods and rhythm of project planning and execution do not allow for appropriation by local actors. A long-term process is telescoped into a time-bound logical framework. It is as if the CNCR were being asked to prepare a *soufflé* with a cement mixer (or to cook *tiéboudienne* without fish, to adopt a more Senegalese metaphor): the tools are not appropriate to the task. The underlying problem is that of putting the aid system in its proper place. Aid plays a far more central role in the determination of socioeconomic and political dynamics in West Africa than in Brazil, more central than is healthy and than is warranted by its effective weight in the economy. The play of conditionalities has undoubtedly advanced the cause of peasant organizations' participation in policy and programme negotiation. At the same time, however, it has bumped change along at a pace that most governments and officials have not internalized. It is essential that the dynamic of interaction between farmers' organizations and governments be rooted more strongly within the national and sub-regional contexts. This is the sense of the national council of rural development and the national development fund that the CNCR advocates.

The MST has had the option—and has seized it—of building up a tightly structured movement from a base of committed members in autonomy from, and often in confrontation with, the state and development partners like the World Bank. Engagement with the state has come only in a later phase. In the CNCR's view this option did not exist for peasant movements in West African countries like Senegal. Winning political recognition, space and access to resources in the arena of national negotiation forums, influencing the deep reshaping of strategies and investment programmes that was taking place in the mid-1990s, was felt to be a precondition for broad mobilization at local level. Examining these options and making these strategic choices in different contexts is an issue of great importance for peasant movements. Is it one that development policy makers and practitioners committed to promoting good governance are willing and able to recognize, and to take on?

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Printed in Switzerland
GE.04-02187-September 2004-800

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