




FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY AND SOLIDARITY IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM POPULAR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

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Sandra Marli da Rocha Rodrigues¹, Gisele de Souza Gonçalves², Jandir Rodrigues³,
Fernando José Martins⁴ and Silvana Aparecida de Souza⁵

ABSTRACT

This article aims to highlight the importance of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (SSAN) and solidarity in the pandemic period, in order to legitimize the need for a rapprochement between the countryside and the city, with the food produced by family and peasant agriculture as its centrality, within the Popular Social Movements of the countryside. As well as, to present data that demonstrate the importance of the work developed by the Movement of Landless Rural Workers – MST in the areas of Agrarian Reform, provoking reflections that contribute to the change of our eating habits, understanding that the act of eating is a political act. To this end, based on news published on websites, we seek to meet the objectives of this research, addressing the facts selected according to the pandemic period and the relevance of Popular Social Movements in the construction of Food Sovereignty in Brazil.

Keywords: Pandemic. Food Sovereignty and Security. Solidarity. Popular Social Movements.

¹ Doctorate student in the Graduate Program, Stricto Sensu, in Society, Culture and Borders, Master's and Doctorate level, Unioeste Campus, Foz do Iguaçu -Pr.

CAPES bag holder

E-mail: sandramarrodrigues79@gmail.com

² Dr. in Society, Culture and Borders, Unioeste, Foz do Iguaçu Campus-PR.

E-mail: giselesouzag@hotmail.com

³ Graduated in Rural Development and Food Security - UNILA.

E-mail: jandir.sanjar@gmail.com

⁴ Professor of the Graduate Program, Stricto Sensu, in Society, Culture and Borders, Master's and Doctorate levels. Unioeste Campus, Foz do Iguaçu-Pr.

E-mail:fernandopedagogia2000@yahoo.com.br

⁵ Professor of the Graduate Program, Stricto Sensu, in Society, Culture and Borders, Master's and Doctorate levels.

Unioeste Campus, Foz do Iguaçu-Pr.

E-mail: Sasouzaunioeste@hotmail.com



INTRODUCTION

Yesterday I bought sugar and bananas. My children ate bananas with sugar, because they had no fat to make food. I thought of Mr. Tomás who committed suicide. But if the poor of Brazil decide to commit suicide because they are starving, not one would be left alive.

Carolina Maria de Jesus, diary of May 2, 1959. Dump room:
Diary of a favelada.

The present work intends to weave a reflection on Food Sovereignty and Security and solidarity, which had their importance perceived during the pandemic, respectively, by the production of healthy and diversified food and because part of this production was destined for solidarity actions and distributed to urban populations in situations of social vulnerability. Both actions were carried out in the fertile lands of family and peasant agriculture, in an organized manner by the Popular Social Movements of the countryside.

Thus, we intend to highlight the importance of Food Sovereignty and solidarity today, in order to legitimize the need for a rapprochement between the countryside and the city, having as its centrality the healthy food produced by family and peasant agriculture from the dynamics and territories of the Popular Social Movements of the countryside. As well as, to provoke reflections that stimulate the change of our eating habits, understanding that the act of eating is a political act.

As a methodology, we chose to select some news dated from the beginning of the pandemic period in Brazil and, based on them, we will highlight the importance of Food Sovereignty, based on the concept presented at the World Conference on Food Sovereignty in Mali, held in 2007, with the Declaration of Nyéléni.

PANDEMIC AND INEQUALITIES

Before we start the proposed discussion, let's contextualize the period in which the donation of food made by the Popular Social Movements took place in Brazil. According to information released by the Ministry of Health, on 03/28/2023, the day Brazil reached the sad mark of 700 thousand deaths. The note from the Ministry of Health informs that "Three years after the first case of Covid-19 registered in the country, Brazil reached another sad milestone this Tuesday (28): 700 thousand deaths caused by the disease".⁶ Worldwide, the data reveal a worrying reality. According to the director-general of the World Health Organization - WHO, during the three years of the pandemic, when observing the most conservative data, that is, those that consider only the confirmation of the action of the virus,

⁶ Information available on the Ministry of Health website: <https://acesse.one/2jHCo>

point out that 6.9 million people died of Covid-19 by October 2022. But, the director-general notes that if deaths are analyzed compared to years before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is noticeable that during the pandemic deaths exceeded estimates that follow normal mortality trends, so victims of the disease could reach the tragic mark of 15 million⁷. In Brazil, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on March 12, 2020, as informed by the Ministry of Health, it is important to say that it was a woman, a domestic worker.

As a methodology, we adopted the following path, considering the importance of the action of the Popular Social Movements in the countryside, we selected news about food donations made by the MST and other Popular Social Movements in the countryside. In this way, we will address solidarity and Food Sovereignty having as analysis material the news published on the internet, which we have selected and in the course of this work we will present.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

It is necessary to point out that, as we enter the year 2020, Brazil was already facing a conjunction of crises (economic, social, political and environmental) and with the return of hunger in an accelerated way, there was also a frightening advance in the destruction of nature, with fires increasing uncontrolled and accelerated in the Cerrado biomes, Pantanal and Amazon, in addition to the relaxation of environmental laws, with the aim of expanding agricultural frontiers for agribusiness. Thus, the political option of Jair Bolsonaro's government was to favor the profit of capitalist companies, further increasing the concentration of income and, consequently, increasing the situation of misery and hunger of the poor, especially in the peripheries of large centers. This option has become increasingly evident, as, for example, when the minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply - MAPA, spoke at the inauguration ceremony, when referring to the incorporation of the aquaculture and fisheries and family farming portfolios into the ministry of agriculture: "We will have a single ministry, which will look with equal prominence at all Brazilian rural producers, regardless of their size".⁸ This position of the federal government has serious consequences for family and peasant farming, with their invisibility in credit policies aimed at agriculture. The unequal cannot be treated equally, ignoring the differences and specificities of the set of subjects that make up the Brazilian countryside.

This political option became even more evident when, at the launch of the Crop Plan, which comprised the 2020/2021 agricultural year and which brings together the instruments

⁷ Information available on the WHO website: <https://abrir.link/XvpQD>

⁸ Excerpt from the inauguration speech of Minister Tereza Cristina. The access link can be found in the references.

of the country's agricultural policy, the minimum conditions for food production by family and peasant agriculture were not made possible. This demonstrated, on the part of the federal government, the lack of knowledge of the reality and diversity that make up Brazilian agriculture.

When the pandemic arrived in Brazil, it found a scorched earth, with regard to public policies, especially those aimed at Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security - SSAN. Brazil was already in a conjuncture of convergences of crises (economic, political, social and environmental), which made the people suffer with their serious consequences. The pandemic arrived in Brazil claiming the lives of thousands of Brazilians, further aggravating an already critical situation.

In the face of this tragic COVID-19 pandemic reality in which Brazil found itself, some fundamental questions became evident to our eyes. One of these is the importance of understanding what is meant by Food Sovereignty, a concept that did not emerge ready-made, but was built and rebuilt in the historical course of the Popular Social Movements in the countryside around the world, Movements that were organized in La Via Campesina⁹. An important milestone in this historical construction was the World Conference on Food Sovereignty in Mali, held in 2007, with the Declaration of Nyélény, which brought the following statement:

Sovereignty is a peoples' right to nutritious and culturally appropriate, affordable, sustainably and ecologically produced food, and their right to decide their own food and production system. This places those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, above the demands of markets and companies (STÉDILE, 2015, p.42).

During the pandemic, the importance of Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (SSAN) was realized, when we followed the hundreds of solidarity actions spread across all regions of Brazil, where the Popular Social Movements in the countryside donated food from family and peasant agriculture on the outskirts of the cities, to people and families in situations of social vulnerability, where most of the time the basics were already lacking, even before the pandemic made the situation of these populations even more difficult. These solidarity actions, often articulated with religious organizations, trade unions and urban Popular Social Movements, have proven that the centrality of public policies for agriculture needs to be the production of healthy food for the maintenance of life. It is also

⁹ The organizations that make up La Via Campesina Brazil are: Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST); Peasant Women's Movement (MMC); Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB); Small Farmers Movement (MPA); Rural Youth Ministry (PJR); Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen (MPP); National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities (CONAQ); National Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining (MAM).



important to emphasize that peasant women, organized in the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, have a perceptible role in the daily construction of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security, although invisible in the official numbers, it is the women in their production units who cultivate and preserve a great diversity of native foods and seeds, ensuring the autonomy and preserving the food culture of their families, contributing greatly to the promotion of health, and, consequently, to the fight against COVID-19.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) released, in 2019, the data from the Agricultural Census for 2017. The figures showed that almost half of the entire agricultural area in the country is concentrated in just 1% of the properties. The census also pointed out that "small landowners, owners of land with up to 10 hectares, occupy only 2.3% of the total" (*Site, Brasil de Fato*). "In Brazil, of every 100 kg of food produced, 70 kg is produced by peasant families" (VARGAS and SILVA, 2016, p.40). The data reveal how productive and sustainable family and peasant farming, based on small production units, is.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY

In addition to the concept of Food Sovereignty mentioned at the beginning of this article, which supported us for the development of this research, we will also bring here the concept presented in the "Dictionary of Rural Education", in which it is understood:

The set of public and social policies that must be adopted by all nations, in their villages, municipalities, regions and countries, in order to ensure that the food necessary for the survival of the population of each place is produced. This concept reveals a broader policy than food security, as it is based on the principle that, in order to be sovereign and protagonists of their own destiny, the people must have the conditions, resources and support necessary to produce their own food (STEDILE and CARVALHO, 2012, p.715).

Thus, as in the 2007 definition, presented at the Conference in Mali, by Stedile and Carvalho, which highlights the fact that "Food Sovereignty is a right of peoples to nutritious and culturally appropriate, accessible, sustainably and ecologically produced food, and their right to decide their own food and production system" (STÉDILE and CARVALHO, 2012, p.721), the authors take up this concept and expand it in the "Dictionary of Rural Education", where they mention how food production and its quality is part of the very life of the communities and territories of rural peoples.

In the same text, Carvalho and Stedile present the concept of Food Security from the understanding of the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, according to the authors: "Food security is a public policy applied by governments of several countries that is based on the principle that all people have the right to food and it is the duty of the State to



provide the resources for people to feed themselves" (CARVALHO & STEDILE, 2012, p.714). We can affirm that Food Security refers to an elementary dimension of human life, which is food, and this dimension is historically linked to the food culture of rural peoples who produce food and urban populations who depend on the distribution and supply of this food, but mainly on the material conditions to acquire it.

The Popular Social Movements of the countryside understand that Food Sovereignty is a broader and more comprehensive concept than that of Food Security, because to guarantee the latter, it is necessary to implement the former. Renato Maluf defines what is understood by Food and Nutrition Security in the scope of public policy. For Maluf;

Food and Nutrition Security is the realization of everyone's right to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting food practices that respect cultural diversity and are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. (II National Conference of FNS. Olinda, 2004). (MALUF, 2011, p.17).

In a context of crisis convergences as mentioned at the beginning of this article is aggravated by the COVID-19 health crisis, the Food and Nutrition Security of vulnerable populations has become unachievable. By correctly reading the political situation of the pandemic period, the Popular Social Movements planned and developed solidarity actions.

SOLIDARITY

When we talk about solidarity from the perspective of the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, we are not talking about donating what is left, what is not being useful or even what is in disuse. Unlike the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, this perspective conceives solidarity as a kind of "boot away", where poor quality products or leftovers are donated. For the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, solidarity is configured as a value, a basic principle that guides the solidarity actions developed during the pandemic. Families donate what they produce best, share the food that goes to their tables. As Fidel Castro would say, "solidarity is not giving what we have left over, but sharing what we have." It is in this way that solidarity is a practice of great relevance, as it eases the pain of hunger of those most penalized by the previous economic crisis, aggravated by the COVID-19 health crisis. Emphasizing that solidarity is a principle and a value inherent to the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, throughout their trajectories, not only in times of emergency, as in the case of the pandemic.

To better develop this analysis, we were guided by the concept of solidarity from the work "Trabalho de base", organized by Ranulfo Peloso (2012). In it, it is considered that:

Solidarity is manifested in compassion as the ability to put oneself in the place of the other person, in affectivity, in partnership and in unconditional love so that the oppressed class can be fulfilled. But it is best expressed in the free surrender of the best, including life itself, so that people and peoples can realize the eternal dream of universal fraternity (PELOSO, 2012, p. 86).

This concept is in line with what the subjects of the Popular Social Movements of the Countryside practiced during the pandemic period through donations of quality food to people in vulnerable situations. Thus, the solidarity implemented by the MST and the set of Social Movements of La Via Campesina demonstrates coherence between theory and practice, especially at a time when Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security had its importance highlighted, and, consequently, gave visibility to the work of peasant peoples and their potential to produce healthy and diversified food in their territories.

Figure 1: MST action in Alagoas. Source: MST website./ Photo of food production for distribution.



PANDEMIC AND SOLIDARITY ACTIONS OF POPULAR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Solidarity actions have multiplied throughout Brazil, among them, we have chosen to mention some that show the necessary presence of Popular Social Movements in the countryside, which stood out in the pandemic period: "More than 40 entities in Aracaju receive 25 tons of food from the MST. Distribution of food kits took place on Rural Workers' Day, last Saturday (25)". (MST, 2020). This and other solidarity actions favored not only those who received the donation, but also the MST itself, which legitimizes its work, often not publicized by the media, not being known by a large part of the Brazilian population.

Not only in Aracaju this donation action took place, but also in other states and regions, such as in Curitiba-PR, as shown in the news: Family farmers and Agrarian Reform distribute a thousand lunch boxes in Curitiba in this 4th action is part of the initiatives to



combat hunger and also marks the International Day of Agriculture and Family Farmers, celebrated on July 25, (MST, 2020).

In one of the news published on the internet, the recognition of the MST as a solidarity and productive movement is evident, considering its important role during this situation of health crisis and one could say, of humanitarian crisis aggravated by the pandemic: To combat the "hunger pandemic", the MST has already donated more than 600 tons of food. Leader of the movement, Kelli Mafort reinforces the importance of solidarity to save lives and enable quarantine (BRASIL DE FATO, 2020).

It is important to highlight that both hunger and solidarity actions were not restricted to capitals or large urban centers, but were internalized by "deep Brazil", as hunger and food insecurity spread throughout Brazil with the same speed as the COVID-19 virus. This is evidenced by the news clipping about donations made in the Southwest region of Paraná, known for being the "cradle" of family farming. Joint action with the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT).

Donations in the Southwest give relief to needy families, this is the third major solidarity action promoted in the region. It is estimated that approximately 15 tons of healthy food produced by family farming have been distributed in the region after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. (CUT/PR, 2020).

With the worsening of the pandemic, solidarity actions have intensified, as can be seen in the news published on the *website* of the Brasil de Fato newspaper, when in memory of the 25th anniversary of the Eldorado de Carajás Massacre¹⁰, news that:

Trucks full of food for those who are hungry. This was the result of the action of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) of Paraná, which made donations in 13 cities in the state between the 14th and 19th of this month. Rice, beans, pumpkin, cassava, vegetables and greens, as well as more than 2 thousand liters of milk were distributed to families in more than 50 settlements and camps in the state. In all, about 67 tons of food arrived at hospitals and people who are in vulnerable situations. (BRASIL DE FATO, 2021).

The solidarity actions in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the hunger pandemic, revealed the productive potential of the territories of Agrarian Reform and family and peasant agriculture, because a true joint effort was carried out against hunger and in defense of life, as can be seen in the news published on the MST website, in 2022.

With the motto "Cultivating Landless Solidarity", since the beginning of the pandemic, the MST has built a national agenda of actions against hunger, formed by

¹⁰ To learn more, visit: <https://cptne2.org.br/noticias/noticias-por-estado/5790-26-anos-do-massacre-de-eldorado-dos-carajas-assassinatos-de-sem-terras-disparam-e-impunidade-permanece>



the Movement together with several organizations and entities that practice the fight against hunger and food insecurity. This even boosted a National Front Against Hunger and Thirst, with permanent grassroots work present in communities throughout Brazil, with the consolidation of dozens of Solidarity Kitchens, Popular Food Banks and Community Gardens. There was also the training of more than 2 thousand Popular Health Agents who were on the front line of all these articulations together with families in vulnerable situations. During the height of the pandemic, not only food was donated, but also care, raising awareness among the poorest population with guidance on how to fight the coronavirus and distributing more than 50 thousand protective masks throughout these trainings. Thus, through popular organization, it was possible to reach the milestone of more than 7 thousand tons of food donated, 10 thousand basic food baskets and exceeding 2 million solidarity lunchboxes. (MST, 2022).

Highlighting such actions contributes to the perception of the potential of the MST as a movement that, with its practices, has contributed to the construction of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security, not only by distributing food, but especially because it is food with greater nutritional, organic/agroecological and healthy value. The food received in the solidarity actions contributes to the food security, health and economy of several people, in addition to being an important instrument to combat hunger, growing in the pandemic period.

Faced with the thousands of solidarity actions practiced during the pandemic period, many people may even wonder: Where is this food produced? And, the answer is being given by the Pedagogy of Example. The food that is donated in solidarity actions is grown in the settlements and encampments of the Agrarian Reform. It is in the fertile soil of the conquered land when it comes to settlements, or in the areas of struggle for land, in the case of encampments. It is on this ground that not only food sprouts, dignity, health and life sprout. These examples also show the strategic importance of Agrarian Reform. Because, even during the encampment process, the fruits of the land and the struggle are already reaped, and these fruits are shared with those who need it most. The following quotation describes in a didactic way how this production process takes place in the encampment areas.

The history of encampments and settlements has been like this. In general, land that does not produce food, that employs little or no people, that despises nature and the environment, is occupied by families in need of land to produce. The occupied land quickly transforms. Families first produce their own food and, fed, they have the strength to produce more, so much so that they can even donate to those in need. The land is generous and the knowledge of the families great. This sum means that in a short time the fruits of the earth are filled with greenness, vitamins and food carbohydrates, healthy, nutritious and tasty. However, the threat continues and so does the risk, but the only way to thank the generosity of the land is to break bread. So, even under threat, taking risks, families prefer to share the little they have and do their part so that the world is not so unfair (TERRA SEM MALES, 2020).



An article published on the MST website on March 5, 2023, presents numbers that corroborate the quote above, let's see:

Currently, the MST has 160 rural cooperatives, 120 agro-industries and 1900 associations throughout Brazil, which work to strengthen Landless solidarity and promote the improvement of the production of the settlements, in addition to establishing more egalitarian labor relations and improving the income of the settled families¹¹. (SITE, MST, 2023).

On March 17, 2023, the 20th edition of the agroecological rice harvest festival took place in the Filhos de Sepé settlement, in Viamão, Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre. During the party, TVT made a report on all the dimensions that the harvest of agroecological rice covers. In this report, the former governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Olivio Dutra, summarized in one sentence the meaning of the production of healthy food in the areas of Agrarian Reform: "Long live the struggle of the workers who are here demonstrating their capacity, their love for others and the true vision of politics, which is the construction of the common good with the protagonism of people¹²."

This brief collection of news proves what the text has been reflecting on the importance of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security and the solidarity that was deeply exercised during the pandemic period. In addition to establishing solid links between the countryside and the city, which can and should remain after the pandemic. In this way, the MST, together with the other Social Movements of La Via Campesina, have proven in a solidary and economical way how much the populations of the city need the peoples of the countryside.

In addition, the MST, through these donations, highlights its performance and dynamics as an organic movement of subjects who work and produce food not only for themselves, highlighting the organization and productivity of this Popular Social Movement. Its actions highlight how much the populations in their most diverse territories need to know, understand, seek and fight for Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security, which brings in its multiple dimensions, benefits to the peoples of the countryside and the city in the promotion of a healthier, economically viable and ecologically sustainable life.

It is worth quoting here an excerpt from Tom Standage about the dominance of power in relation to food, in his book "An Edible History of Humanity", he asks: "What is the most devastating and effective weapon in the history of war?", then answers:

¹¹ Available at: <https://mst.org.br/2023/03/05/cooperativas-do-campo/>

¹² Disponível em: <https://youtu.be/QEBQ6dtDX3E>



It is not the sword, the machine gun, the tank or the atomic bomb. Another weapon killed many more people and determined the outcome of numerous conflicts. It is something that is so obvious that it is easy to underestimate: food, or, more precisely, control of the food supply (STANDAGE, 2010, p. 157).

So we reinforce what we know: delegitimizing the MST has ideological motives that are economic. However, these actions of free distribution of thousands of lunchboxes and basic food baskets have demonstrated how possible and achievable Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security is, so that everyone has healthy food without the exploitation of labor, in addition to having agroecology as a productive matrix. In this way, many conflicts will be avoided and solidarity from the perspective of Popular Social Movements may be permanent, however, for this to occur it will be necessary for the population in general to realize who is building their practices in defense of a dignified and sustainable life on a daily basis.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

This work favors the registration and dissemination of the actions carried out by the Landless Rural Workers Movement - MST, and other Popular Social Movements in the countryside throughout Brazil, which carried out numerous solidarity actions with the distribution of food from the areas of Agrarian Reform and peasant communities, to thousands of families in situations of social vulnerability during the pandemic. Such actions only legitimize the values and work of the Popular Social Movements in the countryside, especially the MST.

Through these actions, it is possible to recognize the importance of food in a concrete perspective of the construction of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (SSAN), for the populations of the countryside and the city, as well as to suggest some reflections on the current agrarian economic model, the current agri-food system, which in the countryside is expressed through agribusiness, which It aims at profit over life, without considering the health of human beings and the maintenance of other forms of life. Understanding that through adequate and healthy eating, health and quality of life are promoted. In addition to indicating, especially in this recent pandemic period - how much predatory activities that disrespect the life of the planet can bring serious consequences to agroecosystems and all who depend on them to live.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The COVID 19 pandemic is the result of the predatory way in which we human beings act on nature, in order to stop the emergence of catastrophes such as the pandemic,



it is necessary to reevaluate the habits adopted by society, such as consumerism, poor diet, individualism and the unbridled exploitation of nature.

The elements and values disseminated in the world today have not contributed to social equality or any other benefit to community life or to the preservation of life in its diversity, benefiting only the accumulation of profit in the hands of a few, that is, the dominant class.

Concepts such as Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (SSAN) and Solidarity need to be understood and practiced on a daily basis, and the Popular Social Movements of Via Capesina Brasil, presented in this article the MST as an example of healthy and diversified food production in the areas of Agrarian Reform, with data that express the productive potential of peasant family farming, And, with the solidarity actions carried out during the pandemic, they ratify their collective work, valuing the land and the people who work and produce on it, more than food, they produce dignity and life. Such facts need to be published, highlighted and disseminated in order to understand what and how the MST constitutes a Popular Social Movement in the countryside, with international recognition.

For a nation to be truly sovereign, it needs to guarantee Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (SSAN) in the first place, a people that does not produce its own food will be eternally hostage to the hegemonic agri-food system.

Therefore, we highlight the importance of writing about the theme and valuing the Popular Social Movements of the countryside, provoking a potential debate that we can carry out in search of spaces that demystify the MST as a group of people who disorderly occupy other people's properties and recognize its importance and its Pedagogy of Example beyond the countryside, but above all, in the sense of pointing out ways for the realization of Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (SSAN) in the countryside and in the city.

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