



PROJETO
DOM HELDER
CÂMARA

CONTRIBUTION OF THE DOM HELDER
CÂMARA PROJECT TO STRENGTHEN
WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AND FOOD
SECURITY VIA TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE SERVICES

MUNICIPALITIES:
QUIXADÁ (CE), OROBÓ (PE)
AND VERTENTE DO LÉRIO (PE)



PROJETO
MONITORA

BRASÍLIA – DF
AUGUST 2022



Contribution of the Dom Helder Câmara Project to strengthen women's autonomy and food security via technical assistance services: municipalities Quixadá (CE), Orobó (PE) and Vertente do Lério (PE)

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INTRODUCTION

Public policies that strengthen the autonomy of women, offer incentives for their participation in decision-making spaces and promote food and nutrition security are necessary. This is what was learned from phase II of the Dom Helder Câmara Project (DHCP). The partnership with organizations such as Centro Sabiá and Centro de Estudos do Trabalho e de Assessoria ao trabalhador (CETRA) provides decision-making on the improvement and diversification of their productive systems, preparation of healthy food for families and the destination of earnings obtained by their agricultural activities.

From the perspective discussed by Favareto and Carneiro (2017), projects such as DHCP II contribute to the reduction of deprivation of elements “constitutive of their lives and that enable (and limit) their achievements and desires” (p. 16), corresponding to what economist Amartya Sen defines as functionings^[1]. Among them can be mentioned “having self-respect and taking part in the life of the community” (Sen, 1996, p. 56).

These actions help rural women feel recognized and valued as subjects of rights, and expand their possibilities of choice. Public policies directed to women reduce gender inequality and contribute to improving women's assets and the possibility of occupying spaces, including those with some decision-making power, within productive establishments as well as outside them (FAVARETO, 2021).

The challenge is to recognize them as productive subjects and highlight their importance in the transition processes of food systems, especially from an agroecological perspective (JALIL, 2022).

BY GAINING FINANCIAL AUTONOMY, THEY CAN UNDOUBTEDLY DECIDE WHAT TO PRODUCE, HOW TO PRODUCE IT AND THE QUALITY OF THE FOOD THEY OFFER TO THEIR FAMILIES. MOREOVER, THIS PROCESS FREES THEM FROM OPPRESSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND OFFERS THEM NEW LIFE EXPERIENCES (FAVARETO, 2021).

¹ “Functionings represent part of a person's state: in particular, the things he can do or be in life. Some functionings are very elementary, such as being properly nourished, having good health, etc. Others may be more complex, but still highly appreciated, such as gaining self-dignity or social integration” (SEN, 1996, p. 55 and 56).



INVISIBLE WORK

They are involved in a wide range of roles within food systems, from production and processing to sale and consumption (QUISUMBING et al, 2021), but the relevance of their participation in productive activities is timidly recognized. In the study published in 2006 by Silva and Portella on the sexual division of labor^[2] in rural areas in northeastern Brazil, the authors produced an unfavorable social and economic diagnosis of the conditions of rural women workers.

In addition to limitations common to the set of family farmers in the Northeast, such as the small extension of land, the low quality of the soil and the reduced investment capacity, there are other difficulties that deepen the problems faced by women. Among them, the low access to formal instruments for income generation and the precarious housing conditions that increase women's workload. Many houses are also used as corrals and warehouses during harvesting seasons, which increases the risks of acquiring diseases (SILVA and PORTELLA, 2006).

Along with this there is an overload of unpaid activities (household and family) that limit women's participation in training activities (FAO, 2017), "in a continuum of productive and reproductive work" (SILVA E PORTELLA, 2006, p.136).

Labor relations are dominated by men. They make the decisions on what to produce, where to market and how to make use of the income. Thus, women's autonomy is reduced or even blocked. For Silva and Portella (2006), rural women workers are subjected to a workload that "imposes itself almost as a totality over their lifetime" (p.143). Data from 2012 indicates that, of the 42 hours of overall workload for rural women in Brazil, only 14 hours were paid, compared to the 37 hours paid to men (FAO, 2017).

² The sexual division of labor "assigns men's work to the productive sphere and women's work to the reproductive sphere, it also ranks men's work over women's work, with a man's work being worth more than a woman's work" (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2008, cited by IFAD, 2021, p. 15).

Other research on the sexual division of labor teaches that the tasks performed in the garden or in caring for small animals are not extensions of household chores, but activities that are part of work and are fundamental to “sustaining life” (JANCZ et al. 2018, p. 18). Hillenkamp's analysis (2021) of women's role in the ecological and social transition highlights an approach to the economy from a non-market point of view, based on the principles of reciprocity, redistribution, and production for one's own family consumption.

There is still a long way to go to overcome gender inequality in rural spaces. However, as reported by Jancz and collaborators (2018), there are experiences that show the success of women's self-organization processes to overcome these precarious conditions in the sexual division of labor.

Among the experiences that can be called successful^[3] are those led by women whose families were supported with Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) services within the framework of DHCP phase II. These experiences are an opportunity for learning through the protagonism exercised by women to ensure the well-being of their families and communities, as well through the achievement of autonomy, which is strongly valued by the women's collective

This document intends to report these experiences, in the voice of its protagonists and bring to light information gathered by UnB's Monitora Project^[4], lessons and recommendations that can contribute to future projects, which aim at gender equity and women's empowerment, income generation and reduction of poverty and hunger in Brazilian rural spaces.

To begin with, information about DHCP II and two partner organizations that worked in the execution of the Project is summarized. Next, cases studied in Pernambuco and Ceará are presented. Finally, lessons and recommendations are listed that can help in the design of future projects, especially in the dimensions of gender and food and nutrition security.

³ A successful experience within the framework of DHCP II is characterized by the development of good practices and innovations carried out by a family or group of individuals that help to face the challenges of the semi-arid region, generating positive impacts on the living conditions of the family and/or the local population that lives in subsistence conditions. The successful experiences should allow the extraction of lessons and learnings that can be inspiration for other families and communities, as practical examples that can be adapted in other contexts.

⁴ The project “Evaluation and monitoring of the Dom Hélder Câmara Project – Monitora UnB/SEAD” aims to monitor, evaluate and support the coordination and articulation of public policies and innovations related to technical assistance and rural extension and fight against poverty and rural inequality within the scope of phase II of the DHCP, reaching ¹¹ Brazilian states and ⁹¹³ municipalities in the Brazilian semi-arid region.

THE DOM HELDER CÂMARA PROJECT (DHCP) PHASE II AND THE PARTNER ATER ORGANIZATIONS

The goal of DHCP II was to reduce rural poverty in the Brazilian semiarid region. To this end, the initiative proposed the reduction of inequalities of gender, generation, race, and ethnicity; in addition to promoting the coordination of public policies and/or the formulation of new public actions, always based on the expansion of innovations. The DHCP II operation was based on a loan agreement with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), signed in 2014 by the Federal government and made operational by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MALS).

DOM HELDER CÂMARA PROJECT RESULTS (2014 - 2023)

 ATTENDANCE TO 835 MUNICIPALITIES | 11 STATES IN THE BRAZILIAN SEMI-ARID REGION

INITIAL TARGET FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

60.000
BENEFICIARY
FAMILIES

TARGET REACHED:
54.048 FAMILIES
BENEFITED
=90%

CHALLENGES: resource cuts and significant changes in its operation, despite the increase in execution time, initially planned for six years

Source: ATER Management System (SGA). 2021

AUDIENCE SERVED

DHCP II advocates a proposal for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) that addresses the different dimensions of rural development and the fight against poverty and hunger. It starts from the principle that technical assistance should be “continuous and systemic, focused on the demands, objectives and areas of interest of beneficiary families” (POA, 2020, p.3).

The beneficiaries of DHCP II are family farmers, registered in the Federal Government's Unified Registry (Cadastro Único)⁵, with special emphasis on serving women, youth and Traditional People and Communities (TPCs). This specificity implies working with ATER methodologies and instruments adapted to the different types of priority groups, their demands and capacities.

In correspondence with the multidimensionality of ATER services, the Project was structured in three main components: the expansion of innovations for sustainable development, the strengthening of organizational capacities and access to markets. All this to favor the dialogue on public policies.

⁵ The Cadastro Único is a registry that allows the government to know who low-income families in Brazil are and how they live. Families that can register for Cadastro Único include families that have a monthly income of up to half a minimum wage per person or that have income above that but are linked to, or want to be linked to a program or benefit that uses the Cadastro Único in their concessions.



Photo: Silvia Nonata da Silva

It was expected that the implementation of the three components would be conducted in a coordinated and articulated manner, but, after analyzing the cases presented in this text, it was the ATER services for sustainable productive development and access to markets that made the actions to strengthen women's autonomy feasible. The goal was the sustainable transformation of agricultural production to improve food and nutrition security (FNS) and income generation, guided by the principles of agroecology and living with the semi-arid region (BRASIL, 2013).

An important point to be highlighted is the guidance for the use of methodologies that recognize local and traditional knowledge and its horizontal integration with technical and scientific knowledge, such as the implementation of specific activities that reverse gender and generational inequalities, as well as include traditional communities, with the aim of promoting the socio-productive inclusion of these most vulnerable groups of the rural population (BRASIL, 2013).

The main line of action of the DHCP II is the provision of technical assistance services through the National Agency for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ANATER), which contracted 27 ATER organizations, 10 public and 17 private, through 46 service provision contracts in the 11 states of the Brazilian semi-arid region.

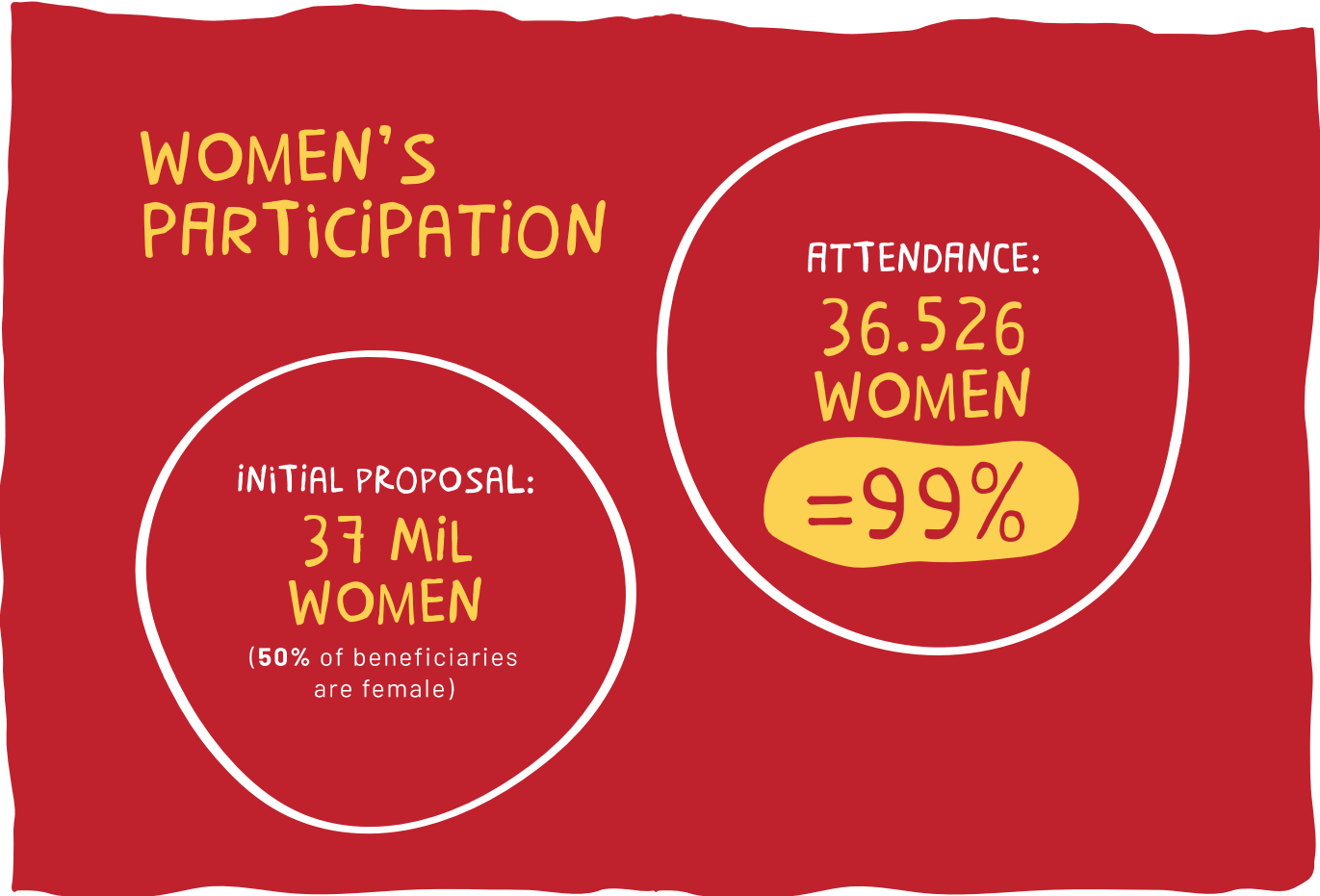




Photo: Sílvia Nonata da Silva

Also as part of the DHCP II strategies, through a partnership with the Ministry of Citizenship (MC), 16,040 (91% of the goal of 17,700) families were benefited by the Rural Productive Activities Promotion Program^[6], which made it possible to invest BRL 2,400 per family, passed on in 2 installments, representing a potential investment of R\$ 38.5 million.

The Program was established with the goal of stimulating the generation of employment and income, promoting food and nutritional security (FNS) and promoting the participation of beneficiaries (in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty) in social, educational, technical and professional training, as well as promoting their participation in associations and cooperatives. Through this Program, farmers receive individualized and continuous monitoring by agricultural technicians, who share their knowledge on ways to increase production, quality, and value of products. The Program also makes non-reimbursable resources available to be invested in the structuring of their productive activities. It was made into a law (Law 12512) in October 2011 and regulated by decree 9221 in December 2017.

⁶ Specifically, in these cases studied, there was no contribution from Rural Productive Promotion.

SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE SEMI-ARID

Among the organizations providing the technical assistance services are the Centro Sabiá and CETRA, whose contracts were executed in the states of Pernambuco and Ceará, respectively.



The Centro Sabiá for Agroecological Development is a non-governmental organization that promotes family farming within the principles of agroecology. Created in 1993, it operates in the state of Pernambuco, specifically in the territories of Agreste, Zona da Mata and Sertão, in addition to the Metropolitan Region of Recife. Its work stands out for its interaction with different sectors of civil society, with the purpose of jointly building a sustainable development model.

PARTNERSHIP WITH DOM HELDER CÂMARA PROJECT AND CENTRO SABIÁ IN NUMBERS

INITIAL PLANNING
5.420 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

4.975 ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT
=95%

15 MUNICIPALITIES
in the Territory of Agreste (PE)

597 FAMILY UNITS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION (UFPA)

1.747 PEOPLE individually attended



18 PROFESSIONALS



CONTRACT VALUE:
BRL 955.066,58

Source: ATER Management System (TMS). 2021

CETRA



Associated with the Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (BSA), the ATER Northeastern Network, the National Human Rights Movement and the Women's Movement, the Center for Studies and Assistance to Workers (CETRA) is an organization that has known the Dom Helder Câmara Project since its first movements in the 2000s. Currently, the center is responsible for eight municipalities and about 900 beneficiaries.

Operating under the principles of agroecology and coexistence with the semi-arid^[7], CETRA has a wide capillarity with networking with the National Human Rights Movement, the ATER Northeastern Network, the Rural Workers Movement of the Northeast and the Articulation in the Brazilian Semi-arid (ASA).

PARTNERSHIP WITH DOM HELDER CÂMARA PROJECT AND CETRA IN NUMBERS

INITIAL PLANNING
8.584 TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE
ACTIVITIES

7.396 ACTIVITIES
CARRIED OUT
=86%

09
MUNICIPALITIES
in the Sertão
Central
Territory (CE)

962
FAMILY UNITS OF
AGRICULTURAL
PRODUCTION
(UFPA)

2.806
PEOPLE
individually
attended



32 PROFESSIONALS



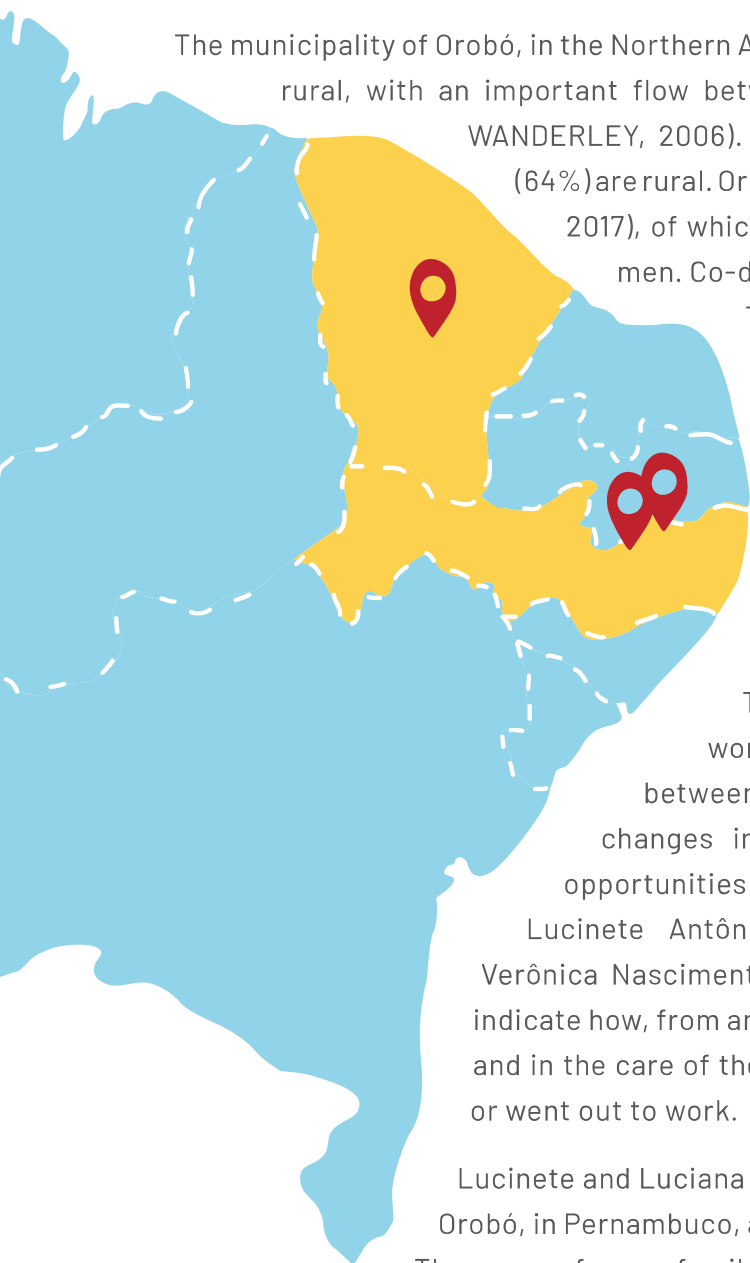
CONTRACT VALUE:
BRL 1.421.828,73

⁷ According to the "Declaration of the Semi-arid Region", published in 1999 by the Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA), coexistence with the semi-arid region aims at "the conservation, sustainable use and environmental restoration of the natural resources of the semi-arid region", as well as "breaking the monopoly of access to land, water and other means of production". Source: Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation - ASA. Declaration of the Semi-arid Region. 1999. Available at: https://www.asabrasil.org.br/images/UserFiles/File/DECLARACAO_DO_SEMI-ARIDO.pdf. Accessed on 23 Aug. 2022

TAKE NOTE

Centro Sabiá and CETRA stood out for their remarkable results and for the quality in providing technical assistance and rural extension services, as evidenced in research conducted by the Monitora Project. Such results, however, are not quantifiable since this work is qualitative and not quantitative in nature. In these surveys, changes occurred in dimensions such as the appropriation of new practices, increased production, diversification, commercialization, management of natural resources and differentiated service to priority groups were analyzed. The indicators were well evaluated by the mentioned beneficiaries.

AUTONOMY, FOOD SECURITY, AND INCOME GENERATION: THE CASES OF WOMEN IN THE AGRESTE REGION OF PERNAMBUCO AND CEARÁ



The municipality of Orobó, in the Northern Agreste Territory of Pernambuco, is predominantly rural, with an important flow between the countryside and the city (PAULO and WANDERLEY, 2006). Of the municipality's 22,878 inhabitants, 14,645 (64%) are rural. Orobó has 1,846 family farming establishments (IBGE, 2017), of which 575 are directly managed by women and 725 by men. Co-directed by couples, there are 523 establishments.

That leaves 22 establishments that are managed, according to the 2017 Agricultural Census, by a foreman or a person with family ties to the owner. Added to this information from the 2017 Agricultural Census, it is noteworthy that, of the total of family farming establishments, 22% had never attended school and 92% had not received ATER services until that moment.

The three years of ATER service received by four women in this municipality, thanks to the partnership between DHCP II with Centro Sabiá, generated significant changes in their productive systems and expanded the opportunities for selling products in natura or prepared. Lucinete Antônio, Luciana Celerino, Renata Fernandes and Verônica Nascimento tell stories of their childhood and youth that indicate how, from an early age, they had to work in domestic activities and in the care of the yard. The men in the family worked in the fields or went out to work.

Lucinete and Luciana are sisters (naturally from Paraíba, they moved to Orobó, in Pernambuco, after getting married) and live close to each other. They come from a family of nine siblings. Since they were children they worked in the fields and are very fond of agriculture. Before getting to know the DHCP II, they worked in the fields and donated the surplus production to neighbors or provided for the animals. However, there was little diversification of products in their backyards.

Lucinete says that she used the wood that her husband cut to expand the plantation, to make charcoal and sell it.

Renata lived with her mother and helped on the farm since she was a child. Times were difficult and she went to live in Rio de Janeiro for a while, where life became even harder. When she returned, she did not go back to live with her mother. She started to receive technical assistance from Centro Sabiá, which, according to her, changed her life. She made manioc flour and sold it, until the technician suggested that they make "beiju." She got excited and, though doubtful about her ability to prepare and sell it, she went ahead. Today, customers consider her product the best "beiju" in the city. She receives orders and makes other types of products using manioc flour as raw material. In her words: "Now I'm working for myself." She bought a motorcycle, which allows her to deliver orders of the cakes and "beiju", as well as facilitates her displacement to take products to the fair and to buy the inputs for production on the property. Renata adds:

"WHOEVER COMES TO MY HOUSE GETS A FULL BELLY; NOW THERE IS NO LACK OF FOOD."

Veronica, the eldest daughter of four siblings, had to devote herself to taking care of the youngest. As a child, she worked in the countryside and when she was a teenager, she became pregnant. A single parent of two sons, she went through many difficulties and faced situations in which she had no food to offer her boys, in her words: "It's sad when your child asks for something and you have nothing to give him, you don't have anything to feed him." She got married and together with her husband, who she describes as a blessing, they started to build a life together, raising their two children until they managed to buy a small plot of land. They did not know that there were such projects that offered technical assistance services. After entering DHCP II, she learned that it was possible, in a small land, to produce in a diversified way and to evaluate the production costs to establish the prices of the products sold at the fair. Thanks to the courses for family farming given by Centro Sabiá with resources from DHCP II, she and her husband produce mineralized salt for animal consumption (goats) using inputs from the farm, such as eggshells and ashes. As Veronica says, "this salt is developed with products from the land." They also make hydroponic corn to feed the chickens and she prepares orange, passion fruit and cassava cakes to sell at the fair. She also takes orders through a phone app.



Photo: Olivia Godoy

For Veronica, the support received gave her the opportunity to offer her children the best food possible. There is no lack of food, and almost everything they consume is produced in their small plot of land. Another point she highlights is having acquired tools to work on the land. Now they have a hoe, a sickle, a spade. Finally, for her, another challenge was to belong to the commission of young agroecology multipliers, an initiative of Centro Sabiá, and to participate in the Agreste Women's Forum^[8]. Being part of these spaces helped her to acquire knowledge about agroecology, meet other young people, other women and overcome her fears of interacting and positioning herself.

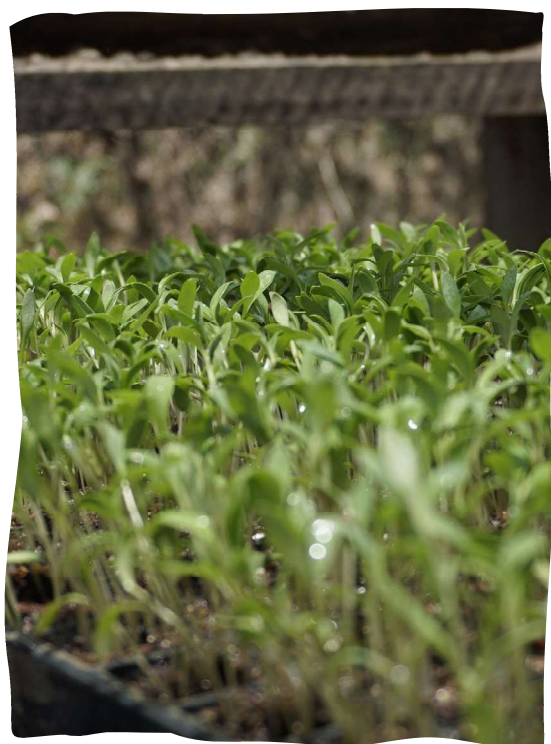
With the ATER service, this group of women learned to work with other crops such as bananas, oranges, passion fruit, cassava, yams, and several types of vegetables, in addition to raising chickens. With this diversity of products, these rural women guarantee healthy and adequate food for their families. In addition, they sell various products at the agroecological fair in Orobó, where they have won a loyal clientele interested in buying varied, quality, pesticide-free products.

Receiving advice on their properties and the support for a fixed point of commercialization, which operates on Thursdays, solved many daily problems. The result of an articulation between Centro Sabiá, the Rural Workers Union and the City Hall, this joint effort made it possible to sell the production surplus (avoiding the loss that used to occur, since the products not consumed by the families and their animals were discarded), transforming this surplus

into income. As a result, the farmers were able to make new investments, such as the purchase of Renata's motorcycle and the new lot for Verônica's family. They received a tent and during the first three months they had financial support from Centro Sabiá to travel from their communities to Orobó. Later, more autonomous and with higher income, as Lucinete expresses, they were able to start paying for their own transportation.

For Juliana Peixoto, project coordinator at Centro Sabiá, "the DHCP works as a great umbrella, because it allows us to reach the communities by offering technical assistance services and, based on that, articulate other actions, also led by Centro Sabiá. That led to improving not only the production processes, but also the processing and commercialization of these families' products."

Photo: Olivia Godoy



⁸ Created in 2018, the Women's Network of Agreste Pernambucano is a forum for strategic actions to fight violence against women and promote a culture of peace in the Agreste region of Pernambuco. The space is the result of the participation of Caritas (Inter) Parochial agents, Indigenous women, quilombolas, young people, family farmers and social movements (Caritas Diocesana -Pesqueira -PE, 2019).

Today the fair is a meaningful place. The benefits go beyond the income they earn and spend autonomously. Initially, they believed they would not have the courage to talk to other people and offer what they produced or prepared. Two of them, not being able to read, could not do math. This limitation was solved by relying on their teenage children. Now they talk, sell, offer, meet other people, exchange information, learn and teach. All four are recognized and valued as farmers. Veronica expresses it best: (before) "We used to be hidden, without having the opportunity to be known, now we are. It was an opportunity. We gained freedom! Now we are happy to go to the fair."



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OR READ THE
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DOM HELDER CÂMARA PROJECT PHASE II IN VERTENTE DO LÉRIO (PE)

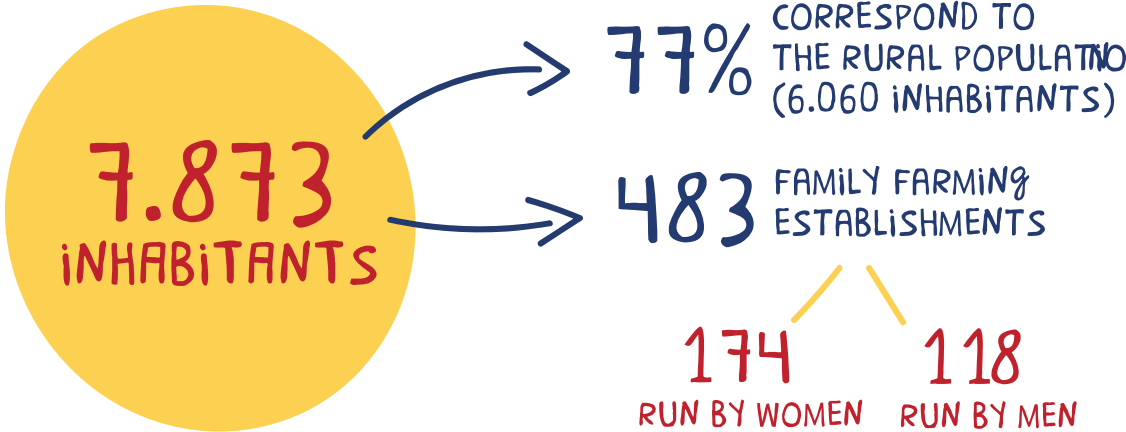


Photo: Olivia Godoy

The experience of this group of women is similar to the case of Ana Claudia in Vertente do Lério, also assisted by the Centro Sabiá, under PDHC II. Vertente do Lério is a small town with 7,873 inhabitants, of which 6,060 (77%) are rural population. There are 483 family farming establishments, 174 of which are directly managed by women and 118 by men. Co-managed by couples, there are 189 establishments. There remain two establishments that are conducted, according to the 2017 Agricultural Census, through a foreman or person with family ties to the titular owner. Similar to the data from Orobó, 25% of the family farmers responding to the Census never went to school and 94% had never received technical assistance services or funding (IBGE, 2017).

Ana Cláudia da Silva, at the Malambá farm, in Vertente do Lério, co-manages her property with her husband, Abel Amaro da Silva, with whom she lives and has two children. With 48 passion fruit trees, without knowing exactly what destination to give the harvested fruit, in 2018 she started selling her production in the market. The following year, with the arrival of the advisory services of the Centro Sabiá, she was encouraged to plant other intercrops (corn and lettuce; cabbage, cilantro, and onions; pineapple, carrots, and tomatoes). The productive diversification made a big difference, especially for her financial autonomy.

Having an income supplementary to her husband's income allows her, for example, to offer her family a day of leisure. In addition to improving the planning of her property and diversifying production, Ana Cláudia won a space at the fair in the municipality of Surubim (16 km from Vertente do Lério). The farmer started selling the passion fruit for a better price and guided by ATER, started to diversify the uses of the fruit. By browsing the internet, she learned to process them. That resulted in the production of various marketable products made from passion fruit, such as pulp, juice, mousse, cake, homemade ice cream "dudu gourmet" - as the frozen juices in plastic bags are called there, known in other Brazilian regions as "dindim" or "sacolê."



Photo: Sílvia Nonata da Silva

"WHEN WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SELL AT THE FAIR, WE SOLD AT A BETTER PRICE BECAUSE IT IS AN AGROECOLOGICAL PRODUCT. WE TAKE CARE OF THE LAND, FROM PREPARATION TO HARVEST. WHAT WE SELL AT THE FAIR IS WHAT WE PUT ON OUR TABLE" (ANA CLAUDIA, VERTENTE DO LÉRIO – PE)

Ana Cláudia is now the vice president of the Association of Agriculturists and Agriculturists of Tambor and Adjacências – a community in the municipality of Surubim (PE) – which opened a space for her to gain autonomy and recognition for herself, her family, and the local residents.

In the municipalities of Vertente do Lério and Orobó, it was the first time that the technical assistance service arrived. For Ana Cláudia, the arrival of Centro Sabiá was eye-opening. Her colleague, Verônica, also noticed the difference after the experience with the technical assistance offered by the Organization. "We realized that many times it's the lack of opportunities, a lack of guidance. Today we have guidance."

Sertão Central



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In the territory of Sertão Central (Ceará), there is the municipality of Quixadá, which, according to the 2010 Census (IBGE, 2010), has 80,604 inhabitants, 29% of which live in rural areas. The 2017 Agricultural Census (IBGE, 2017) counted 3,452 Family Farming establishments, 1,931



of which are run by men and 643 (19%) by women. Co-directed by couples, there are 827 family farming establishments. The data on schooling and ATER are equally disheartening, as are those registered for the two municipalities of Agreste (PE). Of the total family farmers, 32% have no schooling and 93% had never received ATER services.

In the rural area of Quixadá, lives Maria Alcy Pereira dos Santos, who is part of the 19% of women who run her property. Divorced, she raised her son alone and, with a lot of effort, putting together her savings, bought the land where she works today. Almost all of the food consumed by the family is produced on their property, including manioc, free-range chicken, cabbage, "angu", string beans, juices and fruit desserts from the backyard, which are pesticide-free.

Dona Alci's unit, as she is known, has differentiated production structures: masonry works designed to last a long time without requiring maintenance, such as the center of an agroecological poultry raising system integrated with vegetables. There is also a small shed for sheep and pigs, which, for now, no longer houses the animals because, according to the farmer, COVID-19 has brought marketing difficulties. "During the pandemic, I had to reduce production, because there was no way to sell. What we did was to donate the vegetables here to those who needed it more than us!"

As reported by Campos Sá and Diniz (2022), Dona Alci became part of the public served by the Dom Helder Câmara Project phase II in 2018. The property became a reference agroecological unit. "For her, this was already very important, because she did some good things on her own, but the technicians helped to improve it." report the two authors.

The capacity for resilience and adaptation is another element present in Dona Alci's experience. In the original productive project, designed by the advisors with the farmer, the goal was to increase sheep production. With the pandemic, however, the strategies were reformulated, and the new focus became the guarantee of food security for the family and ensure income with sanitary security in the commercialization, as reported by the technicians and the farmer.

On her small farm, in addition to her and her partner, their son lives with his wife, a baby and one more woman, whom she identifies as the other mother of her son.

"The vegetable garden is what I like the most, but that is how it is: I wake up in the morning and stay in the backyard until lunch time. It takes a lot of time, because we must take care of everything, and do the things that they (the technicians from CETRA, organization of TERA services) guide me to do. We have to organize the production to take it to the market. Once a

month our group goes to Fortaleza to sell at the fair. I take fruits, flour, mangoes, and all the diversity that I have here... Before, I only had parsley, lemon balm and cashew to sell. I plant my corn right here. I keep the seeds in the tubes and use them the following year. The technicians want us to make all the seeds we can right here. I cannot live in a land like this and go into the city to buy food. I produce real food here and the income comes from it. Today I have my knowledge about income, the (agroecological) notebooks help me understand everything I do. This notebook showed me the meaning of my work, today I no longer see myself as a farmer, but as a great businesswoman - laughs Dona Alci, with her wide repertoire of humor, activities and responsibilities".

Photo: Olivia Godoy



PRODUCTION OUTFLOW

Commercialization in the municipality of Quixadá is done through a group chat idealized by the technical assistance for the agroecological fairs. The initial idea was to organize the logistics and production planning. With the reality of the pandemic, it was necessary to help the needy with solidarity baskets and deliveries to consumers. Today, this communication tool is the main way to sell the production.

"People place their orders and every fortnight we go to the city to deliver our production. I message what is available in the group chat and people make their requests. The internet and alternative payment methods helped a lot", emphasizes the agroecological farmer.

Dona Alci sells part of her production at a fair in Fortaleza, organized by CETRA. It takes place once a month and is the entity that finances the transportation of the producers and their products. For her, the fair should work at least twice a month. In this commercialization place, the profitability is higher, and the producers feel more valued.

The experience of virtual fairs, the revolving solidarity funds^[9] and the combinations of agroecological technical innovations accumulated by CETRA's assistance were essential for Dona Alci to be able to secure food for her family, for exchanges with neighbors, to supply solidarity baskets and still maintain herself in the market.

The challenge of DHCP II, in this context, was to provide quality advice, with strong ties of belonging and identity with the territory. In this sense, the technicians selected to work for CETRA were, mostly, residents of Quixeramobim and Quixadá, coming from agrarian reform settlements or rural communities that face the same problems as the beneficiaries and were responsible for ensuring that farmers adapted and resisted when faced with the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

⁹ Centro Sabiá and CETRA use the Solidarity Revolving Fund (SRF) mechanism to build, together with farming families, mechanisms to support the agroecological transition, aiming at sustainability in the countryside and the mitigation of climate change. For Centro Sabiá (2020), the Solidarity Revolving Fund refers to an amount for investment in activities that the families themselves already develop, aiming to improve their systems so that they are increasingly sustainable for both families and the environment. These resources can be delivered in cash, materials, or animals. The word "rotative" has a main goal to promote the rotation of these resources, also covering other subjects of the community, the municipality, or the region, mainly providing opportunities for women and young people, a way of giving visibility to these subjects that are of extreme importance in family farming. Speaking of "solidarity" gives a new sense of society, with style and values conceived and locally appropriated, but open to interaction with other groups and ideas, and opposing excluding political and economic relations. Available at: <https://centrosabia.org.br/2020/01/10/fundo-rotativo-solidario-contribui-para-transformacao-de-vidas-de-familias/>. Consulted on August 30, 2022.

The four women from Orobó, as well as Ana Claudia, in Vertente do Lério, and Dona Alci, in Quixadá, agree that the three years of ATER services provided by Centro Sabiá and CETRA, under the PHDC II Project, have contributed significantly so that they, their families and the people who buy their products could have regular access to healthy and diversified food. Amid the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, they managed to continue producing and selling at fairs of neighboring municipalities, following all biosafety recommendations.

The resources used were the ones already available on the properties, and practices of coexistence with the semiarid were promoted. The productive activities conducted by this group of women, their commitment and leadership made their properties reference units, with the expectation of facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences, taking advantage of local knowledge, and improving technological solutions with the guidance of technicians from these two partner organizations of DHCP II.

Organizations such as Centro Sabiá and CETRA have proved to be important facilitators of this process. They guide the ATER service to produce real food^[10], to convince them that regular and permanent access to food, in sufficient quality and quantity, must first be guaranteed, and then move on to commercialize the surplus, either through processing or sale in natura.

For these DHCP II partner organizations, a crucial point is to recognize women as active subjects of the productive process. In fact, the data from^[11] the DHCP II impact assessment are encouraging in this regard, as they point out that an important number of women were assisted by the project. The index of women's participation (iMu)^[12] (MONITORA, 2022), indicates the percentage in which women participate in community actions and occupations exercised in various activities, such as agriculture, commerce, public service, among others.

This index had a significant impact as it showed that DHCP II provided an increase in the empowerment of women in beneficiary families by 28.4% (about seventy-five points above the control group). The impact was even greater when compared to the control groups and beneficiaries that received funding from the project. In these cases, while the beneficiaries with funding presented an average number of 353 points, the control group presented an average of 264 points, showing an increase in women's empowerment of 33.8% (about eighty-nine points above the control group).

¹⁰ *food* is understood as defined at the 5th National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security held in 2015 by the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA).

¹¹ The evaluation of the impact of DHCP II was conducted by Projeto Monitora - UnB. The information from the families was obtained through two sampling journeys, the first (T0) conducted between the months of October, November, and December 2018 and the second (T1) carried out between the months of January, February and March. A significant sample of 4,374 families was surveyed, and two established methods were used to assess twenty-eight indicators: Propensity Score Matching (PSM), and Differences in Differences - DIFF-IN-DIFF. The sample size allowed measurements both for the beneficiaries in general and for those who also received the production incentive, always comparing with the performance of farmers who did not receive the program (control group), with a margin of error of up to 4% (MONITORA, 2022)

¹² The higher the value of iMu, the better the indication of empowerment of women in the agricultural unit. The iMu ranges from 0 to 1000.



Another figure worth highlighting in this analysis is the value of non-monetary income calculated in the impact evaluation from avoided financial expenditures throughout 2021, through the consumption of products of animal or plant products produced in the agricultural unit itself (MONITORA, 2022). For DHCP beneficiaries, this income was 10.6% above the control group and 32% for beneficiaries who received funding (711 points above the control group).

Also in relation to the impact assessment of DHCP (MONITORA, 2022), it was found that the food diversity scale¹³ had a significant impact. While beneficiaries had an average of 5.81, the control group had an average of 5.66. Therefore, the DHCP provided an increase in the food diversity scale of the beneficiaries by 2.6% (about 0.15% above the control group). As in the other indicators, the impact of the DHCP regarding food diversity was even greater in the case of beneficiaries with support when compared to control groups. In these cases, while the beneficiaries presented an average number of 6.10, the control group presented an average value of 5.47, evidencing an increase in the food scale of the beneficiaries with support of 11.3% (about 0.62% above of the control group). In female-headed households, the effect was 4%.

This data supports the evidence collected from the dialogue with the six beneficiaries of DHCP II in the Territories of Agreste (PE) and Sertão Central (CE). In these families, with strong leadership of women, the FNS, the link to markets and income generation, whether monetary or non-monetary, are present.

¹³ Food Diversity indicates both the variety of food items consumed by families and, indirectly, the nutritional adequacy of the diet. The scale varies between 0 and 10. The higher the value of this index, the greater the food diversity of the agricultural unit.

However, the impact evaluation data are not significant in terms of overcoming food insecurity for the total number of DHCP II beneficiaries. The incidence of households with severe food insecurity in DHCP is 11.4%, and moderate + severe is 29.4%, without a significant difference between the control group and beneficiaries, even among those receiving support. One of the factors that may explain these results is that the control group, also extracted from CadÚnico^[14], may have been protected by other policies that “leveled” them with the DHCP. On the other hand, the EBIA questions^[15] ask interviewed families about access to food in the last three months, a period that may have been influenced by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite this, there are positive responses by DHCP when compared to the results of the PENSSAN Network (2022). It is observed that there was a significant improvement in the food security of the DHCP beneficiaries, whose levels of severe food insecurity are at 11.4%, while the Northeastern average is 22.6%. However, the rate of 11.4% is still very worrying because it is not acceptable for farmers to be in a situation of severe food insecurity, which shows the need to invest in actions that allow these families to access healthy and nutritious food (school feeding programs, direct income transfers, food vouchers for formal and informal markets that allow the purchase of fruits and vegetables). As a complement to these emergency actions, programs should be structured to favor more diverse distribution systems, with shorter chains and territorial markets, as well as support the formation of more sustainable, agroecological food systems.

¹⁴ Single Registry for Social Programs of the Federal Government (CadÚnico) is the instrument for the identification and socioeconomic characterization of low-income families for the selection of beneficiaries and the integration of these people into governmental social programs (<https://www.gov.br/pt-br/services/>).

¹⁵ The Brazilian Food Insecurity Scale (EBIA) indicates the level of food insecurity of the agricultural unit, with higher values indicating greater insecurity

LESSONS LEARNED

About autonomy

"WOMEN NEVER GIVE UP, NEVER STOP FIGHTING, ALWAYS GO AFTER SOMETHING GOOD. ALWAYS LOOKING FOR PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER WOMEN, IT IS INCREDIBLY GOOD, ONE HELPS THE OTHER. FREE YOURSELF AND GO TO THE STREETS WITH US" (LUCIANA, OROBÓ - PE)

The DHCP promoted the autonomy of women, especially economic autonomy. The fact that they received advisory services in the field of production and commercialization was decisive for this, going beyond the sale of the product to articulate production for self-consumption, exchanges, fairs and buying groups. The testimonials of the women assisted, including as to the production and income earned from commercialization, provide evidence of this, as do the data obtained by the impact assessment, which show a positive impact on the total agricultural and livestock income of the beneficiaries of the project^[16]. While the beneficiaries presented an average agricultural income of R\$3,887.00, the control group had an average income of R\$3,191.00. Therefore, DHCP II provided an increase in the total agricultural and livestock income of the beneficiaries by 22% (approximately R\$ 696.00 above the control group).

Table 1 | Agricultural Income (in R\$) of households headed by women

VARIABLES/INDICES	BENEFICIARIES	CONTROL	DIFF	%
Total Agricultural Income	3,887.00	3.191,00	696,00	22%
Monetary Agricultural Income	1,478.00	1.106,00	372,00	34%
Non-Monetary Agricultural Income	2,409.00	2.086,00	324,00	16%

Source: DHCP II Impact Assessment, 2022

¹⁶ The agricultural income of the DHCP II beneficiary farmers and the control group was calculated using three formats: (I) monetary agricultural income (sales component), (II) non-monetary agricultural income (consumption component) and (III) total agricultural income (sum of the previous two). Monetary agricultural income considered all financial gain over the year 2021 obtained from the sale of animal or plant products of the agricultural unit. The non-monetary agricultural income considered the financial expenses avoided throughout 2021 through the consumption of products of animal or plant origin produced in the agricultural unit itself (MONITORA, 2022).

The group of women interviewed has established a new level in its relationship with nature and values development on a sustainable basis. This was a result, as they reported, of the knowledge obtained through DHCP II and the commitment made by organizations such as CETRA and Centro Sabiá to conduct advisory services aiming to advance in the agroecological transition. For example, technician Ademir Ligório comments that Dona Alci, with the arrival of the DHCP II, began to diversify and work with “an agroecological perspective.” She changed from commercial chicken and industrialized feed to free-range chicken and feed produced with her own agroecosystem inputs. This exchange was also motivated by the expectation of selling agro ecological products at fairs.

The evidence collected from the testimonies of the six women interviewed allows us to affirm that, in a brief period of time, they learned to enter markets and recognize the importance of the leading role that they play in nutrition, food security and income generation for their families. The combination of technical assistance, collaborative knowledge networks and innovative interventions on productive processes, markets and management practices, devised by the DHCP II partner organizations, contributed to the productive inclusion of women from the communities assisted, while also helping them to get out of the poverty line. Both CETRA and Centro Sabiá promote the formation of networks of agroecological farmers for the exchange of experiences and learning, converting their members into experimental farmers^[17]. In addition, these organizations promote partnerships that allow other actions to be added to the investments in ATER, such as family farming fairs, installed thanks to the support of Rural Workers Unions and municipalities.

The results obtained by the women of Agreste in Pernambuco or Sertão Central in Ceará, measured through interviews, do not allow quantifying the volume and value of production or family income obtained by them, but the degree of satisfaction with the ATER service, expressed in their speeches, is enough to attest to **the success in serving a public below the poverty line, with food and nutritional insecurity, with a low level of education and located in semi-arid areas, particularly women.** They feel recognized for the work they do, for the income they generate and the possibility of occupying spaces, such as the market, usually dominated by men.

In this sense, it can be affirmed that **there was a strengthening of the capacities of the women surveyed with regard to the commercialization of their products and their autonomous negotiation power.** This result was, to a substantial extent, a result of the activities conducted within the scope of DHCP II, especially with regard to the presence of technicians accompanying the productive activities. It is worth mentioning that this was

¹⁷ ASA has developed its own approach that values and channels the knowledge of farmers to build a project for coexistence with the semi-arid region. From the IV National Meeting of the Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (IV EnconASA), in 2003, farmers, with the institutional support of unions and local associations presented themselves as experimenters by socializing the results of their innovative practices. At the IV EnconASA, there was a specific seminar to debate the principles of the methodological proposal for the construction of knowledge centered on the experience of the farmers-experimenters.



Photo: Olivia Godoy

the first time that this group of women received ATER services. The presence of technical teams was the vector that allowed them to benefit from other initiatives, such as fairs in nearby municipalities. Due to financial cuts in ATER contracts, activities such as workshops on commercialization, processing and financial management were not carried out. Collective training activities were limited. But, in spite of this, Centro Sabiá and CETRA held workshops, one for each community (21 and 52 respectively), on gender, which facilitated a first approach to this type of discussion that, within the scope of the fair and the exchange with other women, was deepened and concretized also in other spaces, such as the Network of Women of The Agreste of Pernambuco or the Network of Farmers and Agroecological Farmers.

A lesson that must be considered, from the perspective of replicating initiatives such as those undertaken in the cases monitored, is that **greater financial, technical and time resources are needed for the propagation of knowledge about organizational and commercialization processes**, such as diversification of sales locations, use of the products generated, diversification of customers and reduction of the risks of concentration of productive activity with the generation of a single source of income.

By focusing the technical assistance actions and commercialization orientation to the products of the beneficiary women, the DHCP II generated changes in the lives of their families, giving meaning and recognition to their lives, generally marked by **long trajectories and processes of struggle, resistance and overcoming.**

The testimonies of women from Agreste in Pernambuco and Sertão Central in Ceará, who benefited from the Project, point to the need to provide information that allows them to know more about prices, quantities and sales conditions, and not just about productive aspects. In this regard, another lesson related to knowledge management is that it is necessary to coordinate ATER actions with other organizations and programs. Actions undertaken in the future, regardless of whether the vector is technical assistance, emergency aid, strengthening of organizational bases, food and nutrition security or access to markets, must be articulated and coordinated to promote synergies.

The evidence provided by women from Agreste (PE) and Dona Alci in Sertão Central (CE) **helps to understand the importance of social appropriation of the food system in its distinct dimensions**, as corroborated in other studies, such as that conducted by ACCV (2022). These women gained autonomy by participating in the decisions of organizing production, selling this production, appropriating the discourse of agroecological transition, and understanding the importance of this transition for the food security of their families and the community in general. They have also gained autonomy to use the economic gains obtained in new activities that allow them to continue moving forward with their enterprises.

Autonomy in decisions about the management of the property. As indicated in previous paragraphs, data from the 2017 Agricultural Census indicate that, in the municipalities visited (Orobó, Vertente do Lério and Quixadá), there is a greater number of properties run by women or co-directed by couples. Likewise, the DHCP II impact assessment sample indicates that 33.8% of the households are headed by women. This data may indicate the need for many men to work outside the property to guarantee a sufficient income for their families, leaving the management of the property in the hands of women. Such a situation can overwhelm the number of activities conducted by them, but one should recognize the progress of women's participation and, in some cases, the fact that they have become the protagonists in the management of the properties. Future ATER actions can advance in the structuring of enterprises that, under the co-steering of the couple, allow the shared management of decisions, activities and earnings.



About FNS and income generation

"WE HAVE MORE QUALITY OF LIFE, WE CAN FEED OURSELVES AND SELL THAT PRODUCT WITHOUT PESTICIDES. WE STARTED PRODUCING FOOD FOR OURSELVES. IT STARTS FROM THE BEGINNING, LITTLE BY LITTLE, AND THEN IT INCREASES [...] WHEN WE STARTED, WE ONLY HAD PASSION FRUIT, BUT AFTER ENCOURAGES IT. NOW THERE IS JUICE, PULP, CAKES... AND WE CAN ALSO SELL IT"
(ANA CLAUDIA, VERTENTE DO LÉRIO – PE)

The six experiences studied **were able to maintain access to real food for themselves and the community, despite the severity of the situation arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.** Family farmers, with support from projects such as DHCP II, developed contingency plans to diversify production and marketing networks.

Actions to promote **diversification of beneficiaries' food and income sources** minimized the loss of income for families without affecting the women's newly acquired autonomy. The impact assessment of the project indicates that there was an important gain in the income of women beneficiaries of DHCP II compared to women in the control group. The financial gain from agricultural activities is more representative in animal production and its derivatives, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 | Financial gain (in BRL) year 2021 in households headed by women

VARIABLES/INDICES	BENEFICIARIES	CONTROL	DIFF	%
Animal production	841,00	697,00	143,00	21%
Derivatives of Animal Production	451,00	278,00	173,00	62%
Vegetables production	263,00	192,00	71,00	37%

Source: DHCP II Impact Assessment, 2022

The beneficiaries of the cases studied managed production, reducing, or redirecting it so that they could maintain a minimum volume of produce for sale and a sufficient quantity of real food on their families' tables. **DHCP II facilitated this group of women to acquire the skills to make their own decisions about what to produce and in what quantities.**

Another data that confirms the progress of women benefited by the DHCP II in relation to the management of their production is found in the results of the Agroecological Notebooks initiative^[18]. This action was implemented by eighty-one women assisted by DHCP II in the states of Alagoas, Ceará and Pernambuco. On average, the study found that each farmer contributed R\$ 562.58 per month to the household budget.

The autonomy, flexibility, and resilience in the face of adversity demonstrated by women beneficiaries of DHCP II, as verified in the research, were not observed equally in other segments of beneficiaries, as suggested by the testimonies of ATER technicians. Actions inspired by the DHCP should incorporate this learning when it comes to defining the target audience and planning the contents to be transmitted. Experience shows that **focusing on women produces results superior to the usual ATER practices and the fight against hunger and poverty in rural areas, particularly when it comes to seeking to overcome food insecurity (FI).**

Networks of support and articulation between male and female farmers help in the FNS of families and in the exchange of information to improve their productive systems and income generation. The network of experimenting farmers promoted by CETRA that helped Dona Alci (synthesized above), by revealing the results of the insertion of the beneficiaries in the social dynamics of the territory, including the expansion of marketing spaces for their products at the Fortaleza fair, represent a valuable lesson on how to replicate initiatives of this kind.

The importance of non-monetary income. An important learning resulting from the research, confirmed by the testimonies, is that **the food and nutrition security of families and communities is related to the non-monetary economic production of women farmers.** The impact evaluation showed that the women beneficiaries of DHCP II had an annual non-monetary income (consumption) of R\$ 2,409.00, 16% higher than the income of the control group (R\$ 2,086.00). The existence of these non-monetary incomes should be recognized by the State and society, implementing public policies directed to these agricultures and valuing the diversity of activities they conduct.

¹⁸ The feminist instrument *Agroecological Notebook* was created in 2011 by the Center for Alternative Technologies of Zona da Mata (CTA-ZM), in partnership with the Women's Movement of Zona da Mata and East of Minas, with the goal of measuring and giving visibility to the work of agroecological women farmers. Simple instrument where women farmers record their production, classifying it as "sold, donated, exchanged and consumed, from everything that is cultivated in the spaces dominated by women in the productive units of family and peasant agriculture, from agricultural production to handicrafts and processing" (IFAD, 2021 p. 16).

About ATER and the agroecological perspective

"WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO WORK. AND NOW WITH THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE SOMEONE TO GUIDE US, ABOUT WHAT AND HOW TO PRODUCE IT GETS BETTER [...] WE DID NOT HAVE THIS PLAN, THIS THOUGHT OF SELLING. WHEN ELIANE ARRIVED AND SAID, 'I'M GOING TO PUT UP A STALL FOR YOU [AT THE FAIR]', I LOST SEVERAL DAYS OF SLEEP. [...] HOW AM I GOING TO SELL, HOW AM I GOING TO SELL IF I HAVE NEVER SOLD? BUT NOW, I AM HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FAIR. WE MADE FRIENDS, WE ARE WITH OUR COLLEAGUES, LEARNING, TALKING, IT IS A FREEDOM. IT IS A FREEDOM THAT WE NEVER HAD BEFORE"
(LUCINETE, OROBÓ – PE)

A crucial factor in the successful transfer of knowledge by ATER entities is the attitude of the extensionist, who must recognize the knowledge of the beneficiaries. Giving visibility to women includes this recognition, which must include non-agricultural concerns and practices and the pedagogy of "learning by doing".

As the project beneficiaries expressed, they do not lack the will and determination to learn. Learning and empowerment, however, are achieved with better results through differentiated actions for women. **One of the success factors identified by the beneficiaries of Centro Sabiá is that, in the interaction between extensionists and beneficiaries, the former demonstrate knowledge and insertion in their territories, which allows greater personal closeness and the creation of bonds of trust and cooperation with them.**

The DHCP is a large umbrella that allows articulation with other projects and, thus, enhances the assistance services offered. The articulation and joint work with community associations and unions in the territories of the beneficiaries - which had never been served by ATER services - allows productive potentialities to be identified, social inclusion to be promoted and beneficiaries to be valued. In addition, the articulation with other programs allows beneficiaries to have access to resources through innovative means, such as the revolving funds managed by Centro Sabiá. This process, in turn, facilitates the improvement of production systems and participation in networks of family farmers.

Contribution to the transition of food systems. When observing the work undertaken by Centro Sabiá and CETRA with DHCP II resources, from the perspective of the dimensions

that involve the notion of food and nutritional security, it is possible to affirm that in these families, the diversification of production favors a greater and more varied availability of food and food exchange through local supply networks. Likewise, guidelines for advancing in agroecological transition processes contribute to the social and environmental sustainability of agrifood systems. Agroecological transition processes are not limited to changing the ways of production. They aim to reduce gender and generational differences, and this was perceived by the beneficiaries.

Differentiated methodologies. The way in which Centro Sabiá and CETRA approach communities and use different methodologies to work with specific groups, such as women, is a key element in the success of the interventions. These institutions combine production, marketing and strengthening of social organization. Among the attributes of these methodologies, which reflect the commitment to the policy of coexistence with the semiarid, are: contextualization of the instruments, according to the characteristics of each community or group to be served; decentralized actions; integration with other actions and policies; recognition of local knowledge; promotion of the establishment of networks of farmers; learning-by-doing practices, such as the management of the fair itself.

Territorialization of food systems. The struggle for territory, the formation of short marketing circuits, the production and demand for healthy food, and the strengthening of the relationship between the countryside and the city are all ways of structuring sustainable agrifood systems. In its diversity, the set of experiences analyzed teaches us the importance of partnerships between communities, companies providing technical assistance services and public programs. Groups motivated by the principle of solidarity and driven by collective actions have worked in cooperation networks, solving urgent and priority issues, such as ensuring quality food for their own communities or for other vulnerable groups. These transformations are being built with women from the ground up, with great difficulty, but they represent a major step forward and provide lessons on how to promote sustainable food systems.

The transition from food systems to sustainable systems, the sexual division of labor, the guarantee of food and nutritional security and the valorization of indicators of change, which are not limited to the economic dimension, are the challenges that are posed. The cases of Northeastern women from the municipalities of Orobó and Vertente do Lério, in Pernambuco, and Quixadá, in Ceará benefited by the Dom Helder Câmara II Project, teach about the multidimensionality of development processes. They also leave as a lesson learned the importance of listening to the demands and perceptions of the beneficiaries.

CURRENT CONTEXT

The latest national data on food insecurity is alarming. There are currently more than thirty-three million people in a situation of severe food insecurity in Brazil and the quantitative restriction of food affects 125.2 million people living in Brazilian households (PENSSAN Network, 2022). The II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, conducted by the PENSSAN Network (2022), finds that inequality in access to food is greater in rural households, with severe food insecurity (severe FI) of 18.6% above the national average of 15.5%. This inequality also manifests itself geographically, appearing most strongly in the North and Northeast regions (25.7% and 21% of severe FI, respectively). **Family farming is heavily affected: hunger has reached 21.8% of family farmers/rural producers households in the country** (Rede PENSSAN, p. 41).

Added to the FI data, the information about poverty in Brazil is equally alarming. Within one year (between 2020 and 2021), eleven million people fell into poverty and 6.3 million of those were left in extreme poverty, facing food shortages every day (IMDS, 2022). As with food insecurity (FI) data, the incidence of poverty in rural areas is higher than in urban areas (36.6% to 20.1%, respectively). This dramatic data on the number of poor in Brazil concentrates in the North and Northeast regions (36.4% and 39.7%, respectively) (IMDS, 2022).

The variation in the incidence of poverty in the Northeast region, between the years 2020 and 2021, was 9.4%, compared to the five percentage points of variation in Brazil. When looking specifically at the states of Pernambuco and Ceará, the increase in poverty incidence over the same period was 8.8% for Pernambuco (from 35.1% to 43.8%) and 7.4% for the case of Ceará (from 26.6% to 34.0%) (IMDS, 2022).

Analysts point to the Covid-19 pandemic as one of the main causes of this poverty picture, but it is important to mention that, even before the economic and health crisis, poverty reached 52% of the Brazilian rural population and 15% lived in a situation of extreme poverty (Favareto et al, 2021).

In Brazil, between 2004 and 2013, there was an important reversal in food insecurity indices, which led the country to leave the hunger map. This progress was achieved thanks to a set of public policies implemented at all levels, some of them with resources and technical support provided by organizations such as FIDA. However, this trajectory had a setback, as evidenced by the survey. "The scenario changed a lot since 2015, with rising inflation, the absence of recomposition of the value of social benefits and the dismantling of food security policies, especially after 2019" (Folha de S. Paulo, 2022).

The precariousness of these indicators for most Brazilian households creates greater vulnerability and exclusion, further challenging the design of strategies that help to reverse

this situation and guarantee the right to adequate food for this population, as well as access to goods and services that improve the livelihoods of the rural population in a lasting way. Strategies must be devised so that, in the long term, create the basis for virtuous development paths without the challenges that are evident today in Brazil.

As cited by Quisumbing and collaborators (2022), women's autonomy and empowerment, and gender equality (ODS 5)^[19] are important on their own and are directly linked to the achievement of the first three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in order: elimination of poverty, zero hunger and malnutrition, and good health and well-being for women and children.

¹⁹ SDGs e. Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.



Photo: Heloisa Müller

RECOMMENDATIONS

New public policies or improvement of existing ones for greater impacts on women's empowerment and improvement of FNS

Formulation of public policies that specifically broaden the horizons of women's activities through the conquest of diversified productive activities, such as a variety of commercialization and/or exchange spaces. These policies must be based on principles that rescue traditional knowledge, adapt to the realities of territorial contexts and seek to articulate economic, cultural and environmental dimensions.

The current scenario regarding climate change, hunger, inequality and poverty requires quick, coordinated and articulated actions between different levels of government (municipal, state and federal) and civil society. Future technical assistance programs should take advantage of the lessons learned from DHCP II, mainly those from cases that led towards transformations in the modes of production and commercialization of products. The recommendation is that **programs that encourage the agroecological transition, productive diversification, the participation of organized civil society, and the valorization of short circuits, rooted in the territories, protecting and valuing their natural resources, local foods, and cultural aspects, be more firmly implemented.** In short, projects aimed at transforming food systems. Projects that are presented by organizations providing technical assistance services can be evaluated based on criteria that take these aspects into account, with those that innovate in ways of working with women's groups and ensuring transformation processes towards sustainable food systems receiving a higher score.

Experiences of fairs, institutional public purchases (including at the municipal level), and other innovations for commercialization **can be encouraged by the action and incidence of technical assistance on the different actors of the food systems.** The basic premise is that most of these initiatives do not require new contributions of resources, but the ability to reorient economic flows and generate local dynamics.

Much remains to be done to reduce gender inequalities. The testimonies of DHCP II beneficiaries, collected in the field and partially reproduced in this document, are in line with other evaluations of projects with similar objectives and endorse the recommendations of Favareto and Carneiro (2017). Specifically in the case of women from the municipalities of Orobó and Vertente do Lério, in Pernambuco, and Quixadá, in Ceará, benefited by the Dom Helder Câmara Project, **it is suggested to listen to rural women in order to elaborate public policies that are guided by their demands and by the diversity of realities of the Brazilian rural worlds.** One must identify how power relations are given, and the inequalities they

generate. Domestic and caregiving activities are part of the productive process and, as such, should be included in the projects' concerns.

To facilitate women's participation in public, economic, and political life, it is necessary to allocate resources for their travel and food, to ensure that they can take their young children with them, and to make available infrastructure (such as daycare centers) where they can be cared for while they work in these collective activities. But, in addition, to overcome inequalities in the distribution of productive and reproductive tasks, it is necessary to implement training actions, with methodologies developed for this purpose, where the family group can demonstrate the economic, SAN, and health benefits when responsibilities are shared within the home and family.

Articulation and coordination between programs

Resuming and/or expanding coordination between programs, articulation and dialogue between policies, and cooperation among actors for productive and social innovation seem to be key actions for the success of these interventions and their effects on food and nutritional security for these families. The institutional, political and health crisis that humanity is going through in these times brings with it an increase in inequalities, poverty and hunger. Actions such as those undertaken by DHCP II and its partners in the Brazilian semiarid region give indications that many of the strategies designed can indicate paths for the transformation of rural territories. Among these strategies we can mention: the implementation of agroforestry systems and seed banks; the diversification of productive systems and commercialization channels; the training to learn different ways to process and preserve food, such as the generation of entrepreneurial skills in areas like handicrafts and cooking; the installation of agro-ecological fairs; the constitution of rotatory funds; projects for the conservation and rational use of water; the promotion of knowledge exchanges between farmers, among others.

But the same evidence indicates that it is not a single action that generates good results. It is necessary to articulate productive agendas, market components, social protection actions, and foster cooperative organization. The decentralization in the execution of technical assistance projects must be favored, encouraging the organizations to create partnerships to execute this kind of projects and to explicitly show how the technical assistance resources will be potentiated with other actions that articulate several dimensions for development and that are in tune with municipal, state, and federal plans and policies.

Capacity Building

Working from a **gender perspective** goes beyond workshops that address this issue. **It is necessary to advance in capacity building in the technical assistance service** teams about concepts that guide the execution of practices that reduce gender inequalities. These training actions can be structured in a continuous way, becoming spaces for the identification of good

practices, from which the learning about the gender dimension can be improved.

It is recommended to advance in the formalization of women's associations that favor their autonomy and allow them to make their own decisions in social spaces characterized by male domination, such as the market. Experiences of women's groups show that this formalization allows them, besides strengthening the bonds of solidarity among them and fostering the exchange of experiences and knowledge, to access public policies that, as in the case of public purchases, fulfill the double objective of guaranteeing FNS and generating income.

The data from the farming families of the municipalities that were visited indicate, as already mentioned, a high percentage of people with no schooling. This is the case, for example, of four of the six women in this report. It is recommended to offer technical assistance services that take this situation into account in order to overcome this barrier through forms of communication and languages that are accessible to these people. In this same dimension, it is crucial to **improve training actions among young** people in order to eliminate these indexes of low access to education, but, above all, to introduce them to information and communication technologies (ICT) that become real alternatives for the digitalization of markets.

In general terms, to develop these training actions, it is recommended to use methodologies that promote the exchange between groups of women from different territories, so that they learn from other experiences, get to know similar realities and gain, in this collective space of exchange, the confidence to overcome the barriers that limit gender equality.

The experience of DHCP II, according to the reports of the beneficiaries and the technicians of the private companies contracted, indicates the need for new projects to **establish a closer link with the territories and reduce the gap between them and the central (federal)** level. It is important to value the protagonism of civil society and local partners in the execution of the projects. It is equally fundamental to be close to the local reality in the implementation of development actions in the framework of coexistence with the semi-arid region through the territorialization of its food systems.

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