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## Civil society organizations and their interinstitutional relations in social innovations

### As organizações da sociedade civil e suas relações interinstitucionais nas inovações sociais

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#### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the role of civil society organizations and their inter-institutional relations in social innovation initiatives. To this end, a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory case study was carried out in the Articulation of the Semi-Arid (ASA), and as units of analysis, civil society organizations (CSO) linked to ASA were investigated. The results demonstrate that the CSOs play the role of representing civil society in a democratic perspective, expressing its interests and values. It is noticed that the State is no longer the only agent responsible for the elaboration of public policies focusing on the primary needs of the population, allowing a bottom-up articulation process. In their involvement with institutional actors, the CSO plays the role of legitimizing their choices, enforcing contractual relations, and articulating the financing of social innovation initiatives. The importance of CSO for the promotion of collective actions is evident, in the search for social transformation.

**Keywords:** social innovation; civil society; civil society organizations; brazilian semi-arid.

#### Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar o papel das organizações da sociedade civil e suas relações interinstitucionais nas iniciativas de inovação social. Para tanto, realizou-se um estudo de caso de natureza qualitativa, descritiva e exploratória na Articulação do Semiárido (ASA) e como unidades de análise, investigou-se as organizações da sociedade civil (OSC) vinculadas à ASA. Os resultados demonstram que as OSC desempenham os papéis de representar a sociedade civil em uma perspectiva democrática, expressando seus interesses e valores. Percebe-se que o Estado deixa de ser o único agente responsável pela elaboração de políticas públicas com foco nas principais necessidades da população, permitindo um processo de articulação *bottom-up*. No envolvimento com os atores institucionais, as OSC desempenham o papel de legitimação de suas escolhas; fazendo-se cumprir as relações contratuais e articulam o financiamento das iniciativas de inovação social. Evidencia-se a importância das OSC para a promoção de ações coletivas, na busca da transformação social.

**Palavras-chave:** inovação social; sociedade civil; organizações da sociedade civil; semiárido brasileiro.

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## 1 Introduction

Social innovation initiatives stem from the awareness of a specific territory as a space marked by economic, cultural, and environmental needs not satisfied by the economic-oriented development model (ARAÚJO; OLIVEIRA; CORREIA, 2021). Thus, a paradigmatic shift emerges from the social relations built between actors, allowing the territory to be a space of potentialities, articulations, and mobilizations to form responses in relation to those realities and social challenges, and play decisive roles in local development (LUBELCOVÁ, 2012; MACCALLUM, 2009; MOULAERT, 2013; SOUZA; LESSA; SILVA FILHO, 2019) incorporated into key sectors such as health, education, and social assistance.

The actors involved in this process must focus on initiatives that promote a societal transformation, acting as participative individuals by proposing specific policies aimed at changing the social, economic, institutional, ecological, and cultural imbalances they face and that enable new opportunities for human development (KLEIN et al., 2012). Through their participation, social innovation initiatives are linked to the concepts of social transformation, new economic objective creation, and regulation, environmental protection, a new role played in the political sphere, decentralization, and cooperation amongst social actors and other actors (AVELINO et al., 2019; KLEIN; TREMBLAY, 2013; PEL et al., 2019).

Within this context, civil society organizations (CSOs) play an outstanding role in the social innovation process, developing roles that can help identify social needs developing the social innovation implementation process up to its consolidation (CORREIA; OLIVEIRA; GOMEZ, 2016). In this way, social innovation focuses on practices that promote the development of the individuals'

creative capacity, collective action and macro-structural dynamics (CAJAIBA-SANTANA, 2014; LEHTOLA; STÅHLE, 2014; SGARAGLI, 2014), causing civil society organizations to become involved in the social transformation process, through the cooperation between the involved actors, and in the formalization of social partnerships or networks, as well as contributing to the government and co-producing or co-creating public policies, promoting improvements and reducing costs in public services (ANDION; MORAES; GONSALVES, 2017).

Given what was presented, this article aims to analyze the role of civil society organizations and their inter-institutional relations in social innovation initiatives. This work reveals the results of the Articulation of the Semi-Arid (ASA) analysis. ASA operates in the Northeastern Brazilian states, as an “emblematic” organization of Brazilian civil society that promotes social innovation initiatives that express the active and pro-positive action of society in a political context, in protest against the persistence of severe socioeconomic and environmental problems.

Despite the increase in the number of studies on social innovation in recent years (ADRO; FERNANDES, 2020; EDWARDS-SCHACHTER; WALLACE, 2017), there is still a gap in studies about social innovation initiatives' potential of helping to promote their ecosystems in specific contexts (PEL et al., 2019, 2019; SOUZA; LESSA; SILVA FILHO, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of CSOs in their respective cultural and socioeconomic contexts by identifying elements that can operationalize new forms of organization, products, services, and social practices.

This article intends to advance the understanding of the existing relations between actors directly involved in the development of social innovation initiatives, including the potential role of

stimulating the promotion of public policies to promote social change. This way, it can contribute as a guiding instrument for managers' decision-making, helping them better understand the specifics of the social context they experience.

In structural terms, in addition to this introduction, section two presents the theoretical perspective of social innovation. In the third section, the methodology adopted to carry out this study is described. Afterwards, the results are presented, and at the end, the authors' final considerations are discussed.

## 2 Social Innovation and its Interinstitutional Articulations

In recent decades, social innovation has positioned itself within an agenda and within programs that comply with the ability to solve social, economic, environmental, and institutional problems through a societal transformation in its different sectors (public, private, social, educational, among others) (PORTALES, 2019). This capacity can generate social change sustainably, and it increases society's need to address the problems humanity faces at the global level, which have the most evident consequences in developing countries.

Thus, the social innovation concept emerges in convergence with the search for new ways to coordinate and mobilize global and local problems, reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (PORTALES, 2019). Therefore, social innovation refers to the cooperation between the social actors involved in the creation, production, and dissemination of innovation, so its emergence is the result of the creation of multidisciplinary teams, their learning process for the acquisition of knowledge, changes in representations, new learning, and collaboration (CLOUTIER, 2003; SGARAGLI, 2014).

The creation of these new social relationships supports individual and collectivized mediation, conceived not only

to solve social problems but also to respond to a social ideal. As the network of social actors restructuring takes place, a redefinition of cultural orientations is brought about, which formalizes the adoption of the new management of social relations (LALLEMAND, 2001) and redirects the establishment of new ways of doing things, whether through the development of new services, processes, products, or new forms of organization of social relations (PEL et al., 2018).

It is necessary to consider that the conditions for the emergence of social innovation lie in the combination of factors that enable the emergence of synergy between different actors involved in innovative projects. Therefore, the fundamental characteristic of social innovations is the presence of actors from different sectors of society and at different levels (DOMANSKI, 2018; SOUZA; LESSA; SILVA FILHO, 2019).

Social innovation is mainly located in the third sector. However, it can also be present in public policies and in the social responsibility actions of private companies (ANDRÉ; ABREU, 2006). However, from the New Economic Sociology's perspective and its break with the economic paradigm, the tendency is for social innovation to emerge outside institutions as the result of mobilization around a goal led by civil society (ARAÚJO; OLIVEIRA; CORREIA, 2021; CORREIA; OLIVEIRA; GOMEZ, 2016).

The CSOs capacity for innovation consists in linking social objectives with economic and business approaches, being able to promote social entrepreneurship initiatives, helping to identify products and services, in market analysis to identify potential customers, and in the ability to manage and create a cooperation network (GABRIELA, 2012). Therefore, CSOs play the role of envisioning how social innovations are developed, implemented, and disseminated. One of the main aspects to be observed is that the social innovation initiatives envisage the adoption of

mobilization and community involvement strategies in the process of change as central, assuming broad social participation of CSOs from the preparation of a local diagnosis to the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of actions (CORREIA; MELO; OLIVEIRA, 2019; MORAES; ANDION, 2017).

Social innovation involves new solutions that meet a social need by articulating actors that allow the achievement of a social result. Thus, thinking about civil society involvement within the concept of social innovation is to understand how these actors articulate and how they can get involved in the process of developing new solutions to social challenges (CORREIA; MELO; OLIVEIRA, 2019; MAGLIOCCA et al., 2016).

Within the presented relations, the involvement of social actors' will depend on how they relate to the satisfaction of unmet needs, with the involvement of existing governance mechanisms, with their level of articulation, learning, and empowerment (AVELINO et al., 2019; BEPA, 2010), as well as the reality of the social context.

This refers directly to civil society's strategic role in the search for the realization of participatory democracy, expressed in the creation of public spaces and the engagement of civil society itself in the processes of discussion and decision-making related to social issues and public policies (TEIXEIRA; DAGNINO; SILVA, 2002; YANG; HOLGAARD, 2012). Therefore, civil society plays a fundamental role in any society that holds everyone responsible for their actions, that is driven by the search for social transformation, which pursues equity and justice, human rights for all, preservation of the environment and natural resources; it reflects and defends the dignity of all people (SOMMERFELDT, 2013).

This approach results from the comprehensive and integrated understanding that these initiatives

encompass all sectors of society and their actors in different research areas and application fields, thus demonstrating that broadening the perspective is crucial for understanding social innovation (BJÖRK et al., 2014; POLESE et al., 2018; REYGARCIA; CALVO; MATO-SANTISO, 2019).

The creators or promoters of this type of change are social innovators and may come from the private, public, and social sectors (BAKKER et al., 2013; PORTALES, 2019). These sources are classified according to the actor or sector that implements them. They do not act in isolation and can be complemented by their resources and mandates, as well as articulated among themselves in the interest of achieving the social objective (ANDION; ALPERSTEDT; GRAEFF, 2020; PORTALES, 2019).

Thus, to foster social innovation, identifying the main actors, relationships, and causal relationships that allow new social practices to emerge and spread to establish a new regular practice (TSAKANIKAKA, 2017) from partnerships is suggested. Due to the fact that the central objective of intersectoral partnerships is considered to be solving economic, social, and environmental problems by combining the capacities and resources of organizational actors in different sectors (VAN TULDER et al., 2016; VOLTAN; DE FUENTES, 2016).

It is in this context that the social innovation ecosystems approach emerges to reflect the structures of both the collaboration dynamics and the agility of the involved actors with a shared objective of social transformation.

They are defined from a multitude of actors and organizations that together form social initiatives (Pel et al., 2018) with legal and cultural norms, support infrastructure, and many other elements (CHUERI; VASCONCELOS; DOS SANTOS, 2019) that allow a movement of meta-governance (SCHUBERT, 2018).

In this way, the third sector finds its form of collective articulation as a legitimate actor in defense of interests. It is configured in civil society organizations, situated between the market and the State, acting collectively.

In addition, the CSOs articulate to establish new forms of cooperation suited to the desired social objectives. Collaboration emerges from the participation between same-sector organizations that seek to meet the needs of a given community in the pursuit of improving living conditions, thus forming a set of guidelines for co-creative processes based on collaboration networks that serve to create new knowledge through a learning perspective (ZIEGLER, 2017).

Therefore, civil society encompasses a range of operational and human associative activities in the public sphere outside the State, aimed at the organized citizens' aspirations, united by common interests, objectives, values, or traditions, mobilized for collective action, either as beneficiaries or as actors in the development process.

CSOs have sought to develop participatory solutions to social issues, prompting a proactive response to the role played by the public sector through the implementation of new internal participatory processes that change the way in which actors interact and by providing regulatory and financial frameworks necessary for the dissemination of social innovations (BEPA, 2010; HOWALDT; DOMANSKI; KALETKA, 2016).

Thus, social innovation in the public sphere offers spaces for various actors and instances to intervene on the same public problem, requiring them to provide new responses and solutions and new ways of executing them through communication and cooperation (GORDON; BECERRA; FRESSOLI, 2017; MORAES; ANDION, 2017).

Social innovation initiatives often maintain an unstable relationship with public actors. Due to them being based on

precarious and temporary cooperation arrangements, difficulties in getting involved with institutional governance structures arise. Initiatives are also characterized by solid and formal ties between actors (social, private, public, and third sector) and between different scales of the governance structure (MOULAERT et al., 2010). These actors are involved as co-producers of public policies, contributing to the success of initiatives through their ability to participate in complex networks of different actors.

Social innovation comes from creativity stimulated by an interaction caused by differences, such as different forms of culture, different social disciplines, and different social sectors (private, public, and civic). A creative act, generated by social actors, can result in the innovation of a new form of integration, depending on the element that is being incorporated and on the context in which it will be used (GABRIELA, 2012; VAN TULDER et al., 2016).

The construction of partnerships between these actors is pointed out by Teodósio (2011) as a perspective for social policy management modernization, arising from the traditional political institutions' legitimacy crisis, the new relationships between the market and society spheres, and the risk and urgency notion in solving social interest problems.

It should be noted that effective change only happens when new ways of acting and perceiving the world are shared and established by actors through engagement and training strategies to transform the acquired information into action, and then to generate and share more information between members of the social group (ARNIANI et al., 2014).

Social innovation requires greater actor participation, resource sharing, and the dissemination of innovation through education, training, and knowledge in order to generate social transformations through new forms of social relationships or ties,

formed over a period of time. (LI; SUN; LIN, 2012; ROLLIN; VINCENT, 2007).

Based on what has been presented, the interinstitutional articulation roles proposed in this article incorporate a new combination in business models inserted in social contexts through the partnership between market, State, and civil society. These partnerships draw attention to the permanent need for decision-making by the actors involved through choices that focus on action subject to the specific context of change.

### 3 Methodology

To achieve the objective, a pragmatic approach that, as a conception, arises more from actions, situations, and consequences than from antecedent conditions were adopted, seeking to understand the complexity (CRESWELL; CRESWELL, 2017) of the aspects involved in the development and implementation of social innovation initiatives.

The research is descriptive and exploratory, adopting a qualitative approach to deepen the case study.

The Articulation of the Semi-Arid's selection as the case study for this research happened because it was considered an initiative that follows the practice of local development; also for being based on behavior and organizational structures change patterns; for having as its objective the creation of means of social inclusion; for introducing something new to your region that is considered a social innovation; and for having the active participation of civil society.

In order to respond to this study's objective regarding the roles of society organizations and their interinstitutional relations, all civil society organizations accredited to the ASA state coordinations operating in the states of Paraíba (PB), Rio Grande do Norte (RN), and Pernambuco (PE) were considered as potential units of analysis, totaling 49 representations. That said, emails were sent to all representatives

requesting an interview, according to their availability. At first, responses were obtained from 12 CSOs, in which the interviews were carried out. During the interview, the coordinator was asked to indicate other organizations to compose the research. The number of respondents was defined when the roles identified in the study reached the appropriate saturation point to meet the research objectives (FONTANELLA et al., 2011; MINAYO, 2017), totaling 18 (eighteen) social subjects, represented by the coordinators of the CSOs.

The CSOs registered with ASA have, as a common foundation, the commitment to the needs, potentials, and interests of the local populations of that territory, in particular family farmers, which includes issues related to conservation, sustainable use, and environmental restoration of its natural resources, as well as the breaking of access to land, water, and other means of production monopolies.

As a data collection strategy, data and evidence of different natures were used: bibliographic research as a way to obtain a theoretical basis for the construction of the dimensions of analysis and their roles in social innovation initiatives; documental research to gather necessary data and information about the objects of study, such as regulations, rules, procedures, newsletters, and books published by the organizations; field research consolidated by semi-structured interviews with the subjects; and non-participant observation through visits and experience with organizations during the research period.

The semi-structured interview script was constructed according to the literature review, and the following questions were taken into account: Who are those interested in social innovation initiatives? What are the mechanisms used by the CSO for the involvement of other actors? How is the articulation between the CSO and the other actors?

In this sense, the triangulation between the data collection instruments was performed in order to increase the reliability of the research (YIN, 2015), using data collection multimedia.

Data analysis aims to organize and interpret the data in such a way as to enable the achievement of the proposed objectives. Thus, the data treatment was based on content analysis (BARDIN, 2011) to identify the relations between the categories identified in the literature and the interviews carried out with the actors.

To carry out the analysis of the interviews, the qualitative research software ATLAS.ti was used as a support tool, which aims to facilitate qualitative analysis and present flexibility for data generation.

#### **4 Analysis of the role of CSOs and their Interinstitutional Relations in Social Innovation Initiatives**

ASA stands out for its efforts to promote rural development in the Brazilian semi-arid region. They are recognized for the achievement of the Training and Social Mobilization Program for Coexistence with the Semi-arid, which comprises a set of procedural training and family mobilization actions and associative organizations to live with the semi-arid region.

Its main objective is to trigger discussion processes and involve families in promoting the construction of cisterns and small water infrastructure for producing food, capturing and storing rainwater; water that will be used for domestic consumption and production during the dry season, thus ensuring, in a complementary way, food security and sovereignty for rural families.

Therefore, it promotes and disseminates these social innovations focused on the semi-arid region, discussing

and organizing new public policy options aimed at expanding access to water for low-income families in the region, as well as actions directed at the production of food for self-consumption, to guarantee food security and sovereignty.

Currently, ASA represents more than 700 civil society organizations located in the Brazilian semi-arid region. In this way, social innovation causes registered civil society organizations to focus on improvements in specific locations via their involvement in the process of social transformation, through cooperation between the actors involved, and in the formalization of networks or social partnerships.

ASA is recognized for the Training and Social Mobilization Program for Coexistence with the Brazilian semi-arid region. The main objective of this program is to trigger discussion processes and involve families in promoting the construction of cisterns and small water infrastructure for food production, the capture and storage of rainwater that is used for domestic consumption and agricultural production in the dry period, guaranteeing, in a complementary way, the food security and sovereignty of rural families.

The program develops two projects, the One Million Cisterns Program (P1MC), which provides for the construction of one million cisterns to store rainwater for human consumption, and the One Land, Two Waters Program (P1+2), which encourages the implementation of social technologies aimed at using water for the production of food – “calçadão” cisterns<sup>5</sup>, stone tanks, infrastructure that support the strengthening of the water structure, and food and nutritional security of families and communities of family farmers. The methodology adopted by the two programs is based on a process of training, exchanges of experiences in the construction of

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<sup>5</sup> A type of cylindrical water reservoir, covered and semi-buried, which allows the capture and storage of rainwater.

cisterns, and small water infrastructure for food production, plus the implementation of equipment to subtract groundwater in shallow wells for animal watering.

As for those interested in the investigated social initiatives, referred to in this article as "actors", and the articulation that occurs between them for the emergence of the social innovation process, it was found that it is based, on the one hand, on the engagement of social actors involved in the context of living with the drought, mobilizing, through collective actions, in the search for new interaction practices with the public sector; and, on the other hand, in the recognition and financing of the State in the Federal, State and Municipal spheres. Thus, for the execution of the social innovation programs promoted by ASA, several actors were implemented and mobilized, namely: family farmers, beneficiaries of the programs (social actors); civil society organizations linked to ASA, executing the programs (organizational actors); and the State, in its three spheres, which generate resources to make these programs viable (institutional actors).

It was found that ASA is strategically positioned in the social innovation ecosystem. Due to the absence of State participation, new forms of collective action were developed in small rural communities. Thus, the formation of family farmers' associations or cooperatives was promoted in order to generate recognition by the State in seeing their social needs, and so to promote autonomy concerning political parties and local politicians.

The data collected by the survey provide subsidies for the representation of the dynamics of CSO's role and its involvement in relation to other actors involved with the ASA. The analyzes turn to the following sections: involvement with social actors; engagement with institutional actors; cooperation between all involved, including, in the latter, the involvement with other organizational actors.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews based on the theoretical scope to be explored, documentary research was carried out, using documents from the official website of the network mentioned above, multimedia presentations, and relevant legislation. With this in mind, enough data was collected to discuss the processes of each category of analysis, immersed in the discussions. Both elements are described from the code networks generated by the ATLAS.ti software.

Thus, the subjects' speeches and information from supplementary documents compose the analysis presented below. In citation networks, the numbers shown correspond, respectively, to the number of mentions of the code referred to and to its density and do not imply the analysis.

#### 4.1 Engagement with Social Actors

As they are representations of the social actors themselves, civil society organizations are characterized by their listening capacity and proximity to the beneficiaries of social innovation initiatives through participatory methods and adapted to the socioeconomic context of their localities. In the case of ASA, it was found that it can articulate via networks rooted in the economy, politics, and knowledge (knowledge and technologies) tripod, to identify and understand its reality within the semiarid region, with the ability to propose alternatives regarding their need to live with the drought.

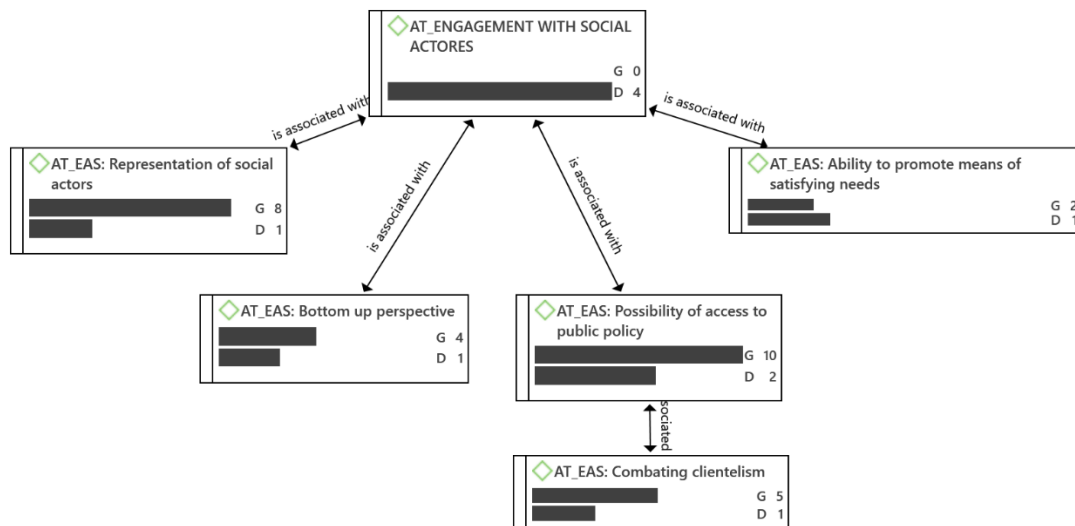
Civil society organizations operating in the semiarid region have developed political-pedagogical experiences, based on articulation and educational work with the populations, on general knowledge and that generated by the region's residents, recovering technologies and relationships with the natural environments of the semiarid region (BRIDGES; CAMPOS, 2017)

One of the roles of civil society organizations in the social innovation

process is to mobilize all institutions and movements and it stands out for its associative initiatives that act according to its communicative logic. Thus, the interviews with the subjects brought up the following aspects: representation of social

actors; the bottom-up perspective; the possibility of access to public policies that is reflected in the fight against clientelism; and the ability to promote ways to meet their own needs, as shown in Figure 01.

**Figure 01** – Engagement with social actors



Source: Field research data

Civil society organizations become representatives of social actors by being present in public life, expressing the interests and values of small farmers. The CSOs are based on ethical, cultural, and political values. They are even concerned with the rural communities' participation in debate and decisions that involve their interests and needs.

ASA's role as a representative of social actors in the semiarid region can be seen in its history, identified in the secondary data of the research. In 1993, due to a drought period, a discussion process involving more than 300 entities was started. The State of Paraíba was the first to articulate some actions in this regard, which culminated in a seminar called Permanent Actions for the Development of the Brazilian Semiarid Region, which aimed to prepare a program of permanent actions that would enable coexistence with the semiarid and point out measures to be carried out by the Government to ensure better living conditions for its population.

Thus, this seminar was the birthmark of the State of Paraíba's Articulation of the Semi-Arid (ASA-PB). From that moment on, ASA-PB began to act as a political subject, contesting the support forms for farmers in that region, mainly fighting clientelism and welfare.

From this initiative, the other States inserted in the Brazilian Semiarid region began to exchange ideas and experiences of living with drought. In Paraíba, the dissemination of plate cisterns (in 1993) was the first action implemented, rescuing a traditional rural process of storing water using simple and cheap technology. The cisterns were financed by the Solidary Revolving Funds system, which demonstrated and strengthened solidary organization in the communities.

Consequently, the concept of "coexistence with the semiarid", developed in opposition to the concept of "fighting droughts", ended up mobilizing civil society and motivating the elaboration of technological and organizational references

for a new model of long-term structuring public policies. This moment made it possible to build a new model of action for civil society organizations, based on the principles of participatory democracy and the respect for the dignity of populations, mobilizing to organizationally and creatively take on the solutions for their own needs.

ASA Brazil was recognized and legitimized in 1999 to establish a space for constructing proposals in the public sphere to deal with the problem of desertification faced in the Brazilian semiarid region.

According to the interviewees, this trajectory has contributed, in the long term, to the generation of a bottom-up process, through the creation of an articulation network representing a civil society that made their demands legitimate for the elaboration of a public policy focused on their primary needs. Within this perspective, the State is no longer the only agent responsible for combating the drought, and the community now has a space to participate in the process of planning and executing actions to meet its demands

The bottom-up perspective is foreseen in the articulation purposes elaborated by ASA when it emphasizes that the Federal Government must develop the project and finance it according to the requirements outlined in the Semi-Arid Declaration, in which it is proposed that civil society must act as responsible for developing practical actions in accordance with the identified social needs. Therefore, ASA would be the idealizer, mediator, and implementer of public policy to build cisterns on rural properties (social actors).

As a result of civil society's capacity to mobilize and promote bottom-up initiatives that seek to satisfy its social needs and that, in a certain way, put pressure on governments to address them in the public sphere, public policies focused on living within the semiarid region have emerged. This social and political articulation has contributed to the

construction of a broad project, promoting cooperation between various organizations from all states in the Brazilian semiarid region.

In this context, ASA plays the role of generating the possibility of access to public policies by being able to identify the needs of localities and build mobilization processes that seek to draw attention to a latent need and attract government interest in solving a problem.

Therefore, ASA can be recognized as a protagonist in the public policies' formation, consonant with rural communities' need in the Brazilian semiarid region and its importance in constructing debate spaces that promote action forwarding and successful initiative publicizing.

“The great ASA contribution to the semiarid region was based on another society form. We were able to contribute with a new perspective, abandoning the idea that a region is a difficult place, where people cannot live, from where they need to migrate. Now it has a semiarid region of potential, which resists new forms of coexistence with the region” (E01\_PB).

These actions can imply the construction of public spaces for dialogue, debate, and negotiation of conflicts, avoiding clientelism and making an ethical dimension of social life possible. This is also necessary in the constitution of active social subjects who define and fight for their rights and not in passiveness in the face of welfare actions.

In addition to the categories of analysis previously discussed, it was also found that CSOs involved in social innovation initiatives can promote ways to meet their own needs. The programs P1MC (One Million Cisterns Program) and P1+2 (One Land, Two Waters Program), developed by ASA, generate new opportunities for small farmers that stimulate investments and improvements in the structures of their rural properties, also

stimulating their permanence in the countryside and strengthening the family succession process.

The roles presented here are related to the different ASA trajectories, adapted to their contexts. As for the territories of the Brazilian semi-arid region, it can be said that the existence of networks of farmers and local organizations operate as a critical factor for a new paradigm of rural reality, enhancing the capacity of families to, in fact, engage in sustainable production practices, in a context created according to its reality.

#### 4.2 Engagement with institutional actors

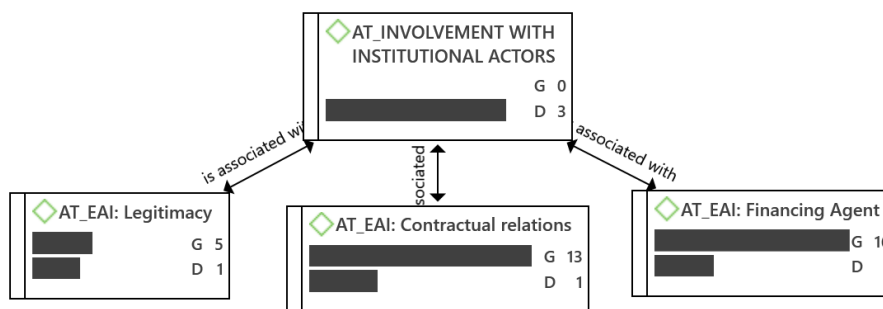
The P1MC and P1+2 programs as an example, it was found that the formulation of public policy involved a process of publicizing and negotiating by civil society organizations to access the public agenda and receive state funding, which created a need for dialogue with actors linked to the State. It is noteworthy that involvement with the State does not only concern institutions linked to the Federal

Government. For the execution of the programs mentioned above, the organizations that are articulated with ASA need to live and negotiate with other instances as well, such as the state and municipal spheres.

At the federal level, the main interlocutor for the negotiation and execution of the cistern program in the government is the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS), as well as the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) for the seed program. As for the participation of the state and municipal spheres, cooperation strategies were implemented with ASA only concerning the awareness of the importance of cisterns and adopting measures of coexistence with the semi-arid region.

From the analysis of the interviews carried out and the documentary research, it was identified that for the role of the involvement of institutional actors that comprise the State in its three spheres, the following roles presented in Figure 02 are relevant.

Figure 02 - Engagement with institutional actors



Source: Field research data

According to the interviewees, in the case of P1MC and P1+2, there was a bet on the participation of social actors, showing that practices in terms of mediation between the State and civil society can contribute to political decisions and legitimize their choices. Thus, civil society organizations had direct access to the State, undergoing a process of

legitimation, having their claims considered fair and legitimate.

Hence, a communicative process was established, operated within the public sphere, by the CSO under study, mediating its social needs and the political system, allowing the impulses from this articulation to reach decision-making instances. In the case of coexistence with the semi-arid region, the legitimacy of this project resided

in the fact that it was defended by civil society organizations, therefore having a social anchorage. Attention is drawn to the fact that CSOs played a role in a specific mode of representation, channeling the interests of social actors, making them legitimate in public policy decision-making processes.

This data is supported by Dagnino (2010), emphasizing that the CSOs' participation sense is reduced to that of management when it is intended that such participation in public policy discussion and formulation instances is restricted only to its implementation and execution, and when the State persists as the strategic actor in defining public policy priorities.

In the case of ASA, through the interviews carried out, it is clear that the proposal was collectively constructed by the CSOs, through a broad process of mobilization of organizational actors who work in the Brazilian semiarid region. However, this participation is limited to implementing such public policies (P1MC and P1+2) with low cost and high "social control".

Another factor related to ASA's involvement with the institutional actor is contractual relationships. The Federal Government, represented by the MDS, establishes consecutive terms of partnership with the AP1MC (A Million Cisterns Program Association). This Association is ASA's legal form, capable of formalizing contracts and managing the proceeds. Once the terms of partnership and their respective goals for constructing cisterns. The deadlines for execution, the details of implementation, and the values that are passed on for this purpose are established, the AP1MC opens notices so that civil society organizations can compete for the resources available. With the resources, the CSOs carry out the projects in the communities.

In the interviews, the actors emphasize that the requirements presented by the Federal Government are legal, made explicit in the public notices issued, which

imposes the need to be respected as political conditions established by the funding agency (MDS).

Thus, respondents claim that the MDS establishes mandatory criteria within the notices to ensure that the program is carried out as recommended by the organizations. One of the aspects included in the notices refers to the criteria for choosing beneficiary families to have work autonomy and combat the practice of clientelism. In addition, there are also selection criteria for the CSOs that will conduct the programs, involving the seriousness of the organizations, their experience working on small rural properties, and their technical capacity to conduct the programs. In such a manner, we seek to nullify the possibilities of creating organizations for the exclusive execution of the mentioned programs.

In this way, the selection of civil society organizations occurs through public tenders, and by the obligation to comply with a series of conditions, such as the presentation of documents that prove their legal qualification and fiscal regularity, and a minimum of three years of existence, which aims to minimize the risk of failure in the execution of the programs.

Another factor pointed out by the interviewees is the terms of partnership between the MSD and the organizations linked to ASA. Since they have defined deadlines and goals, working as conditions for the execution of the projects, both because of the demand to meet the deadline and due to the aspect of grants for the technical team, that are only released at execution time.

"We create one schedule per the public notice, so as not to delay its execution, imposing an accelerated pace, do you see?" (E06\_RN).

"There are technicians who stay at home, waiting for another public notice, because theirs is over, so they have to wait. Sometimes they stay at home for four months." (E03\_PB).

In addition to the explored aspects involving the legitimacy of civil society organizations and the existing contractual relations, the role of articulation with the State was also evidenced about its role as a funding body for social innovation initiatives. In the investigated case, it was observed that the Federal Government is the primary funding agency for the P1MC and 1+2P programs. When it comes to the construction of cisterns by civil society organizations, there is the exclusivity of financing for the MDS. However, it does not finance other construction initiatives linked to the programs.

The MDS sends resources exclusively for the construction of the cistern, such as cement, masons, a technical team that accompanies the construction, promotional material, and training of beneficiaries. On the other hand, the projects do not provide resources for the physical structure. They do not allow investments to be made to acquire permanent materials for the executing social organizations, these issues being in return to be acquired by the CSOs engaged in the projects.

There is also a counterpart on the farmer, who must provide the service of a mason's assistant, who is usually someone from the beneficiary's family. Thus, the Federal Government is the primary funder of the projects. However, transferring the infrastructure responsibility for the execution of public policy to civil society organizations and part of the operationalization to the small farmer.

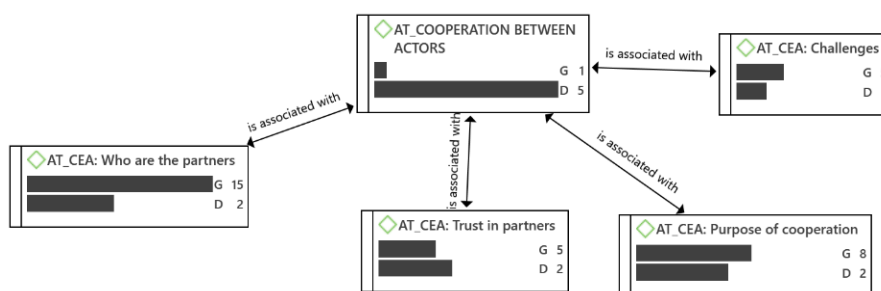
Even going through a legitimation process, having a social connection and a public objective, there is still a demand for transparency and control of the use of these resources by the MDS, since ASA is one of the largest recipients of resources from the Federal Government, allowing a greater stimulus for monitoring by the control bodies.

It is, therefore, a social innovation that resulted from the pressure of civil society organizations, being legitimized as a public policy with resources from the Federal Government, with a differentiated management proposal; below, the possibilities and challenges of this partnership are presented.

### **4.3 Cooperation between Social, Organizational, and Institutional Actors**

The role of the civil society organization to promote cooperation between all actors constitutes one of the primary forms of effective participation in the generation of social innovations. They are allowing it to be, as Quandt (2012) states, a dynamic process associated with the convergence of complementary knowledge, interaction processes, and mechanisms to support cooperation in specific contexts. Therefore, within the cooperation between social, organizational, and institutional actors, the aspects presented in Figure 03 were identified in the data collection.

**Figure 03** - Cooperation between social, organizational, and institutional actors



Source: Field research data

The social innovation process has brought together several adhesions to the term partners, emphasizing the importance of identifying who these partners are as an indicator for analyzing the role of the organizational actor. Thus, it was found that the main partners responsible for the development and maintenance of the P1MC and P1+2 programs are: the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger - MDS, an agency that finances, controls, and coordinates the policy of the programs; and the Semi-Arid Articulation, which includes the various social organizations that compose it (policy implementers) and the communities and families involved (target audience), confirming the importance of the role of the organizational actor when it comes to generating cooperation between the actors of social innovation.

In addition to these partners, there is a remarkable diversity of civil society organizations and government institutions that cooperate in mobilizing causes in the semi-arid region, adding more resources and strengthening the political space, especially in the implementation of social innovations. The examples cited by the interviewees were: Brazilian Federation of Bank Associations – FEBRABAN, World Bank – BIRD, Ministry of Environment – MMA, Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger – MDS, National Conference of Bishops of Brazil – CNBB, Solidarity Communities, Cáritas, UNICEF and Children’ Pastoral.

In addition to these, the International Cooperation Agencies were

also appointed, for their investments in social organizations involved in the projects; Banco do Brasil Foundation, for public notices aimed at supporting and implementing social technologies; and Petrobrás for the qualification project focused on young farmers with the objective of teaching them how to work with social technologies.

This cooperation works to build new social relationships and new patterns of sociability, based on a set of values of reciprocity and sharing, complementary and interdependent ties. Thus, trust between partners emerges as a form of cooperation between them. They absorb such values and fulfill the responsibilities, tasks, and functions established by the partnership relationship. In the investigated cases, the various actors must maintain a direct relationship of trust with the beneficiary family.

In the search for this articulation between collective subjects, ASA acts as a way of thinking and acting on the environment in which it operates, causing community relationships in which those involved are committed to social objectives. In this context, trust and cooperation can positively influence the relationships between the actors, reducing the practices of opportunism and clientelism, as can be seen in the speeches of the subjects representing the organizational actor.

"We have been linked to public policy in the Brazilian state for over ten years, this is very important, the government is showing that it wants to

do it and is calling those who know how to do it." (E03\_PE).

It can be noted, then, that the trust relationship does not allow the understanding of civil society as a substitute for the State, but as a government that regulates the associative activity and gives them fiscal and legal guarantees of power relations mediation within civil society itself. In this way, civil society does not aim at the extinction of the State, but at a paradigm shift in the way it acts. It seeks new solutions that allow excluded sectors to have the right to participate in the political arena, actively acting in a democratic process to resolve the claimed issues.

An advantage identified in the investigated case, contained in this relationship between civil society and the State, is the insertion of civil society in public spheres, allowing public policies to respond to the problems detected by social actors, even counting on their action for implementation. From this perspective, connections with civil society become part of the solution, as committed interlocutors and competent bureaucratic processes are established, thus avoiding clientelistic actions.

The objective of the cooperation is to generate new forms of socio-productive actions aimed at meeting social needs. In the cases analyzed, the objectives were traced through the experiences of living with the semiarid region, significantly strengthening rural communities, with the use of sustainable practices in the use of natural resources, as well as the promotion of community organization.

In this way, ASA started to qualify the space of different political and social articulations, created to join together with shared objectives, integrating individuals and organizations with cultural values built in daily life. This articulation has a solid capacity to mobilize social actors, cooperation agencies, and public bodies focused on coexistence in the semiarid region.

From the above, one can see the result of knowledge applied to social needs through the participation and cooperation of all actors involved, which goes beyond organizational boundaries (LI; SUN; LIN, 2012).

A challenge that permeates this process is associated with access to finance. Due to the fact that the programs receive funding from the MDS, a large part of these interactions occur with this federal entity and its control bodies, that seek to ensure an inspection of the use of public resources incorporated in the program, also implying the imposition of standardized methodologies, causing inconvenience at project implementation time.

Another difficulty mentioned is the deadlines established by the public administration for presenting the results, inconsistent with the development time of community projects, leading to the understanding that the public sphere seeks a "production of quantifiable results" (E02\_RN).

Therefore, this movement created by the CSOs served as a basis for discussions on issues considered essential for the local context, strengthening the bonds of social actors, their articulation capacity, and expanding access possibilities to a public perspective through public acts.

## 5 Final Considerations

This work aimed to analyze the role of CSOs and their interinstitutional relationships in social innovation initiatives. In this sense, involvement with social and institutional actors and cooperation between actors were identified.

It was noticed that the representation of civil society interests occurs because the CSO represents the social actors in the public sphere, in a democratic perspective, expressing their interests and values, even being concerned with the participation of local communities in the debate processes and decisions that

involve their interests and needs, in the search for consensus in forwarding actions.

In this way, the State is no longer the only agent responsible for drawing up public policies focused on the population's main needs, and the community starts to have a space to participate in the process of planning and executing actions to meet their demands.

The results of this study contribute to a perspective that helps to understand CSOs as agents of social and political articulation, in the construction of broader projects and that seek to mobilize different actors in favor of their collective interests.

In this context, this study advances by addressing, theoretically and empirically, civil society organizations' capacity to identify the localities' needs and to build mobilization processes that seek to draw attention to a latent need and attract government interest for the resolution of a problem. As well as mediating with the public sphere the social needs along with the political system, which allows the impulses arising from this articulation to reach decision-making instances.

As a limitation, it is understood that the study used a cross-section in an exploration concentrated in three states that are inserted in the Brazilian semiarid region. Considering that this theme is part of a growing literature, new studies are proposed to approach ways to implement and disseminate social initiatives aimed at the development of territories. Thus, it is suggested that the roles identified in this study be verified in other social innovation initiatives to identify which other elements are essential for its development and consolidation, as well as quantitative analyzes that add subsidies for measuring the processes described in the analyses.

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