

## **Paradigms in conflict: new perspectives for the regional development in the Brazilian Semiarid region**

Lalita Kraus<sup>1</sup>, Aldenilson dos Santos Vitorino Costa<sup>2</sup>

*<sup>1-2</sup>Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*

*<sup>1</sup>kraus.lalita@gmail.com*

*<sup>2</sup>alsvcosta@gmail.com*

This article presents the political project of coexistence with the Brazilian Semiarid (CSA), which is being developed and defended by a regional network in order to lead to new policies and a new paradigm of development. The objective of the article is to analyse the conception of regional development inner to this new paradigmatic proposal, showing that a more socially just development is possible in the region.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in the Brazilian semiarid region lives 13% of the national population and it represents 11% of the Brazilian territory. Here we can find 60% of the Brazilian population that lives in extreme poverty condition and half of its population (more than ten million people) has no income or merely depends on governmental benefits. The region is characterized by a social structure based on a concentration of wealth, income, water and land. At the same time, it is an area susceptible to a threatening desertification process. It is characterized by economic stagnation, dependence on government resources and low human development index. This poses the urgent need for public policies that can reverse this dramatic situation.

The CSA regional network, composed by non-governmental actors and research institutes, develops a bitter critic of government policies and the interventions implemented in the region. These actors share a common understanding of the causes of abuses and injustices in the semiarid territory that are found in the regional development paradigm that aims to fight the drought. It is a paradigm of the modernity that, in order to guarantee a certain type of development, stimulates an occupation of the territory defined by economic exploitation, a fragmented and technical vision of reality and of the alternatives to overcome its limits. This is a paradigm defined by

concepts, practices and policies that still dominates government policies in the semiarid region.

From 1980s social movements and some research institutes have developed proposals and practices guided by the concept of coexistence with the Semiárid, in opposition to the idea of fighting the drought, which means understanding the coexistence as a combination of appropriate economic activities and quality of life for the population. In this way it was structured and developed a new way to see and operate in the territory as a result of a project of collective construction by the large CSA regional network.

This new paradigm operates a deep shift in thinking, perceptions and visions about the Semiárid region. It overcomes a mechanical and anthropocentric vision for a more holistic and ecological one, which interprets the reality in terms of relationships and integration. The Semiárid turns to be a space where the coexistence between humans and nature can be built or redeemed, based on environmental sustainability, quality of life for rural families and appropriate economic activities. This means, for example, prioritizing familiar water harvesting systems, agroecology and commercialization for small farmers, as well as encouraging the creation of small animals and the political participation of popular groups and social movements networks.

The discourse in defense of coexistence was partly absorbed by public bodies, which led to the implementation of programs based on these principles, such as the 1 million Cisterns Program (P1MC) of the Ministry of Environment (MMA). In 2004, the National Plan for Regional Development resulted in actions such as the Strategic Development Plan for the Semiárid (PDSA) and the Integrated and Sustainable Development Program (CONVIVER). Nevertheless, there are still substantial differences between the conceptions of development, sustainability and coexistence proposed by the CSA network and by the government.

In the PDSA, for example, the idea of sustainability has its own characteristics by giving priority to innovative and large scale actions, including irrigated agriculture, agribusiness and mining. This is clearly an interpretation of sustainability that is incompatible with the position of the CSA network. The network declares the

unsustainability of such activities that would perpetuate the exploitation of the territory and its resources, the concentration of land and water at the expense of the agrarian reform and of small farmers.

The theoretical approach adopted is based on a conception of development based on the theories of Amartya Sen and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. From the methodological point of view it will be analysed the discourse of the CSA network and of public bodies in official documents such as laws, acts and statements, as well as semi-structured interviews in the field. So the official discourses will be complemented with concrete and real experiences of coexistence.