

**Partnership, empowerment and local development**  
**Parceria, empoderamento e desenvolvimento local**  
**Partenariat, autonomisation et développement local**  
*Asociación, empoderamiento y desarrollo local*

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**Abstract:** This paper tries to understand how partnership between local organisations (associations, cooperatives, worker's unions and others) and Government affects local development. It explores to what extent partnership is an effective strategy for local development in areas of historical conflict between local Government and the local organisations that defend the interests of family-based, small-scale rural producers. Particularly, this paper concentrates on debate of partnership as a mechanism of power sharing and empowerment of the people that historically have been excluded from the development process. Empirically, the paper is based on data collected in the *municípios* of Ourém and Igarapé-Miri, Northeast of Para State, Amazonia, Brazil.

**Key-words:** Partnership. Empowerment. Local Development.

**Resumo:** Este artigo busca entender como a parceria entre as organizações locais (associações, cooperativas, sindicatos dos trabalhadores e outros) e o governo contribui para o desenvolvimento local. O artigo explora em que medida a parceria é uma estratégia efetiva para o desenvolvimento local em áreas historicamente marcadas por conflito entre os governos municipais e as organizações locais que defendem os interesses dos pequenos produtores rurais de base familiar. Particularmente, o artigo se concentra na discussão sobre a parceria como um mecanismo de divisão de poder e empoderamento das pessoas que historicamente têm sido excluídas do processo de desenvolvimento local. Os dados empíricos do artigo foram coletados nos municípios de Ourém e Igarapé-Miri, Nordeste do Pará, Amazônia, Brasil.

**Palavras-chave :** Parceria. Empoderamento. Desenvolvimento Local.

**Résumé:** Cet article cherche à comprendre comment le partenariat entre les organisations locales (associations, coopératives, syndicats de travailleurs) et le gouvernement affecte le développement local. Il explore dans quelle mesure le partenariat est une stratégie efficace pour le développement local dans les zones de conflit historique entre le gouvernement local et les organisations locales qui défendent les intérêts des petits producteurs ruraux familiales. En particulier, le présent document se concentre sur le débat de partenariat comme un mécanisme de partage du pouvoir et de l'autonomisation de la population qui, historiquement, ont été exclus du processus de développement. Empiriquement, le document est basé sur les données recueillies dans les *municípios* de Ourém et Igarapé-Miri, dans la région nord-est de l'état du Pará, dans l'Amazonie, au Brésil.

**Mots-clés:** Partenariat. Autonomisation. Développement Local.

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata de entender cómo la asociación entre las organizaciones locales (asociaciones, cooperativas, sindicatos de trabajadores y otros) y el gobierno contribuye al desarrollo local. El artículo examina la medida en que la asociación es una estrategia eficaz para el desarrollo local en zonas históricamente marcadas por el conflicto entre los gobiernos municipales y organizaciones locales que defienden los intereses de los pequeños productores rurales de base familiar. En particular, el artículo se centra en el debate sobre la asociación como un mecanismo de división de poderes y la autonomía de las personas que históricamente han sido excluidas del proceso de desarrollo local. Las informaciones empíricas de este artículo fueron reunidas en los municipios de Ourém y Igarapé-Miri, al noreste de Pará, Amazonía, Brasil.

**Palabras clave :** Asociación. Empoderamiento. Desarrollo Local.

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## Introduction

This paper attempts to understand how partnership between local organisations (LO) (associations, cooperatives, worker's unions and others) and Government affects local development. Particularly, it explores to what extent partnership is an effective strategy for local development in areas of historical conflict between local Government and the local organisations that defend the interests of family-based, small-scale rural producers. The paper attempts to further understanding of the relationships that have emerged between local Government agencies (LGA) and local organisations (LO)<sup>1</sup> in the implementation of rural development programmes at municipal level in Brazil. Empirically, it spotlights on the north-east of Pará State in the Brazilian Amazonia region. It focuses specifically on the *municípios* of Igarapé-Miri and Ourém.

In Brazil, LGA and LO have been investing in local development since the 1988 Constitution. The constitution created the mechanisms for planning and the decentralisation of resources that gave *municípios*<sup>2</sup> a certain kind of autonomy. Before this, local development planning was developed by central Government and both LGA and LO worked separately with limited communication or consultation. The historical lack of cooperation between these two main institutions may have led to further mistrust and misunderstandings, therefore impairing local development actions even more.

To promote favourable conditions for planning, resource decentralisation and social accountability, new forms of organisation involving social participation were introduced as part of the political space. In the rural and local context, the most important of these organisations was the *Conselho de Desenvolvimento Rural - CDR* (Rural Development Committee).

The CDR is where LGA and LO build relationships to define the direction for rural development at municipal level. The CDR is responsible for development and management of the *Programa de Desenvolvimento Rural - PDR* (Rural Development Programme). In Brazil they are new and innovative mechanisms that offer a great

deal of possibility for strengthening citizen participation as right in the governance process.

There is a belief that LO participation in local planning and implementation leads to a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness of investment and helps to promote greater democracy in the rural sector (FLORISBELO and GUIJT, 2004, p. 202). LO participation in local planning and implementation has been translated into political discourse as 'partnership' between state and civil society. Although partnership is assumed to lead to efficiency and effectiveness (*ibid*) and citizen participation in the governance process, there has been some difficulty in ensuring that it is happening in practice.

There are various critical issues for partnership practice in Brazilian rural areas. Among others, land property conflicts, established practices of top-down planning and political competitiveness based on *clientelismo*<sup>3</sup> are the most relevant. Additional issues should also be considered in rural areas with a predominance of family-based, small-scale producers. Historical dependence on Government, lack of power and credit, and market constraints are some examples from the Brazilian Amazonia.

Taking the broad spectrum that involves the debate on partnership and the many issues that partnership entails in Brazilian Amazonia, this paper will concentrate particularly on an only issue. This is partnership as a mechanism of power sharing. So far, the literature on partnership has not adequately answered how partnership has promoted equilibrium of the interests and priorities of the local Government agencies and local organisations. The literature has also come over of how partnership has reflected participation and empowerment of the people that historically have been excluded from the development process. In doing so, this paper will specifically focuses on partnership and conflicts of power.

This paper is organised into six sections including this initial one. The following section deals with definitions of partnership. It examines the concept of partnership

within the context of literature from social capital, local/rural development and partnership theories. The third section deals with the debate about the influence of the structure of power on partnership. The fourth section draws the context of the partnership for local/rural development in Brazil, Brazilian Amazonia, Pará state and *municípios* of Igarapé-Miri and Ourém. The fifth deals with the empirical evidences about the influence of the structure of power on partnership process for local development. The last section stresses the paper's main conclusion about partnership and empowerment for local development.

### The Meanings and Structures of Partnership

Over time, the term partnership has obtained a diversity of meanings which McQuaid (2000, p. 10) suggests range along an infinite spectrum. Partnership contains the sense of cooperation, mutual trust and synergy between individuals and organisations to achieve a common objective. On this basis, partnership is concerned with the relationships between two or more stakeholders that join different resources to pursue a joint approach to achieve common aims (McQUAID, 2000; LEWIS, 2000; PENROSE, 2000).

At one end of the spectrum, partnership is a form of organisation in which the compliance of the partners enrolled depends on the existence of trust (BRETT, 1993; POSTMA, 1994; FOWLER, 1997; HARRISS, 2000; DOLNY, 2000) and self-organisation (HARRISS, 2000, p. 231). In this context, partnership motives are not shaped by ideas of material gain or coercion of the enrolled partners, but by a sense of common purpose supported by trust between its actors. Partnerships based on trust evoke the notion of partnership as a prolonged process and as the result of a long-term relationship between the actors (LEWIS, 1998).

Harriss (2000, p. 236) suggests that this type of partnership is an 'ideal type of cooperation' and Fowler (1997; 1998) views it as 'authentic partnership'. Partnerships based on trust are understood to be a result

of the networking skills and motivation of actors (FOWLER, 1997; HARRISS, 2000). Such partnerships are characterised by a focus on its actors, their independence and enthusiasm in sharing values and visions to achieve a common objective. Partnership based on trust is associated with the idea of stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, voluntarily sharing values and goals in embedded relations (OSTROM, 1997). In this spectrum, the intention of the partners depends on commitment rather than on external factors, since partnership only can exist if there is what Thompson (2005, p. 31) considers as basic trust between partners.

Although partnership based on trust possibly represents an 'authentic type' of cooperation as pointed out by Fowler (1997; 1998), and is "understood as mutually enabling, interdependent interaction with shared intentions" (FOWLER, 1997, p. 107), many partnerships are very different from this primary concept of trust. As Tendler (1997) and Evans (1997) demonstrate, cooperation, levels of trust and self-organisation are influenced by the incentives and opportunities created by the prevailing institutional frameworks.

Additionally, any partnership relationship is involved in inevitable risk and uncertainty (THOMPSON, 2005, p. 29). Trust is hard to be produced and maintained (BOVAIRD and LOEFTLER, 2005, p. 153) in any society because of constant societal mutation. In societies where distrust is prevalent, the production and maintenance of trust is harder (MORAN, 2005, p. 242).

At the other end of the spectrum, partnership is most commonly found in formal and political institutions (DFID, 2006; TENDLER, 1997; EVANS, 1997). Partnership is centred on institutional frameworks and governments (TENDLER, 1997; EVANS, 1997; DFID, 2006). This perspective emphasises partnership as shaped by the rules, regulations and governmental actions where it emerges (*ibid.*). From this perspective, the nature of regulatory frameworks, of incentives and sanctions of supportive institutions promoting and valuing innovation influence the level and type of cooperation which prevails. Partnerships centred on institutions are

related to the notion of complementarity (LAN, 1997; EVANS, 1997) between organisations under the guidance of a formal structure of authority. Actors' complementarity, which is specially built in a formal and political environment, focuses on 'problem solving', to present a solution of a particular societal problem such as water supplies (FERREIRA, 2003) or irrigation (LEWIS, 1998, 2000). Evidence of 'successful' problem solving (LEWIS, 1998, 2000; FERREIRA, 2003) induces the idea that partnerships can be built up in a short time.

However, as argued by Giddens (1991, p. 92), relationships depend on the mutual commitment of the partners involved, who remain in the relationship only for as long as they choose to. The intentions of the partners depend on commitment rather than on external anchors and partnership can only exist if there is mutual trust between partners (GIDDENS, 1991; THOMPSON, 2005). It implies that trust is one coping mechanism by which actors can respond to risk and uncertainty in communities. This is especially prevalent at a time when a new climate of risk increases public sensitivity to the levels of risk which they may face.

A common feature of all partnerships is that they represent a relationship that involves power sharing (HODGETT and JOHNSON, 2001, p. 324). However, addressing unequal power relations between partners is still a great challenge to the discourse and practice of partnership in general (JOHNSON and WILSON, 2006) and particularly for partnerships based on formal and political institutions. In any relationship (even relationships based on trust) partners always have differences that reflect at least on their assumptions, perspectives, expectations or agendas (JOHNSON and WILSON, 2006, p. 71). Also, partnership actors bring their own specific sets of power positions, roles and responsibilities as determined by values, skills and organisational resources into the network arena (LOVAN, 2004: 3). A sceptical view of the power relations debate is that mutual partnerships are not possible because of the existence of permanent power inequality between partners (AHMAD, 2006).

In any case, partnerships are relationships of self-interest between those

who see an advantage in them (McQUAID, 2000, p. 15). Partnerships have been built even when the partners do not share the same values, goals and ways of working together. As argued by Johnson and Wilson (2006, p. 71) difference is a driver for mutuality inside partnership arenas. This point to the idea that partnership stands on mutuality (GIDDENS, 1991; PENROSE, 2000) and is not based solely on sharing. Additionally, partnership is also based on difference, which is an opposite point of view stating that mutuality in partnership is not possible because of inequality, especially unequal power relations (LISTER, 2000; AHMAD, 2006). New mechanisms of trust need to be created, mainly where there is a range of organisations and development agencies that bring their own specific set of power positions to partnership relations.

### Partnership and Empowerment

Although difficult to define precisely because of its complexity, the interpretation of empowerment deals with issues of power imbalances in social systems (CHAMBERS, 1983; FRIEDMANN, 1992; WORLD BANK, 2004). Similarly, access to resources, control of elements and processes of production, and rights to dispose of products are experiences in wider and systematic social relations. How people stand in relation to each other in these system has been described as power (CHAMBERS, 1983, 1997, 2005; NELSON and WRIGHT, 1995).

An argument made for building partnership is that partnership is a new attempt to diminish power imbalances in the social system (FOWLER, 1997; WORLD BANK, 2004). Partnership is understood as a mechanism that promotes the empowerment of the powerless, since it enables the powerless to contribute their information, knowledge and skills to the elaboration and implementation of programmes, projects or actions that affect them (FARRINGTON and BEBBINGTON, 1993; WORLD BANK, 2004). However, the models of empowerment currently used to analyse different aspects of power express different perspectives of where power stands and how it works (FRIEDMANN, 1992; CLARK, 1991).

On the one hand, power is the capacity of individuals to make choices and to transform those choices into development outcomes (CHAMBERS, 1983, 1997; 2005; WORLD BANK, 2004). Empowerment, in this sense, is the process of increasing this capacity through people learning and 'capacity building' (LISTER, 2000) to allow people to have freedom of choice and action (SEN, 1999; WORLD BANK, 2004). Power is understood as 'power to', it is enhanced through gaining new skills by active practice or by gaining access to externally generated scientific information relevant to people's objectives (FARRINGTON and BEBBINGTON, 1993). However, empowerment based on 'power to' offers an understanding that power is only a personal attribute (NELSON and WRIGHT, 2001) unconnected to political space. Concentrated on projects, 'power to' offers an understanding that social change can be accomplished from an 'evolutionary' (TEMBO, 2003, p. 25) process of people learning to become aware of power dynamics.

On the other hand, power is the capacity of individuals or groups to access and control the process by which decisions, particularly those that affect their own lives, are made (FRIEDMANN, 1992). Empowerment, from this perspective, is made from powerless people's access to political space (FRIEDMANN, 1992; CLARK, 1991). Powerless people assume an active part in reconstructing the public domain, helping to create a political space suitable for working out the policies that will sustain a development that involves them. Empowerment in this view focuses on social changes by structural transformation (TEMBO, 2003, p. 26, 30), meaning that rules and resources have to be achieved in order to change priorities and the powerless individuals' interests are pursued (GIDDENS, 1990). 'Power to' is seen in terms of people's ability to challenge and change 'power over' relationships and, hence, give the powerless the chance to pursue their interests in long-term access to resources and decision making (MAYOUX, 2001). In this case, the framework of capacity building becomes the way of enhancing not just learning but the agency located in an asymmetric power relationship.

The expansion of 'power to' to the point where people gain 'power over' is also described as a second stage of empowerment (NELSON and WRIGHT, 1995).

However, with regard to the emphasis on the provision of opportunities for excluded people to get access to, and control over the resources of development, empirical evidence has shown that the 'transformatory approach' to people's participation in public development programmes has not promoted social transformations in favour of marginalised people (COOKE and KOTHARI, 2001; BOWYER, 2003). On the contrary, it has reinforced the domain of ideas and ideologies of powerful people (HILDYARD *et al.*, 2001), imposed external control on powerless people (HAILEY, 2001; KOHL, 2003), and it has given opportunity for co-optation (FRANCIS, 2001) and perpetuation of certain sets of power imbalances (TAYLOR, 2001). The 'transformatory approach' has been created through technical and convenient impulses that use participation and partnership as legitimating mechanisms to give greater moral principles to some community development projects (CLEAVER, 2001; WORLD BANK, 2004) and governmental programmes (TENDLER, 1997).

Proposals that promote partnership between local people and Government for people's contribution to development programmes with their resources, skills and knowledge do not mean that governments work more suitably, or that the partnership leads to the empowerment of the community (HILDYARD *et al.*, 2001; BOWYER, 2003). Nevertheless, the ideas that are linked to the Government role in both collaboration with, and opposition to, policy development are an aspect that will inevitably affect people's empowerment (ESCOBAR, 1999).

Although partnership enables people's participation in Government programmes that may be used as a basis for people to empower themselves, the effect that unbalancing the sharing of power has upon the capacity of people to obtain or utilize, local political spaces is generally left unacknowledged (SEN, 1999; CORNWALL, 2001; CLEAVER, 2001). The use of partnership to achieve political space to

influence social transformation based on political empowerment of the poor (FRIEDMANN, 1992), has been recast as an essential element of neo-liberal programme development (WORLD BANK, 2004). The latter defines empowerment as giving moral authority to use local people's labour, knowledge and skills in the implementation of policy, particularly in the rural field as stated by Farrington and Bebbington (1993). Partnership is dominated by cost-efficiency and effective mechanisms to achieve project objectives (LEWIS, 2000; CLEAVER, 2001) and what empowering results might be created from such a view are not clear (CLEAVER, 2001).

Increasing concern in social exclusion has extended the understanding of partnership beyond the implementation of particular projects to comprise much wider issues connected with the relationship between Government and civil society (EDWARDS and SEN, 2002). Such an extension in the use of the participation approach means that it is no longer simply concerned with single issues. Instead, partnership has been linked with accountability, transparency and good governance (TENDLER, 1997; WORLD BANK, 2004). This means that partnership has been brought into direct contact with equitable treatment and empowerment. This new form of interaction between Government and civil society means that innovative entry points have been launched for direct public involvement in the process of Government (TENDLER, 1997). Therefore, the debate about the direct involvement of ordinary people in the political structure has changed from 'scaling up', 'institutionalisation of participation' (CLEAVER, 2001) and participatory techniques that can influence the policy process (WORLD BANK, 2004) to a better understanding of the complex nature of the interaction between individuals and the social structure (TEMBO, 2003)

Questions on how partnership has been used as a channel for building good governance and public accountability in the development and implementation of policy have arisen and have drawn attention to issues about equity and legitimacy. For instance, critical analyses on matters of

representation and beneficiaries have grown, such as who represents civil society and who is likely to benefit from the partnership (CORNWALL, 2001). The process of broad-based popular involvement in political structures for good governance, transparency and public accountability improve the effective targeting of resources and Government awareness of local needs (WORLD BANK, 2004). However, this does not mean that this involvement consequentially brings improvement to the most vulnerable communities (BOWYER, 2003).

As an aim, partnership improves the chances of direct democratic involvement in governance and public transparency and makes the relationship between local people and local governance more direct (FLORISBELO and GUIJT, 2004; WORLD BANK, 2004; CORNWALL and GAVENTA, 2006). However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that partnership addresses a shift of political power (CLEAVER, 2001; CORNWALL, 2004). Particularly, there is a lack of evidence that partnership is able to work as a policy for other local development strategies that bring together different groups to conciliate their diverse interests (CLEAVER, 2001; CORNWALL, 2004) within the process of local development. These are two important points that this paper will address.

### **The Context of the Partnership for Local/rural Development**

The mechanisms created by 1988 Brazilian constitution for resources decentralisation caused new institutional arrangements for local planning in the Brazilian Amazonia region. The implementation of the *Fundo Constitucional de financiamento do Norte - FNO* (Constitutional Fund for Financing the Northern Region), a new financing method for economic development of the region, is one of the most influential mechanisms to impact on Brazilian Amazonia.

The FNO is a public policy instrument that aims to stimulate production activities in the region. In terms of rural production, the FNO is the public political instrument that gives financial support for extractive,

agricultural and agro-industrial projects at municipal level. Under the FNO, there is a special fund for family-based, small-scale producers called Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar - PRONAF (National Support Programme for Family-based Agriculture).

Since its implementation, the FNO has influenced the formation of LGA and LO positions. Firstly, in order to have access to FNO credit all *municípios* have to create a rural development committee and develop formal planning. Secondly, the rural development committee has to involve representation from civil society. Thirdly, partnership has to be used as a way to execute and supervise planning and to achieve efficient and effective results.

The challenges to municipal governments have been the new mechanisms to carry out rural development programmes involving planning, control and the execution of many issues in the rural sector that had not been dealt with before. From 1964 until 1986<sup>4</sup>, the *municípios* were simply the executors of regional and federal planning that were developed under centralized principles and different approaches to rural development.

A weighty challenge to municipal Government in local planning and execution is the formation of a rural development committee with the representation of both public and private agents. This means the implementation of projects involving civil society participation and supervision. Civil society participation in the process of local planning and execution in the Amazonia has been sought after by the rural social movements for a long time. The rural social movements for democratization and agrarian reform from the 1960s and throughout the dictatorship period have always stated their wishes for more rural, civil society engagement in public policies for rural areas. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the state and civil society found themselves on opposite sides and dialogue was always difficult. Political and ideological positions always were put as priority despite certain levels of relationship between state and civil society to carry out an agreed rural development programme<sup>5</sup>.

Rural social movements at municipal level, mainly from the 1980s, symbolize one of the strongest civil society demonstrations against federal Government under the process of rural planning and execution in the Amazonian rural area. Rural Workers' Unions (STRs), producers associations and grassroots organisations, all supported by national and international intermediaries<sup>6</sup>, and other non-governmental organisations, have played important roles in the process of rural development.

Local organisations in rural areas have a long history in Brazil. Rural Workers' Unions were created in rural areas by federal Government as a mechanism to support its policies for health and pensions. However, since the 1990s, this has all changed. The relationship between local organisations and national and international donors and also in some cases the establishment of non-governmental organisations in rural areas has given local organisations the impetus to carry out new activities. Amongst others, they are involved in the planning and implementation of community projects to combat poverty, for socio-economic improvement and the management of natural resources. Many community projects have been implemented and several of them have shown positive results.

Despite the results achieved, the community projects have been strongly criticised for lacking local-state relationships and by their limited and localised effects on the *município* as a whole. The recognition of the limitations of the community projects encouraged the extension of planning and brought back the need of linkages with the state in its diverse levels in order to achieve local development.

On the other hand, the state also recognised the importance of local organisations for progress in rural development. The new Government introduced rules for securing access to credit and the state encouraged local organisations to participate in rural planning. The rural social movements, the community projects and their results were important tasks for the incorporation of local organisations in this process.

From the scenario detailed above, the new relationship between state and local

organisations was inevitable. There is an agreed recognition that to carry out any local development planning that benefits the *município* as whole, the participation of both local state and local organisations is fundamental (BASA, 2002).

According to Tura, (2000b, p. 273-279), historically, the relationship between local state and local organisations in Brazilian Amazonia has been understood to have evolved in two different periods. Firstly, from the creation of the local organisations in 1950s to the end of the federal military Government regime (1985), the work of these organisations was linked to state structures and their main objectives were to support governmental policies on retirement and health. The local organisations registered and controlled the rural workers' activities so as to inform the federal Government on the number of workers involved in the rural areas and also on the length of their working life. They also offered health care with medical and dentist assistance paid with federal resources as a way to supply rural demand (*ibid*). The links with local state were strong since they were created and supported by local authorities that saw local organisations as political instruments to control power. The political inexperience of these organisations and their leaders did not give anyone the ability to develop relative autonomy for themselves. Local authorities and local structures that included elements of *coronelismo*<sup>7</sup> made local organisations highly dependent on local Government.

The second period of development (from 1985 to the end of 1990s) is one where the local organisations' connection with the state and the recognition of their socio-economic status in social structures became issues of some contention (TURA, 2000b, p. 273-279). This is also the time of state democratisation and the growth of the rural social movements for rural changes. In Brazilian Amazonia, the rural social movements influenced rural policies and plans (GRZYBOWSKI, 1987; FLORISBELO and GUIJT, 2004). This period is greatly marked by the formation of local organisations' social capital. National networks and national and international linkages with diverse donors and non-governmental

organisations broke down the relationship with the local state and gave these organisations the sense that they themselves were the only way to promote rural projects and to accelerate rural development. However, reality has shown that no one state or local organisation has successfully carried out rural development alone. In recognition of that, local organisations and local state have proposed a method of collaboration with each other, to carry out rural development programmes from a sense of partnership.

The 2000s has seen the establishment of partnership as a key tool for municipal development in Brazilian Amazonia. Partnership has come to be seen as a cost-efficient and effective mechanism for the implementation of local development programmes and projects (BASA, 2002). Partnership has also been viewed as bringing significant benefits to municipal rural planning such as resources availability and legitimacy in their own right, particularly in terms of developing socially inclusive communities. As a result of these understandings, partnership has been applied to both political discourse and developmental projects by local state and local organisations.

In Brazilian Amazonia, the relationship between small-scale, family-based rural producers and state agents was historically biased in favour of large farmers. For a quite long time (1964-1985, the dictatorship government period) the relationship between small-scale, family-based, rural producers and state agents was difficult. Because of this factor, the authors investigated examples of partnership carried out through actors that have recently located themselves on opposite sides rather than examples of partnership where the presence of large farmers is prevalent. Thus, the authors chose the *municípios* of Igarapé-Miri and Ourém. According to official statistics, 94.79% of landholdings in Ourém are small areas that cover less than 200 hectares that in turn include 90.93% of the rural labour (IBGE, 1996). In Igarapé-Miri, 95.3% of landholdings are smaller than 100 hectares and only 11 large farmers own 49,529.2 hectares, which demonstrates a high level of land concentration.

Apart from the basic criteria stated above, the authors considered other issues. Igarapé-Miri developed the first municipal participatory diagnosis in Pará. This involved organisations from local government, NGOs and rural communities (MIRANDA, 2001). Also, Igarapé-Miri is a place where the local organisations are very active in terms of confrontation with the local and regional state (VASCONCELLOS and VASCONCELLOS SOBRINHO, 2007).

Ourém was the first *município* in Pará that implemented the Plano de Desenvolvimento Rural - PDR (Rural Development Plan) (IBAM, s/d). In the 1990s, the Ourém PDR was considered by the regional governmental departments as a model municipal rural plan to be followed by other municipalities in Pará (IBAM, s/d; SEGBART, 2002; SEBRAE/UNAMA, 2002). This was because it involved an intensive process of community participation; it embraced social and political issues aside from economic aims, and prioritised small-scale, family-based producers (*ibid.*).

LO-Government partnerships in Ourém have existed since 1992 when the municipal Rural Development Committee (CDR) was created. The committee was created by municipal law and was formed in response to the new governmental credit mechanisms to finance small-scale, low-income rural producers. These established a link between access to credit funds and the existence of rural development committees and plans for rural development. Between 1996 and 2004, the CDR of Ourém created and executed two plans (1997-2000 and 2001-2004). With the participation of seven local organisations, five governmental bodies and the legislative assembly (Câmara Municipal de Vereadores), the first plan (1997 - 2000) carried out fifteen collective projects of which twelve aimed for improvements in agricultural production. A range of individual projects for agricultural improvement were also created and executed during the first plan and others are still in execution despite the end of the second plan. The agricultural projects executed had financial support from regional (SAGRI, EMATER) and federal (BASA, SUDAM [ADA], PRONAF) bodies and in some cases from

international donors (DAAD, PPG-7). Technical assistance was also obtained from regional and federal (EMBRAPA, UFRA) state organisations. The aims of the projects, as stated in Ourém's Rural Development Plan, were the improvement of the small-scale low-income peasants' production and to improve local manufacturing based on local peasant production and then to respond to market demands (CMDR, 1996; 1999). The change from provisional (shifting cultivation) to permanent agricultural cultivation, the growth of agricultural production, the rebuilding of a co-operative organisation and the improvement of the peasants' income characterise the main positive outcomes of the rural development plans of the *município* of Ourém (IBAM s/d; SEBRAE/UNAMA, 2002).

The LO-Government partnership in Igarapé-Miri is more controversial since it does not involve all of the local organisations of the *município*. It involves only five of the 32 local organisations existent in Igarapé-Miri. According to the former head of the Municipal Department for Agriculture, the local Government prioritised local organisations that had the highest number of members. In consequence, a large number of Community-Based Associations (CBA) and Community-Based Development Associations (CBDA) were excluded.

LO-Government partnership in Igarapé-Miri began in 1991 with the initiative of the local Government and support of a regional programme POEMA (MIRANDA, 2001). It began with the elaboration of a participatory diagnosis, the preparation and execution of agricultural projects and the formation of a production co-operative (*ibid.*). The agricultural projects carried out in Igarapé-Miri have had financial and technical support from the regional and federal state agencies (PDR of Igarapé-Miri) (SEMAGRI, 2002). In some initiatives such as the creation of the production co-operative COOPFRUT, the participation of POEMA provided access to external financing and technical collaboration. The growth of agricultural production of the small-scale, low-income rural producer and the *município* as whole has been significant and it has been

attributed to the partnership between state agents and the local organisations (DIÁRIO DO PARÁ, 2005). An important characteristic of the agricultural production of Igarapé-Miri is the cultivation of a regional fruit called *açaí* and this has great environmental appeal in terms of sustainable development<sup>8</sup>. One of the outcomes of the partnership between state and local organisations was growth of *açaí* production (IBGE, 1996) that has led to Igarapé-Miri's new label of the *açaí* capital (DIÁRIO DO PARÁ, 2005).

### Influences of the Structure of Power

Both Igarapé-Miri and Ourém are *municípios* with a long and complex political history through which rural development has been expressed and underwritten by local and regional relations of power and patronage. Land has always been a natural as well as a political resource, and has been influenced by changing configurations of power at both municipal and at micro-regional (*microregião*) levels.

According to official documents and the few pieces of historical literature existent about both *municípios*, the history of Igarapé-Miri is linked to great plantations of sugarcane and Ourém to the cultivation of *malva* and black pepper. In both, official registers show that political power relations were dominated by those in control of land and labour and his/her nexus with the regional (state) power (a similar model to Emmi's *Oligarquy*)<sup>9</sup>.

In Igarapé-Miri, for instance, official registers from 1959 to 1977 show that one family, the Lobatos, dominated the political space with the election of five mayors (*prefeitos*). These registers also show that the Lobato family held large areas of land and cultivated sugar cane from 1835 until its collapse in the 1950s. From the 1950s onwards, the Lobato family's power concentrated on the political sphere. This family supported all administrations between 1978 and 1989. From 1990 to 1996, the next local Government leaders to come to power were prosperous merchants. It was only in 1997 that a doctor (1997-2004) was elected and broke down the political power

dominium directly linked to land and economic power. The current *prefeita* (mayor) is a member of a merchant family that held power between 1993 and 1996

Field work in Igarapé-Miri and Ourém revealed that the actors engaged in the partnership process are, in general, aware of an involvement with political, institutional and financial power disputes. Both local organisations and state agents usually indicate (directly and indirectly) that they are on opposite sides in the relationship.

[...] the political conflict between us [local organisations and local Government] is clear [...] it is not new [...] the social movement was always linked to the PT [Workers' Party] and you know, PT for them [local Government] was a monster. Now it is a bit better because our president is from the PT [...]. (Member of Rural Workers' Union, Ourém)

[...] the problem is that they [local organisations] often look at us [local Government] as the enemy [...]. (Former head of Municipal Bureau for Agriculture and Environment, Ourém)

[...] now we are at peace [...] since the money finished we are at peace [...]. (Manager of EMATER, Ourém)

Because of long political dominance of groups linked to rural elites, it is difficult to find local organisations leaders that accept Government leadership.

[...] we cannot trust them [...] they [Government] represent the elite [...] they just look for us during the elections [...] after our support; they leave us [...] this was true of the last *Prefeito* [...]. (Leader of a rural community and member of Rural Workers' Union, Igarapé-Miri)

In practice, this means that partnership for local development in both areas was contradictory and created in an environment where absence of trust was prevalent. Programmes that were created and then implemented without prior agreement of negotiable and non-negotiable principles cannot be carried out without conflict. This does not mean that partnership can be carried out with no conflicts at all. Embedded relationships that suggest complete synergy between state and civil society as pointed out by Tandler (1997) and Ostrom (1997) is a utopia. However, for a

partnership to achieve outcomes at local level, the actors could at least put their differences to one side, define clearly their aims and outline their complementary roles (LAN, 1997) in favour of the more vulnerable peoples. Insufficient understanding and constant disputes between the partners only serve to exacerbate the rural communities' disillusionment with so-called possibilities of improvement in their livelihoods.

[...] I am 75 years old and I am tired of always hearing the same thing [...] Governments come and go and everything is still the same [...]. (Leader of a rural community in Igarapé-Miri).

[...] everyone is tired [...] everyone is untruthful [...] no one believes in anyone [...]. (Leader of a rural community in Ourém).

Not only is this likely to cause partnerships to be artificial and weak in regard to the needs and aspirations of the more vulnerable communities, it also damages the already fragile relationship between them and local organisations and local Government.

[...] it is difficult to believe [...] everyone is untruthful [...] sometimes they [local organisations leaders] are on one side and suddenly they change to the opposite side [...] It happens in every election [...]. (Leader of a rural community in Ourém).

[...] they [local Government staff] just come over during the elections [...] they say that they will do this and that [...] it is just promises [...] (Member of a community in Ourém).

The limited reciprocity between partners is endorsed by external NGOs that suggest that the relationship will not change for as long as the rural sector remains dominated by political interests associated only with elections and power.

[...] for most of them [politicians] the results are secondary [...] what they want is to create an environment where they have the power to interfere and then to have political and financial benefits for the next elections [...] it is a practice in that region that is not recommended but that is still present [...] it is hard to change [...]. (POEMA staff member, Igarapé-Miri).

Political interests and institutional management customs related to this culture mean that interaction with the most

vulnerable rural communities is weak and dominated by ineffective practice for changes in favour of these communities. Any assumption of synergetic relation between Government and civil society is far from being achieved.

[...] I do not understand this relationship as a partnership in favour to the poorest communities [...] what has been done? Nothing [...] one or two marine projects have already failed [...] what I see is that the *prefeitura* uses this discourse to say that they did it, they did that, and then to get votes in the elections [...]. (EMATER staff member, Igarapé-Miri).

Civil servants of the *prefeitura* emphasise that the geographical composition of the *município* is an impediment in reaching the poorest communities. However, while this factor is a real constraint in areas of *várzea* such as Igarapé-Miri, in areas of *terra firme* like Ourém this statement is problematic.

[...] It is difficult to go to communities that are so far away [...] we do not have money to put petrol in our boats [...] even we do not have a place to stay there [...] it is very tiring because we have to go one day and come back the day after [...]. (Head of a local organisation, Ourém).

[...] It is not too difficult to visit the far communities [...] would you like to go there? [...] it is a bit harder during the winter, but now it is fine [...] the *Prefeitura* look after the roads [...]. (*Prefeitura* staff member, Ourém).

Although the physical environment poses real problems for accessing the poorest communities and communicating effectively with them, it cannot be assumed that this is the only barrier to their involvement in the process of rural development. Financial resources and lack of interest in local Government in reaching these communities are always regarded as obstacles to be overcome.

[...] the *prefeitura* [council] has no money to support us in our work [...] we have boats, but our monthly quota to buy oil is insufficient [...]. (EMATER staff member, Igarapé-Miri).

[...] sometimes when we want to talk to someone to give us advice or to use the tractor that was bought through PRONAF projects, we have to raise money between ourselves to pay for oil for the car or tractor [...] the

*prefeitura* just have money during the elections[...]. (Head of a local organisation, Ourém).

[...] it is true; the geographical composition of Igarapé-Miri is a complicated factor in reaching many rural communities there [...] the problem is that local Government use this factor to abandon these communities for a long period and to manipulate people in the elections [...]. (POEMA staff member, Igarapé-Miri)

Geographical access is a recognised problem. However, the CDR and PDR are respectively the site and instrument where local organisations and Government should debate and propose alternative forms to overcome this problem. They are also the site to attract more vulnerable communities to discuss their efforts, to show their financial limitations and to define a form of cooperation between them. However, contrary to the model of participatory governance where civil society has an active role (FLORISBELO and GUIJT, 2004), the model of partnership established in the *municípios* researched is limited. Firstly, it is reduced to the participation of already existent (and formal) organisations. Secondly, it is reduced by excluding those, who in principle should be the main focus of development, the poorest communities.

In practice, the *prefeitura's* (council's) institutional and financial control over the CDR is exercised to maintain the present structure of power and to prolong the mandate of current leaders. When respondents were asked what moves the *prefeitura* to control the committee, the given answers was that control of the committee means the control of political power for the next elections.

[...] There is no doubt, the sustainable economic project was not the most important; the most important thing was the project of maintaining political power for the next elections [...] that's why there is a struggle to control the committee [...]. (POEMA staff member, Igarapé-Miri).

[...] the process of partnership depended on the political interests of *Prefeitura* [...] In Ourém there are some traditional families that were always involved in power [...] They do not want to lose their power [...] they do not want to change their form of

management [...] it is very hard for them [...].” (FASE staff member, Ourém).

Less concerned with the inclusion of economically and socially marginalised groups in process of development, current leaders try to use the CDR space to access financial resources and to reinforce (in the case of local Government) or to secure (in the case of local organisation leaders) political power.

[...] who has the money, has the power, isn't it? The greatest aim of both associations and *prefeitura* was to control the resources and then to prioritise the projects and the communities that will be reached [...] certainly, these projects and communities were according to their political intentions [...]. (FASE staff member, Ourém).

A great risk that CDR has offered is the 'institutionalisation of exclusion' with the pseudo-agreement of civil society representatives.

[...] the projects and communities were chosen between us and the associations [local organisations] this means that it could not be more participatory than this [...] in fact, the most organised associations were more influential [...]. (Former head of Municipal Bureau for Agriculture and Environment, Ourém).

[...] we tried to involve the majority of the communities; however it was so difficult because many of them are dispersed and not organised yet [...]. (POEMA staff member, Igarapé-Miri).

[...] it was highly participatory [...] everyone was invited to participate [...] it was a great moment [...] Ourém was a pioneer in this type of work [...] it was an example for all *municípios* of the region [...]. (Former leader of CDR, Ourém).

## Conclusion: Power and Domination

This paper emphasised that land has been a natural as well as a political resource that influences configurations of power at both *município* and at micro-regional (*microregião*) levels. Taking the example of Igarapé-Miri, this paper demonstrated that political power relations were dominated by those in control of land and labour and their nexus with the regional (state) power. The data presented in previous section revealed

that due to the long political dominance of groups linked to rural elites, it has been difficult to find local organisation leaders that accept Government leadership. It is equally difficult to find members of Government willing to accept the leadership of local organisations. The actors engaged in the partnership process are, in general, aware that it involves political, institutional and financial disputes of power and that they will often find themselves in the opposite sides of these equations. The creation of new grassroots associations by local Government in both *municípios* demonstrates the rejection by agents of the local state of subordination by the leaders of civil society. In practice, this means that partnerships for local development in both areas were created in an environment with complete absence of trust between the partners.

Insufficient understanding of partners' roles in the relationship and the constant disputes between them has served to reinforce the exclusion of the most vulnerable groups in rural planning and consequently in the local development. This has also exacerbated the rural communities' disillusionment with so-called possibilities of improvement in their livelihoods through partnership. Not only is this likely to cause partnerships to be artificial and weak in regard to the needs and aspirations of the more vulnerable communities, it also damages the already fragile relationship between them and local organisations and local Government. The limited reciprocity between partners suggests that the relationship will not change for as long as the rural sector remains dominated by political interests linked to elections and power.

Political culture and institutional management customs related to this culture mean that the type of interaction with the most vulnerable rural communities is weak and dominated by practice which is ineffective in producing changes in favour of these communities. This suggests that any assumption of partnership through synergetic relations between Government and civil society in Pará is far from being achieved.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Local organisation is taken to mean all membership of non-governmental organisations both voluntary and non-voluntary that work for rural development in the area involved.
- <sup>2</sup> The lowest political-administrative level of the Brazilian Government structure. It comprises its own local Government and legislative bodies. Geographically, it involves urban and rural areas.
- <sup>3</sup> Political-economic relationship where the powerless becomes the 'client' and the 'dependent' of a powerful political group and commits his/her political support and vote.
- <sup>4</sup> This is the period of dictatorship and autocratic Government in Brazil.
- <sup>5</sup> The examination of the relationship between state and civil society is much more complex and involves ideological, political and historical dimensions. For instance, many of the civil society organisations in the rural areas were created and supported by autocratic Government and represented a 'perfect' synergy between state and civil society.
- <sup>6</sup> Intermediary organisations are here considered as non-governmental organisations that support local organisations in scaling up their demands from local communities to municipal, regional and national governments (Carroll, 1992).
- <sup>7</sup> Coronelismo is a political power system where local power is concentrated on an agrarian leader usually a large farmer and/or owner of large areas of land. Reciprocal commitment between the coronel and public power members (mayor, deputies, governador, senators, etc.) is the most dominant characteristic of this political power system.
- <sup>8</sup> The cultivation of açaí is an alternative to the intensive exploitation of palm trees for palmito (palm-heart) production. The exploitation of palm trees from 1970 in Igarapé-Miri has left an environmental disaster with great negative socio-economic outcomes at the end of the 1980s (Miranda 2001).
- <sup>9</sup> A relevant text about local power that examines the process of actors' interaction with both social and economic relations in Pará was written by Emmi (1999). Taking a historical perspective, Emmi examines how the structure of power has changed in a circumscribed area (in the município of Marabá) and from what kind of political, economic and social influences. One of the merits of Emmi's work was to show the dynamics of the relationship between the local elites of Marabá and the changes on regional and national Governments.

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### Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ADA</b>	<b>Agência de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia</b> Development Agency for Amazônia
<b>BASA</b>	<b>Banco da Amazônia S.A.</b> Bank of Amazonia plc.
<b>DAD</b>	<b>Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst</b> German Development Service
<b>EMATER</b>	<b>Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural</b> Institute of Technical Assistance and Rural Services Support

<b>IBAM</b>	<b>Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal</b> Brazilian Institute of Municipal Administration	<b>SAGRI</b>	<b>Secretaria Executiva de Estado de Agricultura</b> Regional Secretary of Agriculture
<b>IBGE</b>	<b>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</b> Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics	<b>SEMAGRI</b>	<b>Secretaria Municipal de Agricultura de Ourém</b> Ourém Municipal Department of Agriculture
<b>NUMA</b>	<b>Núcleo de Meio Ambiente</b> Centre of Environment	<b>SUDAM</b>	<b>Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Amazônia</b> Superintendence for Amazonia Development
<b>PPG-7</b>	<b>Programa Piloto para a Proteção das Florestas Tropicais do Brasil</b> Pilot Programme for the Protection of the Brazilian Rain Forest	<b>UFPA</b>	<b>Universidade Federal do Pará</b> Federal University of Pará
<b>POEMA</b>	<b>Programa Pobreza e Meio Ambiente</b> Poverty and Environment Programme	<b>UFRA</b>	<b>Universidade Federal Rural da Amazônia</b> Rural Federal University of Amazônia
<b>PRONAF</b>	<b>Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar</b> National Support Programme for Family-Based Agriculture	<b>UNAMA</b>	<b>Universidade da Amazônia</b> University of Amazônia