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Socio-Technical Controversies between Agribusiness and Agroecology: Reappropriation and Practices of Family Farmers in the Semi-Arid Region of Ceará.

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Abstract Text:

In Ceara (semi-arid Northeast Brazil), although still fragile, the sociotechnical system "agroecology" has established itself as an alternative to the dominant agribusiness. The controversies and clashes between the respective public and private actors that defend them highlight two polarized visions for the rural territory.

In this work conducted in the Jaguaribe region, we questioned these controversies in the face of family farmers' practices and analyzed the determinants of farmers' practices. The methodology associated a participatory systemic and multi-actor diagnosis coupled with semi-structured interviews with farmers (40) and institutional representatives. On one hand, the two socio-technical poles were characterized (actors, visions, rules, instruments and mechanisms for strengthening, etc.). On the other hand, farmers' practices determinantes were analyzed through the framework of sustainable livelihoods and historical perspective.

In the field, the two systems coexist, increasing farmers' capacity to adapt. Without getting too involved in the controversies, farmers pragmatically take advantage of the opportunities offered by both systems to implement their life strategies: instruments (public and private), narratives, rules. Innovative practices often arise from this re-appropriation. They are sometimes in contradiction with the initial purpose of the instruments of both systems (such as subsidies, credits, etc.) that were designed within a polarized vision.

Access to opportunities remains strongly dependent on key actors, in often clientelistic relationships. Information and debate arenas are informal and not very inclusive. This contributes to the great heterogeneity in the capacity of farmers and communities and to social-environmental inequality. The absence of a formal local governance framework may favors adaptability and innovation at various levels (individual, family, community, ...). But at the territorial level, the lacking of natural resources management increases socio-environmental vulnerability.

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