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# CASE STUDY

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## The Sertão do São Francisco Territory (IRPAA) – Development of Rural Activities

Francesco di Villarosa



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**WORLD WITHOUT POVERTY**  
BRAZIL LEARNING INITIATIVE



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This study case is part of a series of studies  
by the Brazil Learning Initiative for a World without Poverty (WWP).  
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# Executive Summary

The Development Program launched in 2011 by the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS)<sup>1</sup> seeks to promote diversified agricultural production, food security, income generation and inclusion in social policies for family farmers in a situation of poverty by providing technical assistance and rural extension (TARE) services and non-reimbursable grants of R\$2,400 to support productive projects. The MDA contracted the Regional Institute for Appropriate Small Farming and Animal Husbandry (IRPAA) to implement the *Development Program of the Sertão do São Francisco Territory* in Bahia in 2013-2016.

The case study tracks the implementation process of the Program in 10 municipalities of the Sertão do São Francisco Territory, involving 5,300 families, and seeks to respond to the following delivery challenge: how the Contractor, and specifically the TARE agent, can contribute through a multifunctional approach to (i) targeting beneficiaries; (ii) community engagement; (iii) information-sharing between different stakeholders; and (iv) coordination between government and civil society, and between different government sectors and levels. The study also seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the incentives set forth in the Development Program, the challenges faced by the Contractor in fulfilling contract performance conditions, the Contractor's methodological approach to rural productive inclusion programs and policies, the profile needed by a TARE agent to fulfil his/her required multifunctional role, and governmental arrangements for supporting the agent's role.

The results of the study point to the effectiveness of the provisions of the MDA contract and demonstrate the value of the IRPAA's innovative contribution to the Development Program with its participatory, collective and contextualized methodology in terms of: (i) combining technical and motivational training with TARE agents' practical experience of life in the Semi-Arid; (ii) mobilizing a broad network of partners coupled with a communications strategy tailored to the target population; (iii) focalizing clients based on a MDA/MDS list of families in a situation of extreme poverty obtained by cross-referencing the *CadÚnico* with the DAP database and supplemented by data on families living in isolated pockets of poverty and hitherto excluded from public policies; (iv) preparing a diagnosis based on a candid dialogue between the TARE agent and beneficiary families about their lives and livelihoods in the Semi-Arid, and maximizing the time invested in this dialogue by relieving agents of certain bureaucratic activities to enable them to focus more on their clients; (v) designing a productive project as the result of this dialogue that sought a balance between complex technical solutions and passive acceptance of traditional practices regardless of their unsuitability to local conditions; (vi) monitoring the implementation of families' productive projects by integrating the individual activities of beneficiary families with activities pursued by the community as a whole; (vii) encouraging family farmers to gradually access markets for their surplus products, supported by cooperative and solidarity networks when appropriate, and in tune with the sociocultural characteristics of their communities; (viii) ensuring the sustainability of project innovations by integrating them with public policies related to contractor/policymaker intermediation, strengthening local social capital, and creating a propitious environment for interinstitutional coordination. Innovations that have been incorporated into the design of new rural socio-productive inclusion programs include changes in the duration of TARE contracts, revised percentages of beneficiaries substituted on client lists following Active Search, reduction of the number of families served per agent, increased clustering (*nucleação*) of communities, and the introduction of attendance sheets for controlling the time spent on home visits by TARE agents.

The main lessons of the study highlight the excellent performance of the project arising from IRPAA's adherence to the contractual provisions and appropriate use of the margin of maneuver agreed in the procurement notice (MDA introductory training for staff, client targeting based on the *CadÚnico*/DAP list with the possibility of revision by up to 20% via active search, mandatory mobilization, open discussion themes in communal activities). The provisions were also enhanced by combining them with the Contractor's innovative methodology rooted in the concept of "educating before doing", in the "collective" approach, in the teaching of practical ways to cope with life in the Semi-Arid, and in the dialogic, balanced approach to the beneficiary families.

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1. In May 2016 the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger merged with the Ministry of Agrarian Development and was renamed the Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development.



# Summary:

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1	Introduction to the Case Study.....	7
2	Background to the Case Study.....	10
3	The implementation process.....	12
4	Lessons from the Case Study.....	24
	Bibliography.....	26



# INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY

Family farmers in the Semi-Arid of Brazil face barriers to their economic and social development such as scarcity of water and land, as well as difficulties in gaining access to credit, technical assistance, agricultural inputs and markets for their products.

Their vulnerability renders them a priority target for the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan (BSM). The Rural Productive Activities Development Program is a BSM program run jointly by the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS)<sup>2</sup>. Created in 2011, this program aims to expand and diversify agricultural production, food security, income generation and the inclusion in social policies of family farmers, families settled under the government's agrarian reform program, indigenous and maroon (quilombola) families, and other traditional peoples and communities in a situation of poverty and extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>.

The Development Program focuses on two fronts: (i) technical assistance and rural extension (TARE); and (ii) the transfer of non-reimbursable grants (R\$2,400) in three installments<sup>4</sup> to beneficiary families to support productive (i.e. farming) projects to be prepared with TARE support.

Implementation of the Development Program is undertaken on the basis of the provision of TARE services contracted by the MDA or the National Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA), or by State governments in Technical Cooperation

Agreements signed with the Federal Government, through procurement notices/calls for applications containing guidelines and incentives for attending to families with poverty and extreme poverty profiles. Contractors are required (i) to train their own teams (initially trained by MDA); (ii) be responsible for the mobilization and targeting of relevant families by cross-referencing data contained in the Unified Registry for Social Programs (*CadÚnico*) and the Aptitude Statement for the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture - PRONAF (DAP). The Contractor is permitted to substitute up to 20% of the listed families with new families identified by active search with profiles of poverty or extreme poverty but not registered in the *CadÚnico*, who need to be included in the Registry by the municipal social assistance agencies; (iii) to prepare and update diagnoses of individual families, highlighting their social and productive characteristics; (iv) to prepare, together with the TARE agent and families, a suitable project for organizing and increasing production; (v) to monitor the release of the installments of non-reimbursable funds conditional on appropriate certification presented by the agent, support the family throughout the entire development of their project to apply these grants in a suitable manner, and seek ways of marketing any surpluses; and, finally, (iv) to submit an intermediate and final evaluation of the activities performed under the contract.

The sequence of actions of the Development Program is illustrated in the following Process Map:

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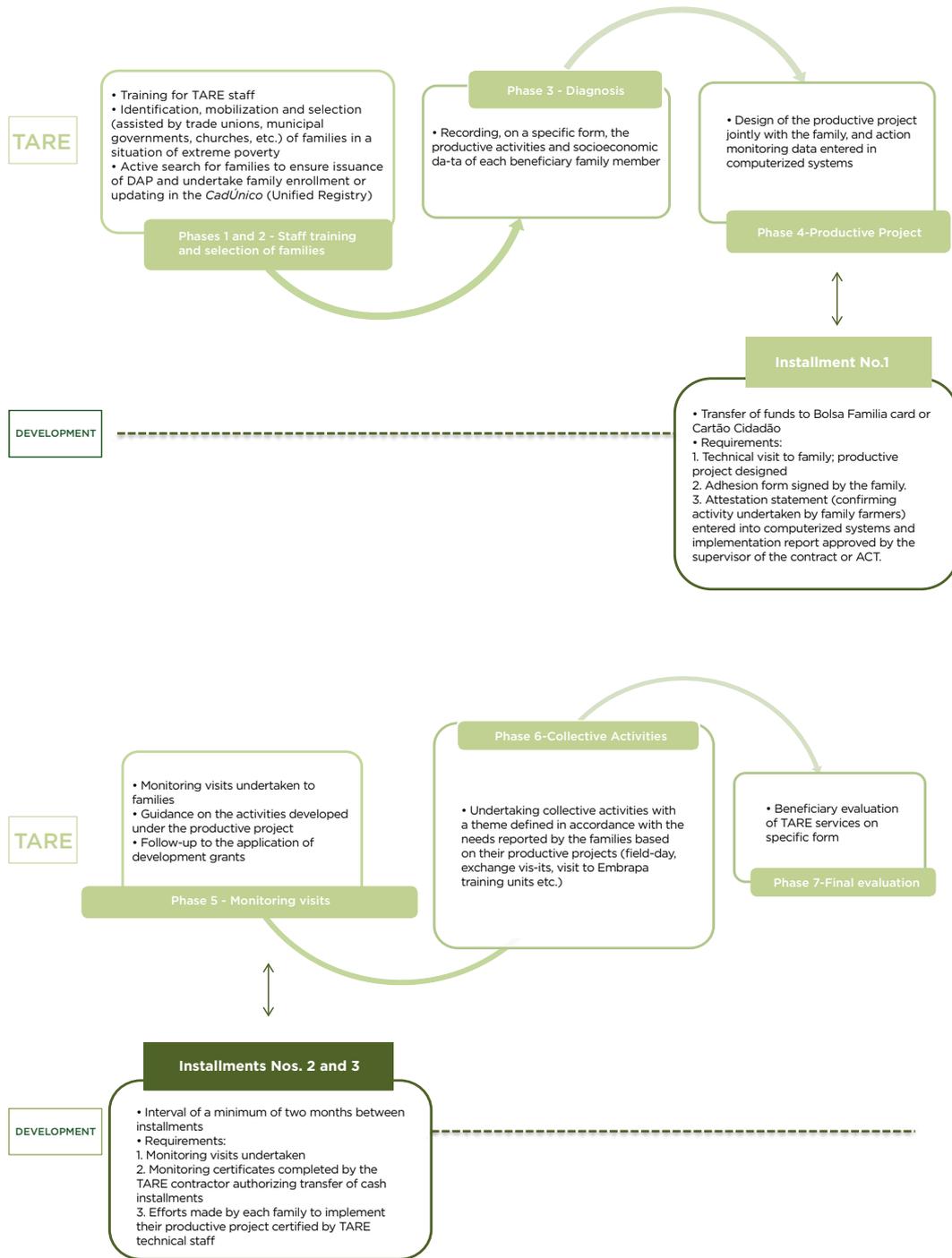
2. MDA merged with MDS in May 2016

3. The BSM/Development Program has two modalities: the *Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Development* scheme (per capita family incomes of up to R\$77), and the *Semi-Arid Development* scheme (per capita family incomes up to R\$154) targeted at people living in the semi-arid region who have access to water for agricultural production. This case study focuses on the first modality of the BSM Development Program.

4. In 2013 the MDS modified the program by decree and the funds are now released in two installments.

**FIGURE 1** Development Program Process Map

## Development Program: service provision schedule for beneficiary families



Between March 2013 and April 2016 the Development Program served, through the Regional Institute for Appropriate Small Farming and Animal Husbandry (IRPAA), 5,300 small-scale farming households in the Sertão do São Francisco Identity Territory in the Semi-Arid zone of the state of Bahia.

The IRPAA is a non-governmental organization based in Juazeiro, Bahia. Founded over 25 years ago, its activities focus on strengthening family farming and improving living conditions in the Semi-Arid through educational and technical assistance (using its own special methodology) organized under four main themes: Land, Water and Climate, Production, Education and Communication.

### The IRPAA Methodological Approach

The IRPAA methodology is based on collective educational processes tailored to the characteristics of the Semi-Arid with a view to adding value to regional knowledge and identity. The basic starting point is to learn about the real situation of family farming via the “pedagogy of the question” method and dialoguing with local people. The job of the agent is to guide and assist family farmers to strengthen their potentialities, but without proposing predetermined and often impractical solutions. The main aim of this kind of intervention is not merely technical; it also involves discussing climate, discrimination issues, the political dimension, land concentration, access to water, etc. Essentially, education comes first, followed by production. Agricultural production is considered to mirror social relationships as well as power structures within families, the community, the municipality and the region as a whole. The overall aim is to empower family farmers, particularly women and young people. It is therefore extremely important to strengthen local cooperative networks, as well as to engage in appropriate communication with family farmers and families so that the messages are suitably transmitted and understood

The Development Program, which previously had been almost exclusively pedagogical, was a good opportunity to put this approach into practice.

The development challenge raised in this case study addresses how to promote food security and the sale of production surpluses (resulting in income generation) of the family farmers in the Semi-Arid who are in a situation of extreme poverty. The following delivery challenge emerges from the set of actions described in the Development Program: how can the Contractor, and specifically the TARE agent, contribute to (i) targeting beneficiaries, (ii) increasing community engagement (iii) information-sharing between different stakeholders, and (iv) coordination between government and civil society, and between different government sectors and levels. Considering the institutional architecture of the

Development Program on the one hand, and IRPAA's own methodology on the other, we can identify three key questions requiring answers: (a) how effective are the incentives provided for in the Development Program, and what are the challenges faced by the Contractor to fulfil the contract performance conditions of the Procurement Notice in terms of providing services to BSM clientele; (b) what contribution does the Contractor's own methodological approach make to rural productive inclusion programs and policies, what are the areas of synergy or conflict with the Development Program's institutional framework, and what are the solutions found by the Federal Government in conjunction with the Contractor; and (c) what kind of profile does TARE agent need in order to fulfil his/her required multifunctional role, and what are the government's arrangements for supporting the agent's role?

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6. With the aim of promoting balanced regional planning and development, the State of Bahia was divided into 27 Identity Territories tailored to the specificities of each region. An “Identity Territory” is defined according to its geography, environment, economy, culture, institutions, social groups, etc., to reflect the elements that best characterize its social, territorial and cultural cohesion. (<http://www.seplan.ba.gov.br/modules/conteudo/conteudo.php?conteudo=17>)

2

# BACKGROUND TO THE CASE STUDY

Part of the Brazilian Semi-Arid, the Sertão do São Francisco Identity Territory, consisting of ten municipalities - Juazeiro, Curaçá, Canudos, Sobradinho, Casa Nova, Uauá, Pilão Arcado, Sento Sé, Campo Alegre de Lourdes and Remanso - is undergoing transition from an area previously dominated by large estates (latifúndios) to one typified by medium and small farms. It contains the important irrigated, export-oriented, fruit-growing hub of Petrolina-Juazeiro (SANTOS, da CONCEIÇÃO et al, 2014). In common with the entire semi-arid zone, the territory suffered from prolonged drought in 2012-2015.

A notable feature of this territory is the large size of some of the municipalities. Some communities are located up to 250 km from the central core of the municipality. Many of the most vulnerable families live in these isolated communities, with no access to information or to any kind of benefits from public policies. This population represents a challenge for the IRPAA given that it differs from the traditional IRPAA clientele of families which, despite being poor, are engaged in some way or other with rural workers syndicates or local associations, etc.

3

# THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The BSM Development Program was implemented in two phases, during which 2,500 and 2,800 families were targeted in Phase 1 and Phase 2 respectively in different municipalities of the Sertão do São Francisco Territory. The first phase

commenced in March 2013. This was extended in August 2015 and completed in April 2016. The second phase began in April 2014 and ended also in April 2016. The following table contains the timeline of the two phases in the various municipalities.

**TABLE 1** Timeline of the phases of the BSM/Development Program in the Sertão do São Francisco Territory

Phase	Period	Municipalities targeted	Families benefited
PHASE 1	March 2013 –March 2015;	Juazeiro, Sobradinho, Casa Nova, Curaçá, Uauá, Canudos	2.500
	August 2015 –April 2016 (extended)		
PHASE 2	April 2014 – April 2016	Uauá, Pilão Arcado, Sento Sé, Campo Alegre de Lourdes, Remanso	2.800

At each phase of the BSM Development Program the actions described in the above Process Map (Figure 1) were implemented. These actions are described below in the same sequence as the items in the Map.

## TARE Team Training

Based on their experience with poor communities living in the Semi-Arid, senior IRPAA staff were well aware of the importance of recruiting a team familiar with the challenges of poverty, and who knew the reality of family farming in the Semi-Arid. However, it proved difficult to find professionals with this profile locally, given that the Juazeiro technical teaching institutions are geared more to the agribusiness sector than to family farming. A further point: although the Program guideline specified hiring professionals with a minimum of five years' experience, the IRPAA and the MDA/MDS agreed to prioritize young technical staff who were inexperienced but nevertheless prepared to learn new TARE methods.

The young professionals received a double training, firstly by the MDA, as provided for in the Development Program, and subsequently by the IRPAA. The Institute taught the second training courses in its Training Center near Juazeiro, followed by continuous training sessions every two months throughout the duration of the project. All this was funded from IRPAA own resources, given that any extra funding was not

foreshadowed in the procurement notice. New staff were basically taught how to deal with the practical aspects of family farming-related problems identified by TARE agents, and the solutions found. This expertise was later passed on to the communities in the expectation of awakening beneficiaries' interest. The Institute also invested heavily in the motivational aspects of training, for example by sending the young technical assistance providers to live in the communities, incorporating self-assessments into the continuous training routines, etc.

As a result of the profile of the young professionals and their training focused on practical ways of coping with conditions in the Semi-Arid, the technical skills and motivation of the teams were strengthened, and value was added to team selection modalities and training guidelines contained in the procurement notice.

## Dissemination, mobilization and partnerships

In conformity with the procurement notice guidelines, the IRPAA designed and conducted an effective project dissemination strategy involving the mobilization of partners and potential beneficiaries. Two aspects of the strategy are worth highlighting since they served to enhance the original guidelines.

Firstly, IRPAA's considerable network of contacts in the region, including agencies

within the local, state and federal governments, and with civil society entities such as parish councils, cooperatives, municipal councils, producer associations, community organizations,

the health sector, etc. Secondly, the IRPAA communications strategy, professionally structured and, most importantly, tailored to the characteristics of the target population.

### IRPAA communications

The IRPAA has a highly active and capillary communications structure that has given substantial support to the project. The staff structure consists of four communications specialists focused on four major areas: (i) institutional communications (site, radio programs, newsletter, social networks), (ii) external communications (media, technical and pedagogical material, etc.), (iii) internal communications (e-mails, internal newsletters; and (iv) social mobilization linked to training.

Based on its communications structure, the IRPAA has developed a different type of approach to communicating with small farmers, using specially-adapted material for this target audience (often illiterate) in the form of booklets with large easy-to-read letters, texts with images illustrating real life situations of different groups (children, adults and seniors), books with many pictures, and, due to the lack of electricity in some places, painted fabric banners instead of ordinary slides.

Capillary mobilization and information-sharing among stakeholders created the right conditions for building a relationship of trust with the families, and inspired community members to provide feedback to the IRPAA, such as the whereabouts of as yet undetected potential beneficiaries.

### Focalization, selection and registration of beneficiaries

The main instrument for guiding the targeting and selection of beneficiaries was the aforementioned list generated by the MDS and MDA containing around 4,000 families with an extreme poverty profile enrolled in the *CadÚnico* and DAP. Of these 4,000, the IRPAA selected the 2,500 families considered eligible for benefits under Phase 1. The same procedure was repeated in Phase 2 for a further 2,800 families. According to the procurement notice, the IRPAA was allowed to select initially 80-90% of these families, and to replace between 10 and 20% of them with new families identified by active search. These had to meet the profile of extreme poverty and were referred by the IRPAA for inclusion in *CadÚnico*

and the issuance of DAP by the appropriate agencies (the municipal social assistance agencies, EBDA or the Union of Rural Workers - STR).

During enrollment of the families the agents perceived that around 10% of them were in fact above the *extreme poverty* line or even above the poverty line. It is important to emphasize that this "perception" by the TARE agent called for deeper investigation and validation in the *CadÚnico*. In this respect, despite the tried and tested methodology of *CadÚnico* involving cross-referencing the government's different data systems, certain cases emerged of people (e.g. family members of local counselors or teachers) who by dint of their occupations appeared to have per capita income profiles that were incompatible with inclusion in the Registry. The Program strategy of providing a long preliminary list of potential beneficiaries (4,000 families) was entirely correct since it was easier to eliminate incompatible families and thus substantially reduce the possibility of inclusion errors. However, it was much more difficult to control, in the focalization exercise, the possibility of exclusion errors, given the upper limit of 20% replacement on the list based on the results of active search for families fitting the extreme poverty profile. During the targeting exercise, family interviews and mobilized partners revealed the names of people with a profile of extreme poverty who were not on the MDS/MDA list. Information also emerged of entire remote and isolated communities in a situation of extreme poverty and exclusion from any public policies. Eventually IRPAA succeeded in complying with all

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7. Identification of families that fit the *CadÚnico* profile and the completion of the related enrollment formalities are the responsibility of the municipalities - normally the function of the Municipal Social Assistance Agency or similar. The municipality is also responsible for updating the register on a biannual basis.

8. Two types of error are possible in focalization processes: errors involving inclusion in the target group of individuals who do not fit the desired profile, and errors of exclusion involving people in the target group that do fit this profile.

the procurement notice provisions, and put 498 new families (around 20% of the 2,500) on the beneficiary list. The number of families fitting the extreme poverty profile identified by active search was actually over 20%, but IRRPA possesses no accurate data on this.

Problems caused by the lack of documentation arose during the registration of some of these 498 families, owing to their past exclusion from public policies, and who were registered neither in the *CadÚnico* nor the DAP. Families and the IRPAA experienced problems in getting the documents issued quickly by the responsible authorities (the Municipal Social Assistance Agencies in the case of the *CadÚnico* and STR or EBDA in the case of DAP). Meanwhile, the unhelpfulness of certain public employees, together with staff shortages and a lack of vehicles, gasoline, and even paper, were partly overcome due to the efforts of the IRPAA and its partners with mayors, managers, local councilors and others who provided logistical support for reaching more distant communities. The Contractor did benefit however from a propitious institutional environment generated by the Federal Government with regard to the BSM agenda, including informing and guiding local government and non-government agencies via MDS-launched information campaigns. The IRPAA also made an important contribution by appointing a social worker to its project team to provide information for families. The social worker was especially useful for arranging appointments for families with the social assistance agencies, completing *CadÚnico* registration forms (or clarifying inconsistencies), thoroughly checking data related to individual family farmers for accuracy, and in general facilitating TARE team exposure to the more vulnerable families. Note that the presence of a team member “trained in the social area” was required by the procurement notice, although this did not refer explicitly to “social worker”. As a result of these efforts, most of the families identified as “very poor” in the active search were included as project beneficiaries: a very few families (IRPAA did not know how many) failed to receive benefits on account of not being able to obtain the necessary documentation within the time allowed.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks (attributed to the local governments responsible for maintaining the *CadÚnico*) the initial list of potential beneficiaries supplied by the Ministries was an invaluable reference document for the targeting exercise, and for redirecting IRPAA efforts to groups of extremely poor people and

highly vulnerable families who had not previously been considered priorities. Government ministries also correctly anticipated the need for revising this list and provided mechanisms to do this (i.e. active search and the “substitution” percentages mechanisms), demonstrating that improvements can indeed be made to the data registration processes for which the municipal authorities are responsible, and that pressure to improve depends substantially on the strategy adopted by the executors of the project. What the procurement notice could not anticipate was the number and scope of the logistical and documentation problems that could only be resolved thanks to excellent teamwork, the commitment of the Contractor (which could have ignored, like the municipal authorities, the more isolated communities), and the “innovative” appointment of a social worker to the team. The propitious institutional environment generated by the Federal Government’s prior mobilization actions was also a valuable contribution.

## Diagnosis

The diagnosis of families’ socioeconomic conditions and access by them and their farms to public policies was conducted in accordance with the procurement notice guidelines, through dialogues with all family members and a series of visits to farms, including geo-referenced properties. After systematization by TARE agents, the data were entered in the MDA computerized system. The measures foreshadowed in the procurement notice were correctly complied with and the IRPAA even succeeded in introducing innovations to them.

In line with its participatory and dialogic methodology, the IRPAA argued that the time allocated for individual visits to families (specified in the notice as being of four hours) was not sufficient, especially if the agents were required to simultaneously enter data in the MDA system. To maximize the time for client discussion and diagnosis, the IRPAA relieved the TARE agents of the task of entering data in the MDA system and, as an alternative, hired 10 typists (one for each municipality in the Sertão do São Francisco Territory). Since the procurement notice only stipulated one IT technician to maintain equipment rather than enter data, the costs of the 10 typists were absorbed by the IRPAA.

Another innovation contributed by IRPAA was the decision not to inform families at the outset that the TARE project provided *development*

*grants*, in order to discourage families motivated by monetary gain from participating in the project. In the case of 2% of the families - mainly those living in the most isolated areas, or those lacking information, excluded from associative activities and mistrusting public initiatives (because they had never been approached previously) - information was provided about grants mainly as a way of interesting them in the project and persuading them to participate.

The main innovations introduced by the IRPAA in the procurement notice provisions referring to diagnosis were thus: (i) prioritization of the target population by relieving TARE agents of certain bureaucratic functions; and (ii) participation by families in the project based more on “moral” than “material” incentives (probably reflecting IRPAA’s growing confidence in the motivational effects of the upscaled family dialogues).

### Definition of the Productive Project

In accordance with the requirement to let families decide independently what they wanted to produce (strongly emphasized in the MDA and MDS training sessions and support materials) the *productive project* was to be designed jointly by the TARE agent and the target family aimed at strengthening the family productive unit (i.e. their farm), ensuring food security and finding ways to sell surpluses. The families were also informed, at the conclusion of the diagnosis, of the existence of development grants.

The IRPAA’s approach to designing a family’s productive project introduced new elements into traditional TARE practices by seeking a balance between technical guidance and standardized procedures on the one hand and

a participatory and flexible approach on the other. According to the procurement notice guidelines the productive project should aim to fulfil family’s hopes and expectations but without losing sight of its longer term viability. In this respect, two tools were prepared by the IRPPA to guide the design process: a *Technical and Methodological Guidance Manual* and the *Reports of Productive Activities Appropriate to the Semi-Arid*. The latter describe the step-by-step implementation of a number of different productive activities, including the costs of inputs (budgeted in shops in the region), and the feasibility of and prospects for commercial sales of farm products. Moreover, in accordance with the IRPAA’s classic collectivist outlook, productive project preparation - regardless of its individual character - needed to be considered in terms of the final product being of possible wider use to the region, and even being inserted into supply chains.

There are two main uses of extremely dry areas: (i) livestock rearing, especially sheep and goats, given their easy adaptation to the semi-arid climate, and (ii) extraction of sertão fruits. 46% of the productive projects of the “dryland” area are focused on livestock rearing. In the “irrigated” areas near to the São Francisco River (populated by families with little or no land, seasonal and highly vulnerable laborers in the agro-industrial sector), most projects focus on tomatoes, onions, passion fruit, cassava and vegetables, showing that the families are more familiar with crop-growing than animal husbandry. There are also cases such as the *Cangalha Community* in the interior of Mauá, where, owing to the lack of water and land, the main productive projects focus on handicrafts (straw hats and mats).

### Examples of productive projects adapted to local and family reality

For a Juazeiro family in the “irrigated area” of the Rio São Francisco, with no land, their dream was to have a place to raise chickens, but they did not have enough space to construct a chicken coop. This family lives in an *adobe* house with only one room serving as kitchen, living room and bedroom, and the solution they found was to construct the chicken coop in a small area at the entrance to the house”.

“In the interior of Pilão Arcado the IRPAA agents discovered that the families were good at planting sugarcane and producing *cachaça*, but there was no budget within the project for funding exchange activities to enable families to learn from other experiences of producing the drink. However, the IRPAA remedied this by hiring a minibus to take 15 families on a “learning expedition”, with hotel and food paid for all of them.

As the drought progressed, priority tended to be given to productive projects that depended less on water, e.g. to minimize traditional planting of regional crops such as corn, beans and cassava, and to focus on investing in facilities (fences, animal pens, etc.), or sowing crops more resistant to dry climates such as palm trees. Productive diversification was also encouraged. One example: while fodder production was very limited due to drought, the solution was to avoid buying more animals, thus resulting simply in many more hungry animals. The MDA showed flexibility over these adjustments, agreeing to review the adherence terms of farmers who decided to change their productive projects: in contrast to the PRONAF approach, development grant *flexibility* is a concept at the very core of this Development Program.

What emerges from the diagnosis and productive product development process is the importance of the role played by the TARE agent. In his dialogical approach with families, the IRPAA TARE agent is definitely not trained as a traditional “technicist” advisor who visits communities with a datashow and delivers a technical lecture about family farming subjects that he has previously decided might be important, but without any real understanding of local conditions or the needs and vocations of the families living in the *sertão*. The IRPAA TARE agent is taught to avoid voluntarist pitfalls and the uncritical way in which many advisers accept traditional productive practices to avoid upsetting the supposedly harmonious relationship between man and the field<sup>10</sup>. The key question is how to strike this balance via a learning process where flexibility and standardization alternate, and where practical experimentation feeds the systematization of knowledge, and not *vice versa*.

### Release of development funds

The grants linked to the TARE represented for many families an opportunity to undertake a new life project after they had lost so much in livestock-rearing or crop planting caused by the prolonged drought.

The MDS took the first steps to releasing the development grants between four and five months after approval of the productive project (according to the timeline defined in the Program). During this interval the TARE agents undertook preparatory visits to families to train

family members in the appropriate use of the money.

At the outset, when the families were aware that they would receive cash assistance, the TARE teams had to explain repeatedly that this was not a loan. Previous negative experiences caused a certain amount of distrust on the part of farmers about receiving “free” money. When the first grant installment was released, it was common practice for families to wish to pass the funds to the TARE agent to purchase materials, seeds or matrices. Agents had however been trained not to accept this responsibility - a key aspect of the program’s methodology geared to eliminating the possibility of dependent “clientelist” relations.

There were some cadastral inconsistencies at this stage (e.g. different spellings of a person’s name, homonymous situations, etc.) between MDS entries (*CadÚnico*) and the MDA (SIATER) - which were two different systems with incompatible data. Such problems affected around 100 families, and solutions were found for approximately half of them - leaving only 45 families (less than 1% of the beneficiaries) unable to secure release of the grants. Other problems arising from the grants being inaccessible with the *Bolsa Família* card or the agriculture *Cartão Cidadão* (due to disinformation in the local CAIXA branch), were resolved via IRPAA intervention (in some cases the Institute had to present MDS explanatory documents).

The main difficulty was the piecemeal way in which the grants were released to eligible family farmers. For example, the money was made available at different times to families working in the same community on the same activity. Funds are normally released from the time the Contractor registers the families in the SIATER and submits project implementation reports for approval, but there is no possibility of the MDS or MDA identifying families by community unless the structure of the system or the data inserted by the Contractor allows this. These delays generated misgivings within the communities, when families that had not been interviewed in the initial stages of the project complained of their non-receipt of grants. Although the IRPAA field team was aware that the simultaneous release for the 100 beneficiaries attended by each TARE agent would render individualized monitoring of each productive project implementation unviable, this was however

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10. See the excellent article by Dias (2013) discussing the transformative role of the TARE agent (in this case without explicitly referring to the IRPAA).

possible in communities with 100 beneficiaries or less. The IRPAA team emphasized that releasing the grants would be more efficient if agents were able to do this within the same territory (“territorialization”), thereby reducing journey time. This problem could probably be resolved by entering data indicating the locality or community where the beneficiary families live.

These non-technical issues arising from the release of development funds have implications for the *delivery challenge* of the case study: for example, they highlight the need for improved coordination at the interinstitutional and territorial levels.

### Monitoring of families

The procurement notice envisaged monitoring families via individual and collective activities. The most interesting and innovative aspects of the project concerned collective activities.

These took place every three months. The theme of the first collective activity, “public policies”, was already defined in the notice. As of the second meeting, the subjects could be chosen freely by the communities and TARE agents. These included social and land organization, gender issues, *fundos de pasto* (pasture fund communities)<sup>11</sup>, native fruits, goats and poultry management, processing and marketing, forage conservation, pest control, treatment of plant diseases with natural remedies, etc.

Community attendance at these meetings was substantial, with no fewer than 50 families at any one time - very different from the number forecast in the procurement notice guidelines (a maximum of 24 families). IRPAA’s explicit decision not to exclude families that were non-beneficiaries of the BSM Development Program accorded with the Institute’s principles prioritizing the collective approach.

Tension between the individual and collective approach (the latter arising from the innovative methodology espoused by the IRPAA) was a feature of many project activities: from the fact that some individual families were benefited (although IRPAA always worked with communities holistically) to problems encountered with the above-mentioned “fragmentary” release of development grants and the individual approach to designing productive projects.

IRPAA argued that TARE agents approaching a community with a prepared list of beneficiaries threatened the community’s cohesion and sense of solidarity. On the other hand, this list represents an effective tool for targeting the most vulnerable sectors of the community. The procurement notice gives guidance on how to preserve the homogeneity of a community: “...the Contractor shall identify the families from the list, grouping them into communities or contiguous groups in order to: (a) avoid that in the event of neighboring families fitting the profile of the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan one family is benefited and another not benefited; (b) rationalize the monitoring of families and the delivery of social policies, access to water, marketing methods, etc”. (MDA 2012:17). In relatively heterogeneous communities it was generally accepted that the problem would be difficult to resolve anyway. This situation was mitigated by the IRPAA enhancing holistic community participation in activities (with higher costs for the Institution) aimed at forging a balance in the community between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and between associates and non-associates of local organizations.

Participation by women in communal activities exceeded the 30% foreshadowed in the procurement notice. Meanwhile, recreational activities were encouraged for children aimed at teaching them about the semi-arid region.

Individual family follow-up activities included the provision of technical guidance for productive projects and assistance for families to access markets for their products. The release of grant funds following the “first” installment was conditional on completion of these monitoring activities.

The individual-collective dilemma resulted from a conflict between the focalization and involvement of the community as a whole. This is implicitly acknowledged in the procurement notice, but the notice contains no practical guidance on remedial measures that might be easily applied to heterogeneous communities. In the BSM Development Program the problem was partly resolved by the IRPAA insisting on information-sharing among the stakeholders (all the community members), albeit at a higher cost not covered by the project.

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11. Communities with an average of 30 or 40 families living on individual plots. Larger plots are used for communal crops or raising animals. Communal farming is the way found of coping with life in the Semi-Arid.

## Market access

Increased production generated surpluses and the need to find ways of disposing of them. At this stage, TARE agents began to explore different possibilities for gradually accessing the market, from direct door-to-door sales to selling in street markets organized by communities, and later encouraging BSM Development Program farmers to display their products and animals (goats and sheep) at larger trade fairs in the region.

The question of product qualification was also addressed at this point. Agents recommended adding value to products by improving their appearance, e.g. cleaning eggs, displaying vegetables in an attractive way, packaging *rapadura* (sugarcane juice candy), putting liquids such as oil and *cachaça* in glass bottles (previously sold or kept in tubs or ordinary plastic bottles) and sticking labels on them containing product and community history.

Family farmers had to overcome other barriers to selling their products, such as the need for an official sanitary certificate for animal products (70% of family farming production of the region), or the long distances from the communities to abattoirs which involved high unit costs of transporting small numbers of animals for slaughter. In a bid to solve these issues the IRPAA encouraged family farmers to join cooperative or solidarity marketing networks such as the *Canudos Family Agricultural Cooperative (COOPERCUC)* consisting of a network of satellite units through which small producers can more easily sell their products. Furthermore, in order to promote access to government purchases via the PAA and PNAE schemes (where family farmers also faced barriers linked to product quality, volumes and production regularity) cooperation was sought with COOPERCUC in Uauá and with other associations in Curaçá, Casa Nova and Sento Sé. Despite these efforts, family farmers' access to the institutional purchasing mechanisms is still fairly limited.

Gradual market insertion reflects an approach to productive inclusion as an inherent component of a community's sociocultural structure. This approach involves a gradual transition from informal to more formal marketing channels, and from simple marketing routines to more complex sales practices. In the case of family farmers in the *sertão* of Bahia, support for marketing via cooperatives and networks was needed principally to remedy municipal authorities' shortcomings, e.g. failure to provide municipal sanitary inspection certifications and conform to

the national regulation governing the minimum percentages of products supposedly to be purchased directly from family farmers.

## Sustainability and Interinstitutional Coordination

According to the "roadmap" concept of the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan, the Plan's vulnerable target population must be included in other policies and programs to ensure the sustainability of the BSM Development Program's achievements.

The IRPAA considers that strengthening the social organization of family farmers is a core requirement for ensuring their access to public policies and thus to boost the growth cycle of family farming. Largely thanks to the BSM Development Program, family farmers' improved their knowledge of public policies and with greater awareness of their rights they were better equipped to explore opportunities for inclusion in municipal, state and federal public policies.

By strengthening associativism and awareness among family farmers, the IRPAA's role as a coordinator with the public policy agents made it possible to include the beneficiaries of the *Sertão do São Francisco Territory* in programs such as the MDA's *TARE Agroecologia* and the MDS' *Fomento Semiárido* and other federal government programs; and in the State-run programs BAHATER, IFAD-CAR *Pró-Semiárido*, *Bahia Produtivo Banco Mundial-CAR*, *Sustentabilidade TARE* and the *Fundo de Pasto* project, among others.

In addition to strengthening local social capital and IRPAA intermediation, a third important element for ensuring sustainability is the institutional environment. In this regard, structural improvements are required to ensure a more effective interface between policies and programs.

The Federal Government made an important contribution to the Program by facilitating coordination with federal institutions such as CODEVASF and EMBRAPA.

As for State programs, the Government of Bahia has recently launched two important initiatives in a bid to boost interinstitutional and programmatic coordination. The first was the incorporation in contracts of a substantial bonus to compensate TARE agents for liaising with government programs such as PRONAF, PAA, PNAE, *Garantia Safra*, *Bahia Produtiva* and the National Program for Production and Use of Biodiesel. The second was Bahia's creation of the scheme *Territorial Services to Support Family Farming (SETAF)*, aimed at merging into a single structure in each Identity Territory the different family farmer services and policies that

previously had been dispersed in the local offices of CAR, EBDA, etc. In the case of the Sertão do São Francisco Territory, the SETAF office - located in Juazeiro - serves as the central point for dispatching technical staff to other municipalities in the territory, subject to demand. Although the SETAFs are still not fully operational, IRPAA staff acknowledges that intersectoral coordination has improved considerably owing to the decentralization of SETAF services, which *inter alia* avoids the need for people to travel to the State capital to resolve land tenure and other issues. Furthermore, SETAF is providing support at local level to negotiations on partnership agreements (on targets and actions) between BAHITARE, local prefectures and Municipal Councils, with the obligatory participation of TARE agents. It is widely acknowledged that interinstitutional coordination will improve even further when the *Municipal Services to Support Family Agriculture (SEMAF)* are operational.

Coordination with local governments (prefectures) generally proved to be very important, both during implementation of the BSM Development Program and in terms of sustainability. Unfortunately, genuine coordination was not always readily forthcoming: the IRPAA claims for example that only four prefectures collaborated effectively with the Program. One of the rare cases of successful collaboration was with the Canudos Municipal Prefecture, where the Agriculture Secretariat provided strong support to the Development Program (mobilization of families, referral to agencies for DAP issuance, support for markets, credit schemes and *Garantia Safra*, provision of materials for building cisterns, etc.). Meanwhile, the Canudo Environment Secretariat assisted with issues related to *Fundos de Pasto*, land

tenure, *caatinga* conservation and environmental registration, while the Social Development and Fight against Poverty Secretariat did the same for *CadÚnico* active search, promoting the *Social Tariff for Energy*, helping with access to *Prestação Continuada* and providing a range of communal services.

It is clear that there is a vital need for coordinated action between the different levels of government, civil society entities and local social capital to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the social and productive inclusion of BSM Development Program beneficiaries.

## Results

The IRPAA possesses no quantitative data on the results of the BSM Development Program for beneficiary families. Despite the fact that the diagnostic data provided a baseline and follow-up data, the MDA system is still limited in terms of its capacity to assemble, consult and analyze these data, at least at the local level. The Federal Government has made various efforts to systematize and monitor the results of the Development Program, using field travel reports by the technical teams, articles and other consultancy products, as well as the MDS Special Internal Control Advisory (AECI) undertaking a thorough inspection which also produced reports on the Program's results. It would appear that the IRPAA did not access this material.

Consolidated data are prepared ad hoc and sporadically, as can be seen in the table below listing the types of productive projects funded by the development grants mechanism (note the prevalence of animal husbandry appropriate to the Semi-Arid):

**TABLE 2 - Types of productive projects funded by the Development Program.**

Productive projects	%
Goat-breeding	46%
Aviculture	29%
Sorghum and forage	11%
Sheep-raising	7%
Agricultural crops	4%
Vegetables	2%
Pig-farming	1%
Handicrafts	0.8%
Processing of cassava by-products	0.4%

Source: Belém et al., 2015.

The following summaries of field interviews with beneficiary families conducted for the case study aim to illustrate qualitative outcomes of the Program.

### Dona Luisa, José Luiz and son Daniel (Canudos)

This family owns an 8 hectare property acquired 25 years ago where they grow palm and raise goats. They learned of the BSM Development Program at a meeting called at the local school by the Residents Association (most people living in the community are associates). Dona Luiza and family are beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* and the *Social Tariff for Energy* programs, and were benefited in the past by the EBDA TARE program, the CAR/FIDA *Gente de Valor* program, PRONAF and the *Crédito Amigo* scheme. The family supplement their income doing small jobs in a mechanical repair shop on the site. They used the development grant to build a new pen to protect their goats from sun and rain. The pen was designed by themselves, unlike their previous pen which was totally unprotected from the weather and made it difficult to raise their 20 goats. They now have 50 goats and they learned to use the forage supplied by a neighbor and to make natural de-worming medicine for the goats. They tried to plant a vegetable garden, but owing to the lack of a cistern of their own they were unable to continue watering their plants by hand with water drawn from a community well. With a larger number of goats the family began to consume milk and meat on a regular basis. They also sell goats to a neighbor who buys animals from community residents for sale in local markets. This family estimates that during the project's three years duration their income improved, together with their self-confidence: "...our income is better, and we have more plans for the future". Future plans include improving the quality of their goats to sell them "on the hoof", obtaining water from the community well for planting capim grass and more palms, and reactivating their vegetable plot.

### Dona Paixão, husband and two daughters (Canudos)

This family of four possesses a 3.5 hectare property where they have lived for the past 20 years. They produce beans and corn but this is suffering from the lack of rainwater. They also have 12 *leucena* trees, palm and *capim* grass irrigated with water discarded from the community well that they desalinate and re-use on their property. They also grow vegetables, fruit and medicinal plants. Prior to the project, they raised five goats, a pair of sheep and two pigs. They receive the *Bolsa Família* and rural retirement benefits, supplementing their income with odd jobs. They received nothing from the *Garantia Safra* in 2015. They have never had access to credit. They learned of the project through a meeting convened by the Community Association. They already possessed their DAP and NIS. With the development grant they were able to construct two pens for their goats, separating the kid goats in different pens to prevent them from damage. They also invested in planting different species (palm, *capim* grass, vegetables, and a variety of medicinal plants and fruits, such as pomegranates, pineapples, coconut, banana, papaya, passion fruit, sugar cane, and cotton). They also invested in their animals by acquiring three more goats. Through the TARE they learned to use forage and make natural de-worming medicine for goats. The family's diet improved with the consumption of goat's milk and beans, corn, vegetables and fruits from their own plot. They have not yet slaughtered any of the goats or been able to sell any of their products. They consider that their lives have "improved a lot... we managed to plant palm, *capim* grass and raise our animals". Future plans include increasing the herd and extending the goat pen. The family also intends to contact the local association to obtain permission to use the forage area for storing animal feed.

### Dona Maria Helena, husband and son (Uauá)

Dona Maria Helena does not know the size of the family property, where they grow beans, corn and palm and raise goats (12 before the project). The family receives the *Bolsa Família* and has access to the *Garantia Safra*. They have never accessed credit, and their income is supplemented with odd jobs. They learnt of the project through the IRPAA agent who also advised them to obtain their DAP (the agent made arrangements with the EBDA). The family used the development grant to buy 15 goats, 800 palm plants and constructed a goat pen. They lost their palm plantation in the drought. They have piped water, but because they do not belong to the *Primeira Agua* scheme (drinking water) they are not eligible to access the *Segunda Agua* (cisterns for agricultural production). They pay for drinking water but not for irrigation water in view of the cost. Irrigation depends entirely on rainfall, including for the kitchen garden where the family grow tomatoes and coriander (also part of the TARE as indicated in the procurement notice). The family's diet improved thanks to being able to consume goat's milk, and eat beans and corn from the plot belonging to their in-laws in the same community. They have not yet slaughtered any animals for sale. Future plans are to increase their goat herd. The BSM Development Program was important for re-establishing their productive activities: "...we improved a lot; before Michelle's arrival (the IRPAA TARE agent) we were producing nothing".

### Contributions to public policies

During the implementation of the BSM Development Program the IRPAA met the requirements of the procurement notice and also proposed several innovations to the institutional structure of the Program. Some of these innovations are being used in other Federal and State programs, thus contributing to improving public policies related to rural social and productive inclusion, specifically: (i) in the TARE projects run by the Government of Bahia the participatory methodology is considered to have been highly positive; (ii) the duration of TARE contracts was extended from two to three years, and the percentage

of recipients eligible for inclusion via active search was increased from 20% to 30%; (iii) in the new TARE projects of the Government of Bahia, the number of families attended by each agent was reduced from 100 to 80 with a view to improving focus on clients; (iv) in the new BAHITARE technical assistance and rural extension project, communities with similar characteristics in each district will be clustered in an effort to optimize the territorialization of TARE services; and (v) the BAHITARE made individual agent visits more flexible by introducing an attendance sheet stipulating 12 obligatory TARE hours (to be organized at the agent's discretion).



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# LESSONS FROM THE CASE STUDY

In the BSM Development Program the IRPAA added value to the incentives structure outlined in the procurement notice by increasing project effectiveness in terms of staff training, dissemination, family mobilization and monitoring, focalization, diagnosis, preparation of productive projects, and market access. Overall, the IRPAA demonstrated that it is possible to go much further in the Development Program.

IRPAA added continuous, contextualized and practical training to the introductory team training provided by the MDA. The Institute also introduced the requirement for TARE agents to spend some time living in the communities. In the same vein, added value was introduced to the mobilization and dissemination mechanisms (described in the procurement notice) through the network of partnerships and IRPAA's own communication strategy, which included working with different media and producing easy-to-understand information. This made it easier to work with communities and improve the focalization mechanisms outlined in the procurement notice, and to identify and reach out to remote and isolated pockets of extreme poverty that had hitherto been excluded from public policies. The IRPAA methodology provided a basis for establishing a deep and candid dialogue with family farmers at the diagnosis and productive project preparation stages. Value was also added to the provisions of the procurement notice by increasing the time dedicated to this dialogue with families, focusing exclusively on clients, and transferring secondary tasks such as data entry to subordinate technical staff. Traditional technician and excessively voluntarist TARE practices were replaced with a learning approach based on experimentation and practical techniques.

A key contribution to the technical and methodological repertoire of the BSM

Development Program was the collective approach at the core of IRPAA's methodology. While the procurement notice outlined a well-structured sequence of individual and collective monitoring activities to support the implementation of the farmers' productive projects, the IRPAA revised the format of communal activities, extending participation and information-sharing to non-beneficiary families. In this way it indirectly contributed to mitigate an inherent mismatch in the design of the Development Program between focalization, grant allocations and monitoring - all of which need to be individualized - and the threat to the internal solidarity and social cohesion of communities. A further innovation was gradual market insertion for family farming products - one of the outcomes of the improved dialogue with the community and of the efforts to find appropriate solutions tailored to communities' special sociocultural characteristics.

Other lessons learned from the experience of the BSM Development Program were the result of challenges generated by circumstantial obstacles. This was the case, for example, of IRPAA solutions to non-technical problems relating to logistical aspects, documentation, blocked release of development grants and institutional purchases. Many obstacles, caused by ineffectual municipal governments or inconsistencies in interinstitutional coordination, were remedied by Contractor interventions that possibly exceeded the scope of contractual responsibilities.

Some of the following innovations introduced by the IRPAA in the Program helped to advance public policies: the revised duration of TARE contracts, the new percentage agreed for the lists of active search beneficiaries, the reduction of the number of families per agent, the administrative clustering of communities, and the introduction of attendance sheets for controlling time spent on home visits by TARE agents.

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