Rural women: political agents in the struggle for food sovereignty and food security

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Organization of rural women in Brazil

The first rural women’s movements were consolidated in the 1980s, upon gaining recognition as rural women workers involved in family-based sustainable agricultural development;

Their political platform:
Right to organize in trade unions; access to land; rights to social welfare programs and policies.
They took part in movements of men and women (mixed organizations) (Trade unions, movements for access to land: CONTAG, MST) as well as rural women’s movements (MMTR’s, MMA, MIQCB, among others).

Their strategies: organization of grassroots groups, petitions and large marches.
In the 2000`s

- The rural women arrived at a new level of organization and appeared publicly with political force;

- 2000, 2003 and 2007: The March of the “Margaridas” (The National Comission of Rural women workers of CONTAG and other organizations), with millions of participants;

- In 2006: public demonstrations of members of the Via Campesina movement on March 8th-International Women’s Day;

- The issues of agroecology and food sovereignty appear in the women’s political agenda, along with feminist demands (for economic autonomy and against violence)
The situation of women rural workers in Brazil today

Despite the creation, after 2003, of a series of public policies that recognize the rights of rural women and aim to diminish the inequalities existent in gender relations, rural women still face many forms of social inequality and injustice.
Examples

- Women have less access to: land, financial aid, technical assistance, land cultivating techniques and information about market systems;

- Little decision-making power over strategies for food production and commercialization of products in the family unit;

- Their knowledge and skills are not duly recognized; They are overburdened with domestic responsibilities and care-taking activities;

- They have less access to income and are not recognized as autonomous agents in the public sphere.
The organizing efforts of rural women around issues of food sovereignty and food security

- The organization of women’s groups frequently is motivated by issues of health, nutrition and food, with a sustainable focus.

- Food production: natural, organic and processed; cultivation of small animals; preservation of different species (seed banks); use of medicinal plants; experiences of commercialization in local markets: These are all forms to affirm the experiences of women in the above mentioned themes and issues.
Food Sovereignty and Food Security: The political platform for women’s organizing efforts

The cultivation of diverse types of crops constitutes the peasants’ model of food production; healthy food for consumption, produced in a sustainable way, occupies a place of priority in this political platform;

Confrontation of the model of monoculture, based on agricultural production on a large scale: denunciation of the hegemony of multinational companies in their control over the forms of production of toxicants and modified seeds; of international commercial agreements that do not favor family-based, sustainable agriculture practices; of public policies that are negligent of environmental issues (such as the OGMs).
- International networks and collective actions constructed around these issues: Havana forum (2001), Nyéleni (2007), among others; affirmation of the concept of Food Sovereignty.

- Large public actions that involve confrontation of multinational companies: marches, demonstrations, occupations of laboratories and fast-food restaurants.

- A new model for agriculture should recognize women as protagonists with rights, always taking into consideration their experiences, needs and proposals for sustainable development.
Challenges for thinking about rural development with food sovereignty and gender equality

Valorization of the variety of actions necessary for the sustenance of human existence: Through giving a new status to reproductive activities as a necessary project for the survival of all, that should not be considered exclusively a woman’s responsibility.
Challenges...

- A strategic model of agricultural development aimed at sustainable practices: productive technologies, the scope of the market system, preservation of the biodiversity, of the water, energy and natural resources;

- A model in which the knowledge of women and all those involved in family-based agriculture should be affirmed and their autonomy respected.
Challenges

- Construction of alliances between urban and rural sectors, men and women, for the creation of a system of production and consumption that can guarantee food sovereignty and food security indistinctively.