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The challenges of territorial governance: the example of rural Brazil

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Márcio Caniello, Étienne Polge and Gilles Massardier*

Brazil's territorial development policies are now a worldwide benchmark. This is especially true of its National Programme for Territorial Development (Pronat) created in 2004 by the federal government. This programme was intended to encourage investment in family farming in the most marginalized territories through the setting up of collective facilities. In this approach, territorial development is considered primarily to be a process for creating and managing a territory that comprises of several municipalities and is endowed with specific identities. Local actors are accorded a key role in Pronat so that they can control their own futures. Territorial development favours local solidarity (between actors, including the most marginalized ones) and national cohesion (by combating spatial disparities). It also promotes a principle of integration and coherence between sectors, scales, dimensions of sustainable development, public policies and endogenous projects. Projects, proposed by very diverse actors with varied and often diverging interests, do not naturally converge at the territorial level. Territories are as much the expression of tensions, competitions and conflicts as of solidarity and cooperation (Sabourin, 2015). The need for coordination and arbitration is therefore paramount.

Territorial governance is the product of this coordination between actors with diverse objectives, resources and approaches, but who share a common project: the creation or consolidation of a territory (Rey-Valette *et al.*, 2014). This governance corresponds to a lower level of centralized territorial management, based on a partnership between public authorities, civil society and private operators. It is also a multi-level process that promotes vertical coordination, because it depends on decisions taken at other organizational levels, and itself influences others. Territorial governance traces its roots to decentralization, which is often linked to a withdrawal by the central State for financial reasons, and to the willingness of civil society to intervene in public affairs in greater measure. It increases the involvement of citizens in political action. Territorial governance takes the form of specific mechanisms which allow actors to translate a shared vision into common objectives, which are then broken down into projects, planning

tools and normative and financial frameworks. In Brazil, Pronat has promoted a unique mechanism for participatory governance, constituted by a territorial development college within the territories, as well as by councils at the state and federal levels.

CIRAD and its partners have supported this programme and participated in its national evaluation in collaboration with the Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA). The evaluation involved 26 universities in 37 rural territories. This rich experience has helped identify several challenges of territorial governance.

THE POWER GAMES AROUND INSTITUTIONAL PARTICIPATION AND ARRANGEMENTS

Territorial governance must ensure the participation, mainly through representation, of the maximum number of actors in public decision-making. Pronat has thus encouraged actors who were hitherto excluded (mainly uneducated farmers, women and the young) to get involved in policy matters. It has also promoted agricultural development projects in rural areas that are less influenced by agribusiness and Green Revolution agriculture, both forms being generally unfavourable for family farming. Other roles of agriculture (food security for rural areas and small towns, employment, biodiversity management) have been recognized. The presence of the actors in debates, however, is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by transparent and efficient decision-making processes, which then implies that institutional arrangements, considered to be the 'rules of the game', and their conditions of use within the mechanisms, are of suitably good quality. The assessment of Pronat exposed problems, both in terms of mobilization (lack of presence of public bodies, weak legitimacy, and high participant turnover) and the fragility of decision-making rules and of the functioning of colleges (Piroux and Caniello, 2016). The groups of actors, including the ones in family farming, have organized themselves around interest groups, and therefore around power relations. However, conflicts that arise are rarely debated, thus resulting in blockages. The domination of certain groups or individuals and harmful political influences also hamper the quality of decisions. For example, within the Aguas Emendadas territory (DF-GO-MG), participation has mainly involved community leaders who have been representatives of agricultural communities for a long time. These prominent individuals have become professional negotiators and essential transactional leaders for the development and financing of collective rural development projects. Pronat also shows that frequent problem can arise in the relationship between farmers and elected officials, but solutions do exist. For example, an experiment carried out at the TASPP (Território do Alto Sertão Piauí e Pernambuco) showed that a long process of raising awareness of mayors led to the creation of an inter-municipal consortium where they are more active. The different partners have accepted alternative agricultural development projects that derive value from family farming, and are inspired by agroecology principles.

The assessment of Pronat has finally highlighted significant positive impacts, especially in terms of learning, including in the exercise of power, and improved relations between actors. As such, Polge (2015) has shown that territorial governance in the Amazonian territories of the State of Pará has led to a strengthening of local networks through local productive arrangements and, more broadly, organized proximities.

NEED FOR INNOVATION AND SUPPORT

Experience shows that the territorial leadership and engineering skills mobilized are key for the effective implementation or creation of the proposed governance mechanisms. They help in building up innovation capacities to promote coordination, encourage creativity and adapt to complex, uncertain and evolving situations. To this end, within the mechanisms, a common language (sense making) was developed and lessons were suggested to share knowledge (sense giving) and transfer tools and instruments (instrument-sizing) (Vitry and Chia, 2016). The solutions are then developed in experimental approaches to evaluate, test and fine-tune the processes depending on the situations – which are always unique. Local experiences highlight a significant need to support and institutionalize these experiments (Tonneau *et al.*, 2011).

Training initiatives contribute greatly to this process as they improve the representation frameworks and strengthen the organized proximities. At the TASPP territorial level, for example, a rural university, linked to the governance mechanism, has helped co-construct information, derive value from local knowledge and analyse complex situations to better inform debates, as regards credit, infrastructure and productive choices. Another training exercise in conflict management and understanding of territorial dynamics was conducted at the national level for participants in territorial colleges in charge of Pronat. It helped better prepare participants for the concertation necessary to create a mobilizing project to ascribe meaning to development actions.

The need for innovation also concerns institutions that are in charge of territorial development, often at more encompassing levels. This was the aim in assessing Pronat, but it showed the difficulties of undertaking such an exercise in a context of institutional inertia and routines.

CONCLUSION

The aim of territorial governance is to help regulate the interaction of public and private actors within territories and to ensure coherence between levels of organization. Experiments in Brazil have shown that territorial governance cannot be imposed. It must be created by the actors themselves according to situations that are always unique. Improving the capacity for innovation, translation and concertation thus represents an essential element in building relationships based on trust that are a prerequisite for effective governance.

But the processes remain very dependent on the balances of power and, more broadly, on policy frameworks. In Pronat in Brazil, the legitimacy of governance mechanisms was limited by a dependence on the federal administrative structure (constraints of bureaucratic procedures for disbursements and for project implementation), instability in local facilitation mechanisms, and a legal framework that makes them very dependent on the goodwill of mayors and federated States. Consolidating territorial governance therefore requires broader institutional innovations that can, in particular, guarantee greater autonomy for local mechanisms.

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