

CASE STUDY

Brazil: Giving visibility to the economic contributions of women through agroecological logbooks: The Caderneta Agroecológica

Summary

The Caderneta Agroecológica (Agroecological Logbook), created in 2011, is a political-pedagogical tool designed to empower women by raising awareness of their economic and social contributions. It supports home gardens and recognizes unpaid work as essential to the livelihoods of families, communities, and society. The logbook affirms the role of women farmers in developing agroecological knowledge and promotes sustainable food production, resilient livelihoods, soil health, biodiversity, and climate adaptation. The Caderneta Agroecológica highlights women's leadership in diversified, climate-resilient agriculture, emphasizing care for the environment and community well-being.

Background

The initiative was developed within the Brazilian agroecological movement, started in 2002 through the National Agroecology Network (Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia [ANA]). A platform for civil society movements, networks, and organizations, ANA promotes agroecology, strengthens family farming, supports soil health and biodiversity, and addresses climate change. The movement encompasses approximately 25 states and regional networks and 15 national social movements.

Within ANA, the Women's Working Group (Grupo de Trabalho de Mulheres [GT Mulheres]), established in 2004, focuses on empowering women, and the non-profit organization, Center for Alternative Technologies of Zona da Mata (Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas da Zona da Mata [CTAZM]), was central to the Agroecological Logbook in 2009.

The collaboration between CTA-ZM and GT Mulheres has led to the widespread adoption of Agroecological Logbook across Brazil. The Agroecological Logbook initiative involves partnerships with academic institutions, environmental justice organizations, and feminist movements nationally and internationally.

The concept of the Agroecological Logbook is simple: a woman lists the produce in her home garden and values it against market prices, giving her family and her insight into – and proof of – the value of her work and the value of her contribution to the household budget.

The Agroecological Logbook is arranged in four columns: consumption; donation; exchange;

and sale. Women note what they use themselves, give away, trade (for other food, goods, services, etc.), and sell in the market. At the end of the month, they calculate the corresponding monetary value of these activities and determine the amount they have saved and earned. This helps give relevance to their work and compare it to the rest of the family's monetary income.

The Agroecological Logbook initiative also facilitates group discussions between women using the logbook. They share knowledge on agroecological practices, seeds, medicinal plants, soil health, food storage and preparation, market prizes, etc. It broadens the general view of monetary and non-monetary income and the contribution of women to the food and nutritional security of the family and community.

Through increased awareness and recognition, women's previously invisible contributions to their families' livelihoods are being unveiled. Tasks once labelled as mere 'help', 'housework', or 'women's work' are now understood as essential, both monetarily and non-monetarily. Once women's contributions were made tangible, many began to experience positive changes in their relationships and labor division with their husbands and relatives. Moreover, armed with data and knowledge, women actively engage with policy makers to advocate for supportive policies in agroecological food production. The Agroecological Logbook initiative has contributed to the government's acknowledgment of the vital role of women in Brazilian food production.

Actions taken

In the context of climate change, drought, and adaptation, this initiative is essential, helping women discuss soil health and seeds and reduce the risk of crop failure. In turn, these discussions have led to the sharing of agroecological practices and the creation of community seed banks, allowing women to conserve and share seeds for food production. These seed banks support agrobiodiversity and help communities increase resilience to droughts and other climate change shocks.

Women's involvement

Agribusiness is a pillar of the Brazilian economy, worth nearly a quarter of its gross domestic product (GDP), with crops such as soybeans, sugar cane, and coffee among the country's most important export products grown on industrialized farms, which mainly employ men. Brazilian family farming plays a pivotal role in supplying the domestic market with healthy products and sustainable management of environmental resources. Boasting 3.9 million farms, family farms represent 77 per cent of all farms and occupy 23 per cent of Brazil's total agricultural land, approximately 80 million hectares. Family farming contributes 23 per cent to the gross value of agricultural production (CONTAG 2023).

As a result of industrial agricultural expansion in the 1980s, many traditional agricultural practices and local seed varieties were abandoned. This led to a decline in the resilience and autonomy of rural communities. However, many rural family home gardens are building on these traditional agricultural practices and local seed varieties. These home gardens provide food and herbal medicine for rural families, do not rely on external chemical inputs, and preserve species and varieties that have been passed down from generation to

generation.

Women tend these home gardens, selling or swapping produce and providing food for their families. Their contributions to their households – taking on domestic responsibilities, raising children, and working in agriculture and other economic sectors – are vital and, yet, often invisible, undervalued and overlooked. If their partner is not a farmer, the value of their work is even less recognised.

For example, in the Jenipapo community, in the northeast region of the Caatinga Biome in Brazil, farmer Fátima Maria dos Santos runs her own farm. Applying the principles of agroecology, she uses a cistern to collect rainwater, retains native vegetation, and develops an agroforestry system comprised of native and fruit tree crops and medical plants. She was among the first farmers to join Agroecological Logbook and monitor her food production to understand the value of her production to the household, monetary and non-monetary benefits, and soil health and biodiversity preservation.

Examples of drought wisdom and agroecological practices being exchanged in the Agroecological Logbook women's groups and contributing to drought-resilient home garden production include:

- Monitoring crop production and weather conditions to understand the impact of drought on production
- Rainwater harvesting through cisterns
- Local and Indigenous crops, varieties, and seeds and the importance of agrobiodiversity, especially during dry periods and droughts
- Food processing and conservation techniques for preserving food for longer periods, including droughts
- Tips and tricks for product diversification and commercialization

Outcomes

Women champions:

Perpétua Barbosa from Uaua in Serra da Besta is a female small farmer and founder of COOPERCUC, the Family Agricultural Cooperative of Canudos, Uauá and Curaçá. She describes how the Agroecological Logbook initiative has helped her household and community:

Because of the Cadernetas initiative, I have a better understanding of what I produce, when and how best to store my produce during dry months. For example, thanks to the Caderneta Women's group I got encouraged and motivated to make and sell jam from the Umbu tree (*Spondias tuberosa*). It has a long shelf life if made and processed properly. Therefore, I still have enough production to sell during the drought. The Cadernetas initiative has also helped me share my knowledge on food growing and inspire other female farmers in this.

Francineide Santos Dibrito, in rural Remanso, Bahia, enthusiastically describes the impact of the initiative on her work, just three months after starting:

"I couldn't believe it! So much money that I saved through my work!? And I haven't even counted all the fruits my fruit trees give us.... You could say that I have earned more than a minimum salary per month. I never imagined this. I think these logbooks are very important."

Edneide Brito Nascimento in Pilão Arcado:

"When my husband was unable to work and stayed at home for three months, he finally saw the importance of our garden and my investments in it are for the well-being of our family. Since then, he has treated me with much more respect, and so do my children. All because of the work with the logbooks."

Laeticia Jalil is now Associate Professor of Sociology at the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco [UFRPE]), focusing on rural sociology, gender studies, feminism, agroecology, environment, rural development, and the semi-arid region. Together with Beth Cardoso and others, she helped systematise the methodology, leading to the Agroecological Logbook initiative.

Beth Cardoso, an agroecologist by trade, works with women in Brazil to make their labor on family farms visible and remunerated. Her professional career is marked by her commitment to gender and agroecological issues, themes that she also studied via her master's degree in Spain. At the Center for Alternative Technologies, she developed the first agroecological logbooks. Together with Laeticia Jalil and others, she helped systematize the methodology, leading to the Agroecological Logbook initiative.

Challenges:

Continued use of fossil fuels: The influence of the agribusiness sector, particularly in advocating for agro-industrial approaches centered on the continued use of fossil fuels (including chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and machinery), poses grave risks to farming women and their families and communities, exacerbating greenhouse gas emissions, contaminating soils and ecosystems, and causing human and environmental health hazards.

Adverse impacts of renewable energy investments: Investments in renewable energy, notably in Northeast Brazil, have adversely impacted territories, disrupting traditional livelihoods and the relationship between biological diversity and socio-cultural systems diversity (socio-biodiversity), with detrimental effects on women's and children's health.

Lack of necessary financial support: Financial resource constraints pose significant challenges, hampering their ability to advance policies recognizing women's vital role in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. There is an urgent need for sustained support and recognition of women's agency in shaping Brazil's response to environmental and social crises.

Other priorities: Debates on climate policy at government level focus mostly on protecting the Amazon and promoting solutions, like the economy and green economy. However, concerns persist over the neglect of other biomes, such as the Cerrado and Caatinga, which lack protective legislation against deforestation and desertification.

Lessons Learned

1. Empowerment Through Awareness

The Agroecological Logbook empowers women by making their economic and agricultural contributions visible, increasing their confidence, status, and role in household and community decision-making.

2. More Than Just a Tool

The logbooks are effective not only as records but also as catalysts for organizing women's groups, enabling knowledge exchange, and encouraging advocacy at multiple policy levels.

3. Importance of Support Structures

Scaling the initiative requires investment in facilitation, training, and networks that connect women with civil society, academia, and policymakers—not just funding for the logbooks themselves.

4. Adapting to Climate Challenges

The initiative enhances women's capacity to adapt to droughts and climate change by supporting sustainable practices like food preservation and diversified production systems.

5. Gender Equity in Environmental Policy

Broader climate policies often neglect local biomes and gender perspectives. Recognizing and financing women's roles in agroecology is vital for just, inclusive environmental strategies.

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Organisation

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Supporting Materials

[04_Caderneta Agroecológica_Final 2.pdf](#)

Related IWRM Tools

[Agriculture, Irrigation and Gender](#)

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