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What works in rural Afro-Brazilian communities?: Impressions of Successful Government and Non-governmental Interventions

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WHAT WORKS IN RURAL AFRO-BRAZILIAN COMMUNITIES?:
IMPRESSIONS OF SUCCESSFUL GOVERNMENT AND NON-
GOVERNMENTAL INTERVENTIONS

Judith A. Morrison

ABSTRACT

This research is about how regional level agencies structure high performing community level development approaches for rural black areas. A cultural development NGO and a flexible government extension program have similar internal structures which has led to the incorporation of community perspectives in planning.

The cases represent the overlaps between the successes of non-profit work and government work. Typically, non-governmental organizations have been charged with core aspects of empowerment and community building, while governments have been considered effective at larger-scale, standardized impersonal projects, which lack a need for cultural sensitivity. The cases illustrate that government agencies are able to implement community-building approaches for black communities through their existing institutions using new techniques. The new techniques were geared towards all types of communities within the municipality, but they were particularly successful with black areas, because black areas were able to articulate their specific community needs.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Methodology	
2. BACKGROUND	22
2.1 Why black communities?: Community Type Selection Criteria	
2.2 Introduction to the Municipalities	
2.3 Organizations and Philosophies of Development	
3. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS.....	39
3.1 Minimizing Hierarchy Between Agent and Community	
3.2 Effectively Modeling Community Participation	
3.3 Strength of Community Organizations	
4. BUILDING COMMUNITY PRIDE BY ELIMINATING COMMUNITY PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO ACTION	62
4.1 Transforming the Impact of Scrutiny in Black Communities	
5. CONCLUSION	69
6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAPP.....	71
7. REFERENCES	73

ABBREVIATIONS

CNPT	Centro Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentado das Populações Tradicionais do Maranhão (State cultural preservation agency)
EMATER-MA	Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado (State technical assistance and rural extension company)
IBAMA	Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente dos Recursos Naturais (State natural preservation agency)
INCRA	Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agraria (National land reform and agrarian reform institute)
ITERMA	Instituto de Colonização e Terras do Maranhão (State land agency)
PAPP	Programa de Apoio ao Pequeno Produtor Rural (Program to support small producers)
PVN	Projeto Vida de Negro (Black NGO research collaboration between SMDDH and CCN)
SMDDH	Sociedade Maranhense de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos (Maranhao's human rights NGO)

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is about how regional level agencies structure high performing community development approaches for rural black areas. A cultural development non-governmental organization and a flexible government extension program have similar internal structures which has led to impressive strides in building (1) community voice in the planning process and (2) minimizing the impact of regional level racism on the individual communities. I have chosen to look at community voice and minimizing racism because they contribute significantly to my understanding of how the communities in this research learned to become successful. First, the cases show that creating opportunities for communities to provide feedback in the planning process leads to projects that are: better able to meet community needs, more likely to be implemented properly and carried out completely by staff members, and more likely to be enthusiastically implemented by community members. Second, regional level racism is in the form of lack of support for projects by local politicians and exclusion from community activities by neighbors. Through minimizing or transforming regional racism is an important factor contributing to the success of outside agencies working in black communities. I found that the black communities in this research used the tools developed by the outside agency (either cultural pride by PVN or successful agricultural organization by EMATER) to establish mechanisms to gain the support of local politicians and become integrated into municipal life.

I started this research attempting to discover which type of development assistance the state of Maranhão should support as they allocate funds for the first government level program for black communities in Brazil.¹ I began with the question of, which approach best meets the needs of black communities a cultural approach to development, such as the non-governmental agency (NGO) PVN, or a more general approach, such as the government agricultural extension agency EMATER? Are there qualitative differences between a cultural NGO approach and a state approach-- is one approach more comprehensive? I found that when looking at the most successful examples of culturally based NGO development or state agricultural extension agency development there were few differences in strategies or outcomes. The purpose of this research is to document these high quality approaches and outcomes.

This research in Maranhão sits at the juncture of three debates within three different literatures.

Preference for Non-governmental Organizations as service providers

The first is the literature which prefers non-governmental organizations (NGO) over government agencies in public sector service provision. In this literature it is often assumed that NGOs are more responsive to the needs of communities and are better able to remain flexible and accountable compared to government agencies. This occurs because NGOs rely on staff that are more dedicated to the mission of serving the community and utilizes workers who are infused with values of participation and service. Bureaucrats are

¹ Maranhão is planning the first program in the country to target black communities at the state level [“O Maranhão e o primeiro Estado a adotar no Brasil um programa de recuperacao fundiaria e cultural do patrimonio das comunidades negras rurais e remanescentes de quilombos.” O Estado do Maranhão 7/13/96].

viewed as hierarchical self-interested rent-seekers who employ models of organization which do not promote community participation.

Surprisingly, the NGO in this research did not have a comparative advantage over the government agency in promoting community development or helping communities minimize the impact of regional level racism. In fact both agencies were able to create programs which addressed both adequately. Even more surprisingly, the NGO staff and government officials mutually admired one another's programs, at times even more than their own programs, further evidence of the consistently high performance of both agencies. The cultural development agency so strongly recommended that I visit Felipa (the agricultural extension agency supported program) that these cultural development agents gave me a ride to Felipa. While on the other hand state officials from Brazil mentioned the NGO case of Frechal so enthusiastically that they suggested that it become my first stop in Brazil because it had the strongest community organization and the most dynamic programming of any of the other black communities in the state.

Table 1: NGO and government agency behavior: Comparison between the literature and research observations

Literature	Observed
NGO preferred over government approach	Little discernible difference between NGO and government approach
NGOs viewed as more flexible	EMATER demonstrated flexibility in the decision to employ a new community participation approach (Gespar) which broke down the hierarchy between the agent and the community and included community perspectives in planning.
NGO staff is better adept at promoting community participation	EMATER created consistent, intense community participation which had spill over effects within the internal community organization.
NGO staff are more accountable	EMATER agents took the initiative to implement a more effective program. This new effort involves more work for agents because they have to prepare meetings more thoroughly and are more accountable to the community members because they are in frequent contact with the communities they serve.

How was a government agency able to create an approach that is so effective in an entrenched state bureaucracy? How did this happen in a Brazilian region with notoriously high levels of clientelism?² Long time staff members in the government agency were interested in promoting participation and became more flexible in their approach because they were frustrated with their own performance. Several projects implemented over a decade were not meeting community needs, and therefore were not being completed properly, or were vulnerable to high levels of corruption. In trainings at the state level, agricultural extensionists at EMATER learned about a participatory planning approach that included information on meeting facilitation and integrating community input in planning. This technique is called Gespar and is explained in detail in Section 2.3.d.

² Judith Tendler (1997) effectively summarizes the research on Brazilian corruption, “the nine Northeast states are legendary for their clientelistic ways of governing and for the resulting poor quality of public

The bureaucratic agents of this particular EMATER office were willing to take on additional responsibilities and become more accountable. The Gespar technique makes agents more accountable for two reasons. First, Gespar trains community members to be more outspoken by involving them in their planning process. Involving community perspectives requires that EMATER agents: carefully plan sessions by creating flip charts outlining complex technical details, and developing activities exercises and handouts which explain complex parts of projects. The preliminary work of EMATER helps the community fully grasp proposed projects. After these details are established agents then solicit community input and help facilitate debates. Decisions cannot be made without consensus, so often meetings are heated and can be quite lengthy. Through this process community members become more confident expressing their opinions. More outspoken community members are more adept at understanding how projects work within their own community and are more likely to speak up if agents are not acting responsibly. Second, Gespar requires that agents are in frequent and sustained contact with the community that they serve. With such high levels of contact agents who are not performing their duties properly are regularly confronted by vociferous community members. The initiative agents take to use the Gespar approach shows the priority these EMATER agents place on creating a high quality program in contrast to merely using an easier to implement less effective non-participatory model.

Preference for culturally based non-governmental organizations

administration,” in her introductory chapter which sets the stage for her counter-examples of good government in the Northeast.

Second, this research addresses a debate in the literature about cultural development and empowerment of racial minority groups. There is a growing preference for approaches which are seen as culturally specific. The impetus for this movement is a merging together of the environmental movement, applied anthropological research, and the sustainable development literature. The link and occasional discontinuity between the cultural development approach and the environmental movement is obvious in Frechal, one of the cases from the research. Frechal is part of an extractive reserve formed to preserve two protected “resources” -- black culture and the wild babassu coconuts in the community. Consequently the land rights to this area are held by IBAMA, *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente dos Recursos Naturais*, the state natural preservation agency. Interestingly, the head of this division, CNPT, *Centro Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentado das Populações Tradicionais do Maranhão*, told me that he was often uncertain of his role in the organization because he is a trained environmental engineer not an anthropologist. As a result of his training he tends to treat Frechal like the other environmental natural resource communities that he is responsible for in the state. He tends to only watch to make sure that trees are not cut and natural resources are not over harvested and does nothing to preserve the culture.

In the broader development community several NGOs have based their existence on their ability to serve or protect the needs of culturally marginalized communities.³ I call

³ For example an organization called Cultural Survival which works principally with indigenous populations throughout the world has a research affiliate which publishes a magazine emphasizing the importance of traditional ways. “Cultural Survival Quarterly’s mission is based on the belief that the survival of these peoples depends on the preservation of their rights in deciding how to adapt traditional ways to a changing world.”

these organizations cultural advocacy organizations (CAOs). These NGOs are comprised of activists who advocate for the protection of minority groups from encroachments by outsiders. CAOs often promote culturally specific economic development projects like the creation and distribution of traditional arts and crafts items. Although CAOs are seldom staffed by members of the community they represent, staff feel a commitment to understanding the ethnic group. These staffers design approaches which meet the needs of the ethnicity by presenting materials in the indigenous language with symbols, text, and using planning/implementation structures that borrow from traditional values. The development literature which supports CAOs suggests that racial minorities cannot be served effectively by approaches which are not designed for the specific culture. In the United States, American Afrocentric theorists create a growing body of literature which makes similar conclusions about African-American children and communities.

Afrocentricism may be particularly relevant in the Afro-Brazilian context because the literature addresses similar cultural and linguistic challenges that people of African descent face in the United States and Brazil. For example, African Brazilians and Americans both share a common history of slavery, or forced migration, which makes black citizens vulnerable to internalizing the racism that they receive from the dominant racial group. This occurs in part because the culture of black communities is often not attached to a particular country or cultural context abroad, but instead stems from experiences and adaptations from the blending of African and American traditions and survival techniques from the condition of slavery. Because of the absence of a definitive culturally reinforcing “homeland” black institutions in the U.S. or Brazil often emphasize re-educating and re-

valuing black history and cultural expressions. This education is a way of reinforcing black cultural values that are perceived as being rapidly devalued within black communities. The resulting viewpoint is that negative behaviors are caused by internalized racism originating outside of the community's cultural context. Therefore the remedy according to Afrocentrists is that communities must relearn their black culture through studying their history and ancestors. This Afrocentric literature advocates for black leaders to lead black people and requests vigorous action for the support and creation of culturally specific black institutions (nonprofit agencies and elementary and primary schools). Afrocentrism concludes that black people are best served by black institutions.

Again the case of the agricultural extension agency in Brazil (EMATER) produced surprising results. EMATER's black and non-black agents were able to effectively organize and empower black communities within the context of a non-black government institution. The non-black institution, EMATER, effectively works with the black community because the participatory approach of EMATER enables the black community, Felipa, to have their specific concerns as a black area addressed throughout the planning process and meetings. When Felipa expresses their opinions about projects they do so from their context as black individuals living in a black community. Through the agrarian reform meetings black residents of Felipa are able to specifically address the way their black identity influences how projects are implemented in their community. So instead of generally addressing non-specific concerns about oppression, community

members are able to discuss and troubleshoot how oppression affects them in specific arenas and in specific projects like, agricultural production or access to education. By giving all members a genuine stake in the decision making process of the agrarian reform settlement the concerns of Felipa as a black community are addressed through the participatory Gespar approach. The ability of a non-black institution to have a powerful impact in a black community lends further credibility to the importance of documenting the specific strategies and techniques that the state agricultural extension agency employed in Maranhão.

Creating programs to target black communities or including black communities in comprehensive regional development programs?

Third, this research begins to address the debate in the literature of targeting programs for marginalized groups, in this case black communities. Is it more effective for policy makers in Maranhão to fund black cultural development projects like PVN, or is it more effective to include black communities in a more universalist approach within current structures of agrarian reform settlements where black communities benefit from existing services with their non-black neighbors? This research begins to explore these issues, but given the small sample size further research is necessary to begin to draw conclusions about whether programs for black communities should be independent targeted projects for black areas, or within current structures of agrarian reform settlements.

Highlights from the research

These cases in Maranhão present an interesting counterexample to dominant cultural development paradigms, demonstrating that communities are capable of maximizing

development opportunities with great success, regardless of whether technicians or techniques have been crafted by experts especially for black communities. The three examples in the research further show that similarly successful outcomes of community development can be reached in black communities by both standardized government approaches and nonprofit, culturally specific approaches.

The cases also represent the overlaps between the successes of non-profit work and government work. Typically, non-governmental organizations have been charged with core aspects of empowerment and community building, while governments have been considered effective at larger-scale, standardized impersonal projects, where cultural sensitivity is less necessary. The cases illustrate that government agencies are able to implement community-building approaches for black communities through their existing institutions. Even more interestingly, government agencies are able to provide opportunities for black communities to increase their self-esteem and build community pride and support community institutions in ways similar to an NGO (described in more detail in Chapter 3). The technical assistance agency, EMATER -MA, Itapecuru-Mirim, includes community building approaches in their agricultural assistance training while retaining the integrity of their mission to provide technical assistance for cash crop projects throughout the municipality. The government sponsored agency and the NGO have similar broad and effective impacts meeting the community development needs of the black areas I investigated.

Research Background

Maranhão is a part of the Northeastern region of Brazil, one of the poorest parts of Latin America.⁴ Maranhão is about 329,556 km². Despite the poverty of the region many practitioners remain optimistic about development projects in Maranhão because it is located in a uniquely fertile agricultural belt between the rain forest and the dry lands. The three communities of this research are similar in that they have been identified as part of the “black lands,”⁵ meaning that they are predominantly black regions populated by descendants of slaves (Magno Cruz, 1991; O’Dwyer, 1995; PVN, 1994; Wagner, 1988). Policies for black communities will significantly impact the 400 black rural communities of Maranhão,⁶ with 204,400 inhabitants (or 7% of the rural population of Maranhão).⁷ Currently Maranhão is the first state in Brazil to allocate project resources exclusively for black communities. The pilot project beginning this year by ITERMA, *Instituto de colonização e terras do Maranhão*⁸ concentrates on eleven out of the 400 black communities. The project is led by the governor of the state, the agriculture secretary and the state land agency. The unique place black communities hold in Maranhão’s policy environment and their distinct cultural background explain why specific research on black regions is particularly timely.

⁴ “[W]ithin rural areas, the Northeast [of Brazil] has long constituted the single largest concentration of poverty in Latin America” (Van Zyl, et. al., 1995).

⁵ *Terras de Preto*

⁶ *Jornal O Imparcial*, 5/21/96; CCN, 1996.

⁷ Average population measured by family size in a black *povoado* is 73. Rural population of Maranhão is 2,958,000. (1991 Census of Maranhão)

⁸ The PAPP small producer project has committed to providing infrastructure assistance for this project.

Similarities between the povoados

The three communities are alike because they are (1) comprised of related family members, (2) have unique communal land titles, and (3) similar levels of exposure to outside agencies.

First, the three communities, Felipa, Frechal, and Santa Rosa are similar clusters of related individuals. Several generations have remained on the same plot of land for hundreds of years, a common pattern in black communities (Wagner, 1988; PVN, 1994; Salustiano, 1992).

Second, the three communities hold communal land titles that are unique in their own municipalities, and often rare within Brazil. Frechal with the largest amount of land, 10,500 hectares and approximately 64 families, is an extractivist reserve held by two interconnected state agencies. The common land title of the region means that ostensibly the community does not own their own land. Instead, Frechal residents have the right to live and work on the land as: (1) a protected culture of CNPT, *Centro Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentado das Populacoes Tradicionais do Maranhão*, the state cultural preservation agency, and (2) as an extractivist reserve of people who live off of the resources of the land (the coconuts of the wild babassu plant), managed and protected by IBAMA, *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente dos Recursos Naturais*, the state natural preservation agency. The unique land structure requires the community to tailor development projects to meet the environmental standards of the holders of the land, IBAMA. Frechal is the only black extractivist reserve in Maranhão, and one of less than four such protected areas in Brazil.

Santa Rosa's 2,600 hectares of land are held by a male patriarch and his heirs.

Currently Senor Geraldo, an elderly man in his 80s, is responsible for paying taxes and distributing building rights to the 130 families occupying the land. A patriarch in Senor Geraldo's family has served as the official representative of the land for the entire time that the community has been in existence. When Senor Geraldo dies one of his male heirs will continue to represent the land. Four generations before Senor Geraldo, the land was given by a slave-owner, Baron Nunes Belfort, to a slave woman, Amelica. The families on the land are the descendants of the slave owner and Amelica. The structure of a land representative is so unusual in the area that several anthropologists have chosen to conduct extensive research on just the title and passage of land title in the community.

Felipa's 26 families hold a common title to their 800 hectares of land, located in the agrarian reform settlement of Entroncamento. The other seven communities of the settlement have individual titles, but due to a desire to speed up the land titling process INCRA filed Felipa's application jointly. Members now have only communal rights to the land, plots are not held individually.

Table 2: Brief summary chart

	Frechal	Santa Rosa	Felipa
Municipality	Município of Mirinzal	Município of Itapecuru-Mirim	Município of Itapecuru-Mirim
Size	10,500 hectares	2,600 hectares	800 hectares
Population	64 families	130 families	26 families
Title	No individual titles: Extractivist Reserve	No individual titles: Patriarchal Line	No individual titles: Joint land title
First Project	First project 1986	First project 1987	First project 1986
Outside Agent	PVN Black Life NGO project	EMATER State agricultural extension agency	EMATER State agricultural extension agency
Income Generation	Subsistence farming for individual household consumption. Surplus crops sold at market, supplemented by remittances	Cash crops for approximately 1/3 of the community, supplemented by remittances	Cash crops. Household gardens for fruit, home consumption.
Crops	Rice, beans, babassu	Rice, mandioca flour, bananas	Pineapple, bananas, and sugar cane
Composition of Community	Related Family Members	Related Family Members	Related Family Members

Third, the communities have all had outside agents (PVN and EMATER) for the same amount of time. In the cases the first interventions by outside agencies occurred in the late 1980s [1986, for Frechal (PVN) and Felipa (EMATER); and 1984, for Santa Rosa (EMATER)]. Although the agencies began working in the communities at the same time, they were operating a variety of projects. Frechal received a small grant from PVN to cultivate a fruit called *acerola*, in 1986, while Felipa received funding in 1986 from the *Banco do Brasil's* PROCERA project for credit extension to support agriculture. In 1987, the *Banco do Nordeste* (BNB) sponsored a rice machine and commercial storage house (*casa comercial*), for Santa Rosa.

The final similarity is that all of the communities were identified, interviewed, and documented as black communities by the black cultural project in 1986. This project was carried out by PVN in a significant number of black communities throughout the state.

The obvious differences between the communities are the population and the differences in income generation. First, in terms of population although the population in each community varies greatly, the family to hectare average (number of families/hectares of land) is very similar. The average amount of hectares per family is important to note because it implies that the communities have similar access to land which makes them have relatively equal potential revenue from agricultural production. In Santa Rosa the family to hectare average is 20 hectares per family, while in Felipa, it is 30 hectares per family. Although in Frechal the family to hectare average is quite large, 164 hectares, it is important to note that much of the land in Frechal is set aside for natural preservation and cannot be used for productive purposes, instead several smaller areas have been designated for agriculture, compromising less than 20% of the available land that the community occupies. With this designated 2100 hectares of agricultural land Frechal's family to hectare average decreases to 33 hectares per family.

The second difference is that communities receive income from a number of different sources. Income generation is an important measure of the economic condition of the community, although the indicators do not necessarily reflect the level of prosperity within the community. Based on my observations living in each community for several weeks, I would argue that community members on average seem to generate equivalent

amounts of money in all of the *povoados* regardless of whether it is principally from remittances or cash crops. I am basing this assessment on the presence of three indicators, (1) small scale crops in community gardens, (2) the quality of the homes, and (3) the appliances purchased and available to community members. First, all of the communities have one or two members with diverse family gardens for home use which include regional fruits (like *acerola*) and limited cash crops (principally banana). Second, the homes are made of dried earth with animal dung, with thatched roofs, while in all of the communities the most elite one or two members have houses with tile roofs, or in some cases homes of cement. Third, all of the communities had three or four members with television sets and refrigerators.

The communities are engaged in the following income generating activities: Frechal relies on subsistence farming with remittances; Santa Rosa relies on cash crops (banana and sugar cane) for 1/3 of the community, while the other 2/3 are subsistence farmers, with most of their income supplied through remittances from family members who work in São Luis or the south of Brazil as servants; Felipa generates income almost entirely from their cash crops (banana and pineapple). I do not want to dismiss the importance of income generation as an indicator, but to some extent the differences in income generation prove that qualitative factors such as building internal community organization and confronting regionalized patterns of racism can be achieved by an outside agency's approach regardless of whether communities generate income principally from cash crops or remittances.

1.1 Methodology

The field work for this research was conducted in the city of São Luis, and three rural communities (*povoados*) in the municipalities of Mirinzal and Itapecuru-Mirim during the summer months, June through September, of 1996. Information was gathered from a variety of sources within the municipal capital and within the communities. I conducted interviews with government officials, NGO and extension agency staff, local politicians, members of the rural workers union (*Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais*) community residents and leaders (elders, men, women, and children), and university professors to ascertain how PVN and EMATER interventions enabled these particular communities to be successful. Sources provided valuable background information, quantitative data about the state, and the information used to select the *povoados* for research.

I was fortunate enough to sit in on several agricultural extension agency, EMATER Itapecuru-Mirim, meetings resulting from a new agricultural cooperative venture throughout agrarian reform settlements in Maranhão. In these five half day to full day meetings throughout the three months of my field research I was able to see first hand the techniques that the agency employs in the *assentimento* (settlement). I have fewer observations about PVN's meetings within the actual community compared with Felipa because I was only able to attend one meeting on site at Frechal. Although there were so few meetings in Frechal, I did meet several researchers working in the community and was able to observe their interactions with the residents. Much of the information I am using to explain the NGO, PVN, comes from impressions I have generated from working

closely with staff, materials written by PVN, observing several planning meetings and information sessions in São Luis, and a site meeting in Frechal.

2. Background

This section provides vital information on the communities selected as the focus of this research (section 2.1), and the history, mission, and approach of the outside agency operating within the communities (section 2.2).

2.1 Why black communities?: Community type selection criteria

I have chosen to limit my research to black communities to shed light on growing interest and concerns about the specific needs of the rural black population of Maranhão. As interest in black communities increases in the popular media there has been little research about project implementation within black areas. Although there are increased political efforts to gain funding for black regions, there is little research that attempts to explain the efficacy of these policies implemented or planned for black regions. Maranhão has a strong black political and cultural movement which significantly influences the public policy environment and impacts the position of black communities within the state. Although black communities have been historically marginalized there is a growing effort to attempt to correct these injustices. The black movement led by lawyers, NGOs, and the media is a strong advocate for the rights of rural black regions. In fact, the black movement and members of black cultural institutions are so efficiently mobilized in Maranhão that they have been granted legislation and additional resources for targeted black development assistance from the state government. NGOs like the CCN,

Black Cultural Center (*Centro Cultura de Negra*), and the PVN, Black Life Project (*Projecto Vida de Negra*), have concentrated their efforts to develop rural black communities. These NGOs have contributed to the amount of attention black regions receive in Maranhão. PVN's 1986 black community identification project interviewed all of the black communities of the state. Further the areas receive high levels of media attention. Two of the areas, Frechal and Santa Rosa appear in frequent television specials and periodicals. In my three months in Maranhão, Frechal appeared in the state newspaper two times, on a local television special, and in a national environmental magazine, *Terra*. The attention in the areas has even been international five years ago, Frechal appeared in the *New York Times*. Although Santa Rosa has received considerably less attention than Felipa, in the mid-1980s it was featured in a national weekly agricultural program on one of the largest television networks in Brazil.⁹ The added attention of the media has contributed to the black movement of Maranhão's success at targeting development projects for black communities as a whole.

In order to explore in more depth the challenges and triumphs facing black communities, the scope of this work is limited to a small sample of black communities in the state of Maranhão. The piece hones in on the common underlying institutional strategies that have made regional organizations highly successful in agricultural production and community mobilization within select black areas of the state and does not attempt to compare black communities with non-black communities in Maranhão, or make comparisons between particular black communities in Maranhão and those of other

⁹ *Globo Rural*

states. Although the piece is narrowly focused I hope the research may spur future research or debate on applicability of the findings for other areas of Brazil.

2.2 Introduction to the municipalities

The communities selected represent models of success in three areas: (1) agricultural production (Felipa), (2) cultural organization (Frechal), and (3) garnering state resources (Santa Rosa). Although the indicators of success are different for the three areas there are a number of similarities which link the *povoados*, which have been elaborated in the introduction (1) common history, (2) land title, and the (3) year agents made their first contact with the community. The criteria I am using to select *povoados* is whether communities are considered successful through an analysis of available data sources, consultation with expert practitioners (government and NGO workers), and perceptions of neighboring communities.

Table 3: Municipal Data

Municipality	Itapecuru-Mirim	Itapecuru-Mirim	Mirinzal
Povoado	Felipa	Santa Rosa	Frechal
Population	26 families	130 families	64 families
Internal Organization	Extractivist Reserve with additional communities (Felipa, Outiero, Jaibara, Picus I, Picus II, the povoado named Entroncamento)	Patriarchal line	Joint land title
Crops	Pineapple, bananas, and sugar cane	Rice, mandioca flour, bananas	Rice, beans, babassu
Location: Distance from Municipal Capital	~ 1 hour walking 30 minutes by car (bad roads)	~ 2 hours walking 30 minutes by car 40 minutes by bicycle	~1 1/2 hours walking 15 minutes by car 30 minutes by bicycle
One way	45 minutes by bicycle	(10 minutes by car to a regional center)	
Location: Dist. São Luis	~120 kilometers	~100 kilometers	250 kilometers
Location: Travel distance from São Luis	~ 2 1/2 hours 2 hours by bus 1/2 hour for car transport from the road	~ 2 hours by direct bus	~ 6-8 hours Bus and Ferry Boat to municipal capital, car to povoado
One way			

2.2.a Municipality of Itapecuru-Mirim (Santa Rosa and Felipa)

My interest in the municipality of Itapecuru-Mirim, stems from its historical significance as part of the black lands.¹⁰ I sensed that generalizations made about *povoados* in Itapecuru-Mirim may be particularly valuable for the other black communities in the largely black *município*. According to PVN research, the municipality of Itapecuru-Mirim represents one of the largest concentrations of black communities in Maranhão, and has many visible acknowledgments of the presence of the black

¹⁰ “*Terras dos pretos*” one of the black lands of Brazil identified by anthropologists (Magno Cruz, 1991; O’Dwyer, 1995; PVN, 1994; Wagner, 1988).

population, including the black São Benedito, the patron Saint of the municipality.

Itapecuru-Mirim's black communities face similar political, economic and geographic conditions because they share a common state representative/mayor, are close to the state capital, and receive a higher level of state bureaucratic support resulting from their dense agrarian reform program which spreads across the entire municipality.

My research began in the United States relying on data and information provided by the PAPP office of Maranhão. After receiving data and talking with PAPP officials I selected Santa Rosa, in the municipality of Itapecuru-Mirim, because it has garnered a large share of resources from the PAPP government program, and is one of the most heavily funded black areas of the state. In selecting the second *povoado* within the municipality I relied heavily on information from NGO staff, technicians and municipal leaders. Technicians from EMATER-MA, the agricultural extension agency in the state capital, enthusiastically talked about the model agrarian reform settlement (*assentimento*) of Entroncamento. Entroncamento is rated one of the top two agrarian reform settlements in the state based on agricultural productivity, perceptions of resourcefulness, and community cooperation, as defined by the EMATER office staff. Itapecuru-Mirim's *assentimentos* are currently being heavily invested in because of their economic potential. Agents previously attempted to provide equivalent services in *povoados* throughout the municipality, but difficulties with financing, and concerns about program quality have led the agency to consider more concentrated projects in settlements. Entroncamento is considered a "model" agrarian reform settlement, because agricultural projects

implemented in the region have low loan default rates. Felipa, one of the *povoados* in the settlement has never had an individual default or miss a loan payment, the reasons for this are explained in the section that discusses community organization. In addition, EMATER of Maranhão uses the settlement to test new innovations in crops (pineapple, and liquor production) and agricultural organization (formation of agricultural cooperatives the introduction of a new agrarian reform staff training program, Gespar) for the entire state. Entroncamento is currently receiving special pilot agricultural cooperative trainings.

Leaders and technicians most familiar with Entroncamento were consistently impressed by the success of Felipa, the most admired of the seven *povoados* in the settlement. Technicians at the extension agency, neighboring community members, non-governmental (NGO) agency workers, and local politicians praised the community for developing so quickly. As a black community considered the most successful *povoado* in a “model” agrarian reform settlement, Felipa represents a strong case of a successful black community in Maranhão.

Felipa and Santa Rosa together represent many of the political, economic, and geographic conditions facing black communities within the municipality. The two *povoados* represent the two types of areas within the municipality -- (1) those that are more remote and isolated, Felipa and (2) those that are more accessible and influenced by the state capital city of São Luis, Santa Rosa.

The rising significance of the highway system in this region has led to a dramatic shift of transportation and residents from the municipal capital to business and commercial zones at highway side posts. The impetus for this movement is a rising trucking and transportation industry and inadequate roads to the municipal capital town. Improvements to the municipal capital town road has lagged behind the BR 135 highway. The BR 135 is a major interstate highway, 15 kilometers from the municipal capital city. The road from the BR 135 to the municipal capital town is a semi-paved red dirt road. Small road-side locales have experienced rising small business growth, including a shift of several key communication and transport services from the municipal capital to locales outside of the capital because of the poor quality of the road into the municipal city. Workers who ride on the back of trucks or in cars with open windows have to bring an extra change of clothing because their clothes become heavily soiled from the red clay dust. Any materials on the back of the open trucks are also soiled because of the dust. Several businesses and transport lines have limited their service to the municipal city because it is so inconvenient. The main telephone post, *Telma*, has down-sized their office in the decaying municipal capital. Currently only two telephones are available in the capital, while at least three gas stations at the roadside Entroncamento offer telephone service. The declining significance of the municipal capital city can be further seen in bus transit. Bus service to the municipal capital has been cut to two buses per day, while express buses are offered from the road side center of Entroncamento to São Luis, several times per hour during peak times. The most effective way to get to São Luis from the municipal capital of Itapecuru-Mirim is to first take a cab through Itapecuru's dirt road to

the road side center of Entroncamento. Buses seldom stop in the city of Itapecuru-Mirim, because of road conditions the routes have been redesigned to pass the city and continue straight along the BR 135.

The municipality of Itapecuru-Mirim is relatively close to São Luis, only two municipalities and approximately 100 kilometers separate the area from the state capital city. Some *povoados* in Itapecuru-Mirim are easily accessible by major highways, like Santa Rosa. More remote communities can be virtually impossible to get to, in the case of Felipa, roads are so unstable that that they are impassable by cars or bicycles during the rainy seasons and difficult to traverse during dry periods. It takes only two hours to reach Santa Rosa by direct bus to São Luis, while Felipa, closer to the municipal capital and only 20 kilometers away takes an additional 40 minutes by car or bicycle during the dry season. The two areas represent the realities of the types of communities in the municipality, those that are accessible and influenced by the urban capital of São Luis, and others that are more remote and isolated. By investigating two styles of communities I hope to develop recommendations that can be helpful for a range of black areas in Itapecuru-Mirim.

2.2.b Municipality of Mirinzal (Frechal)

I first selected Frechal before arriving to Brazil, based on the recommendations of government officials from the small producer project, PAPP, who view Frechal as a model of culture-based development. NGO leaders and academics later confirmed the choice because of its historical, cultural, and political significance in the state. The leaders of

CCN told me that Frechal is valuable because it represents a community which has retained historical records about their fight against slavery and land battles. International researchers, anthropologists, and photographers have documented the history and internal organization of the *povoado*.¹¹ Frechal is so well known that almost every newspaper article or publication on black communities of Maranhão mentions the strong historical legacy of Frechal.¹² Frechal's organizational structure and history as an idyllic Brazilian community make it a good example of a successful intervention by a cultural development non-governmental organization (NGO).

2.3 Organizations and philosophies of development

The two main agencies represented in this research are a state wide cultural development NGO (*PVN*) and a municipal branch office of a state-wide agricultural extension agency (*EMATER Itapecuru-Mirim*). The organizations are alike in that they are charged with responsibility for providing training, outreach, and assistance to rural communities. The agencies have further similarities because they have chosen to concentrate their efforts on developing community institutions as a vital part of initiating projects. This section provides a brief history and background information on the agencies, staff members, and an overview of approaches to development.

¹¹ Frechal has hosted visiting researchers from Belgium (photojournalist), Germany (anthropologist), and the south of Brazil (anthropologists, photographers, community organizers, black movement historians and activists). The Beligan's work has appeared in several European museums and was featured in a French photo magazine. Periodicals include *Terra*. Other authors include: Wagner, 1997; O'Dwyer, 1995; CCN, 1987, 1988, 1989)

¹²Jornal O Imparcial.

2.3.a Introduction to PVN

PVN (*Projecto Vida de Negra*), the black life project, is a research collaboration between CCN (*Centro Cultura Negra*), the black cultural center, and SMDDH (*Sociedade Maranhense de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos*), Maranhão's society for human rights. CCN and SMDDH were both established in 1979, PVN is a collaborative project that represents the coming together of CCN and SMDDH. The organizations formed the partnership to share office staff, support, and resources. CCN was interested in scaling up and broadening the scope of their work from cultural activities to political and anthropological research. This is when leaders from CCN approached SMDDH to form a collaborative. PVN's original project received funding in 1989 from international supporters¹³ interested in recording geographic, anthropological, historical, and cultural aspects of black communities in Maranhão. Although the project officially began in the late-1980s the staff of PVN started their work in Frechal, as early as 1986, through the older institutional structure, CCN. PVN is a multi-cultural organization with a majority of black staff and is heavily connected to the ideals and ideologies of the black political movement in Brazil.

The values of PVN are to preserve culture and the cultural autonomy of black communities. These values attract staff members who have philosophies congruent with notions of community participation, many former staff members are trained community activists committed to supporting indigenous leadership. PVN's staff varies considerably

¹³ Initially the Ford Foundation, later Oxfam International.

depending on their funding.¹⁴ The instability of funding requires PVN to employ flexible staff patterns. One example of this flexibility is the frequent variation in staff size. The variation of staff size is quite different from the government agency EMATER which relies on long-term staff, this difference is compared in more detail in section 2.3c. In the early 1990s the staff of PVN went from approximately 25 staff members to 6 in a period of 2 years, because of funding decreases by the Ford Foundation for the PVN (*Projecto Vida de Negra*) report. The project currently employs 3 full time staff members. Highly unstable staffing patterns means that PVN utilizes workers from other parts of the SMDDH, the human rights organization of Maranhão to assist with specific projects. Many staff members work on contract or volunteer their services to the organization. Members tend to have similar training as lawyers, agricultural engineers, anthropologists, historians, photographers, educators, and community organizers. The original identification of black communities project started in 1986, and preceded the 1988 Constitutional Article 68, granting title to black areas. Many of the activists involved with documenting black lands for PVN were also involved in the political lobbying for the Constitutional Amendment. The PVN members were in the process of identifying black lands as a preliminary step of providing evidence for the legislation establishing land rights for black communities.

In 1986, the project's sole charge was to provide documentation for black areas in the state of Maranhão. The original PVN project includes the following skilled staff members

¹⁴ PVN has relied heavily on foreign donor agencies to provide funding. Initially Ford Foundation was a major donor, currently Oxfam is providing resources.

and components: (1) a lawyer led legal assessment of land, *parecer judico*, including information about land titles succession rights, size and boundaries of black lands; (2) an engineer led longitude and latitude map, *descriptivo memoria*; (3) an engineer led social economic assessment of the entire community, *levantamento socio-economico*, including , a) areas of cultivation for each family, *roças* , b) agricultural products and calendar, c) management of natural resources, d) members who are supported by projects, *benefiteiros*; (4) biologist led expert reports on the natural resources and foliage, *laudo biological* ; (5) anthropologist led anthropological survey, *laudo antropological*, assessing the cultural resources of the community. Currently the PVN project has broadened its approach and provides Afro-Brazilian history courses, shares organizational contacts to develop networks of black communities, provides grant writing assistance, and documents the history of black regions.

2.3.b. *Philosophy of PVN*

The desire to integrate community perspectives in leadership, planning, and assessments of projects is central to the mission of PVN. PVN is a part of the black movement (*movimento negro*) tradition in Brazil. In fact, the CCN, one of the two original co-founding partners of PVN, was born out of progressive grass-roots level action. The first action of the organization was a successful effort lobbying the mayor of São Luis to donate a former slave holding fort as a black cultural center. The cultural center serves a dual purpose for CCN. The organization sees the center first as a reparation for the injustice of slavery, and second as a monument to the victims of

slavery, broadly viewed as the ancestors of the black population of Maranhão. The logic of this argument as explained to me by CCN founding staff members is the following; historically all black people originally migrated to rural areas of Brazil to work on plantations because of slavery. As descendants of these original slaves black people all have a strong connection to rural life, and many urban people trace their immediate family members back to rural black communities.

Most of the black researchers in PVN come directly out of leadership and organizing positions from the battle for the cultural center, or other campaigns within the black movement. Non-black members tend to be influential members of liberal academic institutions or activist associations with significant community-level organizing experience. The progressive nature of the founding group has significantly influenced the organization's mission by keeping the organization focused on activist causes opposed to EMATER which learned to appreciate integrating community voice into their planning process after their failures.

Much of the information I am using to explain PVN comes from impressions I have generated from working closely with PVN staff, publications, and writings by the leaders of the PVN project. I was able to participate in a number of planning and information sessions in São Luis with core staff members and activists including a rural black community¹⁵ history seminar.

¹⁵ These rural black communities comprised of descendants of run away slaves are referred to as *Quilombos*.

2.3.c. *Introduction to EMATER-MA, Itapecuru-Mirim*

EMATER-MA of Itapecuru-Mirim, (*Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado do Maranhão*), the municipal affiliate of the statewide agricultural extension agency, works in both Felipa and Santa Rosa with five technical staff members, and four administrative support staff. Staff is based in a regional office in Itapecuru-Mirim and a satellite office in Entroncamento (with two part-time secretaries, one live-in house monitor, and one staff agronomist). EMATER-MA, Itapecuru-Mirim, is an agricultural extension agency with agronomists, agricultural and civil engineers who maintain cash crop and livestock projects, assist with initial project assessments, recommend proposals in the project selection process, assist with the purchase of agricultural inputs and livestock, and train residents about crop planting, fertilizers, and pest control.

EMATER agents implement large scale projects through (1) technician led site visits (2) or in group trainings at the agrarian reform office in the case of agrarian reform settlement, called *assentimentos*. The EMATER office is located in Entroncamento along the BR 135. Felipa is a part of the *assentimento*, Entroncamento, which was expropriated by INCRA in 1986. INCRA, the national land and agrarian reform institute (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agraria*), has been given responsibility for all land issues, while EMATER is responsible for productive aspects of the settlement, agricultural extension services and training.

EMATER-MA of Itapecuru-Mirim operates in two different ways in the communities it serves, one is the approach of Santa Rosa, the other is the approach of Felipa. The remainder of the section explains the approach being used in Santa Rosa, while the next section explains the approach used in Felipa. The Training and Visit (T&V) model of agricultural extension (Tendler, 1997) is an accurate description of the Santa Rosa model where agents deliver highly standardized services for the community with little input from community member clients, or with few opportunities to deviate from pre-prescribed plans. In Santa Rosa, EMATER has emphasized individual agents conducting meetings exclusively within the community, with few visits or meetings held off the Santa Rosa site. In these meetings the agent conducts and assessment with little community-level feedback.

In this research I am choosing to focus on the model of Felipa rather than Santa Rosa because it demonstrates more interesting findings because it shows how the agency was able to employ a particularly innovative approach. I have further chosen to focus on Felipa because the municipal level agency, EMATER-MA (Itapecuru-Mirim), is attempting to move towards the Felipa oriented approach for all communities they serve.

2.3.d. Philosophy of EMATER-MA, Itapecuru-Mirim

Gespar, a Scandinavian consensus and leadership approach for development, was introduced by several key upper Northeast Brazil regional level staff members of EMATER in the late 1980s. These regional leaders introduced front-line workers to the technique. The catalyst for the use of Gespar were several municipal level extension

agents who felt that the Gespar approach was particularly suited for Itapecuru-Mirim. Other regions of Maranhão, and Brazil have been exposed to Gespar, but the technique was not as widely adopted.

In Itapecuru-Mirim, two municipal-level agents promoted and encouraged the use of Gespar. EMATER agents at the Itapecuru-Mirim office are long term staff members, almost all of this office's agents have been with the organization for at least ten years. These agents felt that Gespar would enable them to deal with some of the personal disappointment agents were feeling because of project failures in Itapecuru-Mirim. The agents came together and found that projects that they had supported were not being implemented, and money was stolen, or the projects that were implemented were not the highest priority items for the community as a whole (project selection was benefiting the elites). In Itapecuru-Mirim several productive projects, such as (1) an irrigation system which was never operational because of shirking and (2) the purchase of tractor inputs which were later only used for transportation not agriculture, made the morale of EMATER agents particularly low. The Gespar approach was seen as a way to get the entire community involved in project planning and implementation instead of just community presidents to minimize the negative influence of self-interested leaders.

Additionally, Gespar became the method of choice for newly expropriated agrarian reform settlements in Itapecuru-Mirim for fiscal and managerial reasons. Gespar was encouraged by a budget crisis, and increasing financial concerns by the upper-level administrators of EMATER offices in the states of the Northeast of Brazil, because the

agency needed to increase the area that each employee worked to economize. As the agency faced the realization that they had less money EMATER felt the need to concentrate their resources in fewer areas. Limiting communities served to agrarian reform settlements was one way to maximize EMATER's scarce resources. Managerial agents were feeling more prepared to try new techniques because agents were frustrated by sluggish community responsiveness to projects, and unmet expectations in some of the areas of the municipality. All of these factors contributed to the heightened use of Gespar training techniques.

I am choosing to focus my analysis on the *practice* of Gespar rather than the theory, in other words looking at how EMATER-MA Itapecuru-Mirim implements their Gespar influenced approach. I am focusing on practice to account for the adaptations made by the municipal office staff. In Felipa's Gespar system, a team meets with leaders from the different sub-regions (*povoados*). This team of leaders and EMATER staff rely on consultants who come in for brief periods of time to instruct the community on specific topic areas. Presentations include, experts on cooperatives assisting with business plans, and quality control specialists helping to troubleshoot problems with the sugar cane liquor (*chachaça*) production facility. The emphasis of sessions is to build consensus and involve community members as much as possible in decision making about their own communities.

Members of Felipa say that they are comfortable discussing issues with EMATER agents because they view agents as helpful and generous people. I found the

overwhelming confidence and trust in the agency a strong testimonial of their success. As someone unconnected with EMATER I found Felipa's praise for EMATER particularly genuine. When I was first introduced to Felipa at a group meeting I asked, what was the most important event or institution in the community. The unanimous response was that it was the arrival of EMATER. Felipa residents so genuinely respected EMATER and what it had done to improve the community that they frequently mentioned the organization and EMATER agents in their day to day conversations.

Briefly EMATER's approach emphasizes that meetings are a time for community level leaders to develop their own speaking, listening, problem-solving, and consensus building skills. EMATER agents seldom guide leaders with straight-forward and simple directions, instead they ask a number of questions to encourage the leaders to think about the issues and solve their own problems. These techniques are explained in more detail in Section 3.

3. Strengthening community institutions

Both organizations EMATER and PVN foster cooperation within communities by minimizing hierarchy between agency staff and *povoado* members. The section provides examples which demonstrate the process of strengthening community institutions. First, I will briefly outline the structure of the argument. Through modeling cooperation between the agents and community members *povoados* strengthen their community institutions. Community members reciprocate resources, collaborate, and act collectively through a type of cooperative safety net. All members buy into this net by lending their

help. Consequently members benefit from the net because they can withdraw resources from their neighbors in times of need. Establishing a cooperative community is a building block for successful projects, because communities can begin to use the skills they learn from these experiences to successfully manage their projects. This net builds community institutions that can be used to mobilize areas in times of crisis, or to establish norms of behavior around projects.

3.1.a Minimizing hierarchy between agent and community: EMATER

The staff of EMATER view themselves as organizers and trainers interested in developing consensus, leadership, and local capacity. Group trainings emphasize values and activities which build relations that can be utilized in times of crisis, rather than specific technical skills. The agents try their best to minimize hierarchy between themselves and the community.

For example, agents troubleshoot why the sugar cane liquor quality, *chachaça*, has decreased with the community instead of coming to the community with “new” pre-determined approaches for fabricating the alcohol. Trainings emphasize group problem solving skills. Sessions are generally held quarterly although, during the implementation of new projects meetings may be as frequent as once a week, this latter model was used in the cooperative training sessions I observed.

Meetings of the entire settlement of Entroncamento, which Felipa is a part of, have at least two representatives from each *povoado*. All community members may sit in as representatives, but an officer of the community, generally the president is always

present. Few women are represented at meetings, less than 10% of community representatives at general meetings were female. None of the officers present were women. Although women are not always present in the sessions -- women within the community are active and knowledgeable about the events of the sessions. One of the barriers of access for women was the length of the meetings. Women are often unable to attend meetings because of pressures to prepare meals for the family and care for the children. Although *povoado* officers are the official representatives of the smaller communities, the larger *assentimento* meetings are comprised of a diverse group of community leaders. Sessions are day-long which prevent some leaders from attending all of the meetings, especially during the harvest season. Instead of attending all of the sessions, leaders often send other interested community members in their place. Communities always had at least two representatives, although the numbers of outsiders greatly increased when meetings are held in an community meeting space like a school or festival house, opposed to the EMATER agency office in Entroncamento. Generally, presidents attend most meetings, although this is not always the case. The rotation of substitute "representatives," contributes to more community members having information about the events of the meeting, therefore one leader is unable to hoard information. An accountability mechanism has been established because many members of Felipa follow the events of Entroncamento and participate in the discussions, so leader representatives are forced to be accountable to the community. One example of the accuracy and accountability representatives must bring back to the community is the required report-back Felipa representatives make after the *assentimento*-wide meetings. In a Felipa

meeting two women residents asked very direct questions at the report back session. A result of this vigorous question time is that representatives must be prepared and focused in both the local meetings in Frechal, as well as in the cooperative meetings with the entire *assentimento*.

Nuts and bolts technical information is disseminated in several on-site meetings held approximately four times a year, in Felipa they occur during the dry season because of road flooding. On-site meetings cover the specifics of agricultural production and project difficulties arising from pests or disease. Two examples of on-site trainings are the livestock crisis in the late 1980s, when EMATER hired a veterinarian to come to the community to teach how to vaccinate animals, and the banana pest invasion in the early 1990s, when EMATER agents explained how to administer pesticides to crops.

Meetings are a time for leaders to develop their speaking, listening, and consensus building skills. Sessions follow a mutually agreed upon agenda, which is presented to meeting participants in the first few minutes of the session. Additions to the agenda are added by participants. In times of conflict about the decision-making process, people break into small groups, led by community level office holding (president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) facilitators. These small groups are joined again with large groups where individual leaders report back on the group discussion, allowing an opportunity for members to make addendums or corrections to the speaker's report back. Before meetings the EMATER agents make very careful outlines of what the meeting will cover, to help community chosen facilitators lead the larger group. Flow-charts of the different

project implementation phases being considered are mapped out. In addition, if a large group facilitator is stuck EMATER agents cautiously intervene. With this goal in mind, EMATER agents seldom guide leaders with straight-forward and simple directions, instead they ask a number of questions to encourage the leader to think about the issue. The process encourages people to realize the answer to a problem, instead of being given the answer.

One example of several of these techniques occurring simultaneously is a cooperative meeting held with the large group of *assentimento* representatives. This particular meeting drew a large number of representatives from each community because it was held on site in Jaibara (one of the *povoados* within the agrarian reform settlements). The host community had as many as fifteen representatives, with the highest percentage of women, approximately 30% of meeting participants, compared with 10% at the earlier meeting I observed. Women participants from Jaibara were able to travel back and forth from their homes throughout the day to take care of children and housework, which accounts for their higher level of participation. Forming a cooperative was considered an interesting and controversial topic by many and contributed to the large turnout. In this meeting, agents presented a cooperative plan to the community, illustrated by an elaborate and colorful flip chart. The agent then explained the cooperative in small easily digestible chunks. After meeting in groups of approximately ten members, leader facilitators reported their understanding of specific questions about the cooperative. The *povoado* president of Oitero, and the president of the entire *assentimento*, volunteered to

summarize questions and the plan at the end of the meeting. The plan had so many parts that the president asked EMATER agents for clarification on a number of points as he presented. Instead of giving direct answers agents encouraged him to reconsider the charts which had been created originally and led him to ask the larger group of *assentimento* representatives for support. Questions were almost always directed to the larger group of participants. Agents did not readily give answers instead they asked for others to contribute. This carefully implemented direction by EMATER agents preserves the integrity and respect of community members and minimizes the authority, or hierarchy of the agents' voice. Without the agent's voice as the dominant authority in meetings many answers to questions are entertained and considered. Allowing *povoado* presidents to lead the full meeting discussions further demonstrates the willingness of EMATER agents to rotate leaders and not dominate the discussion. Agents encourage community leaders to participate in all aspects of the meeting. In addition to leading core aspects of the meeting, *assentimento* members are also responsible for taking notes on large flip charts in the front of the room. These participant generated notes serve as the permanent record of the discussion. Notes are referred to in later sessions and key sheets are posted in the EMATER Entroncamento office.

One particularly illustrative example of breaking hierarchical relations between agents and community members occurred in a meeting that a well building contractor interrupted to get signatures for his contract. The contractor did not care that he had created a disruption, in fact he seemed to be using the interruption as a way to intimidate the

meeting participants. A female EMATER agent left the room to go to an adjoining area, because she appeared frustrated by the contractor. When the contractor finally received the necessary signatures for his work, he tried to convince the leaders to move the site for the proposed well. He preferred to move the well to a location that was closer to the road and easier to build. In exchange for this maneuver he promised to give the leaders the price difference between the proposed and actual costs. The community leaders looked confused and uncertain about what to do. No decision was made and eventually the contractor left. When the agricultural extension agent returned she began asking the community a litany of questions about the effect of the well site change on the production of sugar cane liquor in the settlement. She then gave several examples of what happened in other communities when wells were moved by contractors and the wells were rendered useless to the community because they were too far away from the liquor processing facility. This discussion set off a brief debate. The dialogue was the agent's way of trying to get the community to see all of the consequences of the proposed project modification. In some way it was leading, because it was obvious that she was furious about the contractor's proposal, but the incident marks an interesting departure from what one assumes a more educated professional agent would do. It would have been very easy for her to assert her influence over the community by establishing her position of authority. Instead of using her expert status to *tell* the community what to do, the agent tried to let the settlement leaders make up their own mind about the situation, utilizing more of an organizer's approach to problem solving enabling the *povoado* leaders to learn how to think about their problems.

The EMATER-MA sessions do not just have interesting opening presentations and events throughout the meetings, they also close very enthusiastically. One meeting I watched, which had been particularly difficult for leaders, ended with an agent demonstrating the importance of planning and creating a vision for the future. He illustrated his point with three large pictures of a man with a boat and a short three or four word sentence underneath each picture. He started by asking the group to identify the different aspects of the picture and tell what they thought the specific pictures might mean. Finally, the agent read the slogans aloud. This technique was particularly astute because many of the leaders present are illiterate, and one of the concerns the leaders emphasized is that the settlement as a whole is not educated enough to run an agricultural cooperative. By showing his values with pictures and words, the agent was certain that the message of planning for the future would be understood by all of the meeting participants, regardless of whether they could read or not. In this case the agent also was able to take the literacy obstacle and minimize it by conveying his information in multiple mediums (pictures, words, oral story-telling, and reflection) to ensure that the entire group understood.

At the close of all the meetings I noticed the emphasis of building coalitions between agents and communities. At the closing the entire collective, including the staff, sing and sometimes even dance together. Suggestions for songs and activities are made by both community members and agents. Typically songs are organizing or religious songs about

poverty and life in the Northeast. Agents enthusiastically join in and occasionally sing solos.

The communities' have a non-coercive relationship with EMATER where they actively choose to follow the advice of EMATER agents. When agents make suggestions to residents about which pesticides or fertilizers to purchase the community has many options. Communities have the autonomy to follow through on the advice with few repercussions if they decide to completely ignore suggestions because agents seldom visit the *povoados*. Despite Felipa's freedom to ignore agent's suggestions residents are extremely cooperative and follow through on agent's advice. For example, *povoado* members purchased expensive chemical preparations when animals and crops were unhealthy, in both the banana and cattle health projects. Further, community members have open channels of communication with EMATER agents. According to community members when they have problems with their crops their first plan of action is to talk with agents.

3.1.b. Minimizing hierarchy between agent and community: PVN

The values of PVN are to preserve culture and the autonomy of black communities. These values attract staff members interested in promoting community participation, many former staff members are trained community activists who have specialized in understanding the empowerment needs of black communities. The organization attempts to make little distinction between staff members and the community being served. Several community leaders have become staff at PVN, through participation in leadership training

or black history workshops. Staff with a deep understanding of the community are particularly sensitive to understanding how to minimize hierarchies between workers and community members. There is a sense of sameness and respect in the way that PVN operates. Workers and representatives from PVN capitalize on sameness between community and staff, by emphasizing that staff members are from black communities, in the case of black workers, or that staff respects the community, in the case of non-black workers. Black and non-black staff respect community structures and have cordial relations with black elders and their same age peers in the community. The connection between staff and the community is so tightly knit that elders in *povoados* view staff members almost as a network of extended family members. One of the black staff members, Ana Amelia, is viewed as a type of daughter to Frechal by many of the elders because she “respects and dedicates herself” to their concerns.

Black staff members are viewed as being very trusted within the community, while non-black staffers also retain a similar position. Why does this happen? First, non-black staff members are also considered respectful of the community by Frechal. Some of this sensitivity stems from the fact that many of the visitors to Frechal, are anthropologists and historians, who focus their work on preserving the culture that already exists in the communities. Consequently non-black staff tend to have an admiration for the lifestyle and people who live in the communities. The admiration for black communities is a result of staff member self selection. Someone who is not respectful of rural black communities, will not choose to work with PVN for little or no compensation and in harsh working

conditions. Utilizing a tight network of organizations also ensures that disrespectful workers and volunteers are weeded out of positions. I asked several PVN staff members if they ever had a problem with outsiders attempting to exploit communities. Several thought that the question was ridiculous and could not understand how exploitation could happen because of the dedication of their staff members and volunteers.

In order to probe further in the question of exploitation by agents I relayed a story which was a prominent debate within African-American communities in the U.S. several years ago. An artist of European ancestry involved in photographing prominent African-American women for a calendar entitled "I Dream a World," set-off an outcry and debate within the black American community. There were two interconnected parts of the debate, first some African-Americans felt that the white photographer was exploiting black people because he did not have the cultural information necessary to make these photos, and second, some thought that his large profits from the sale of the calendar represented the evidence of his desire to exploit the community. This story of a photographer further parallels the events in Frechal because several photographers have worked extensively documenting the community members and life in Frechal and are now generating profits from their work. A Belgian woman's photos of Frechal have appeared throughout European photo exhibits and magazines, and a number of white Brazilians' photos of Frechal have appeared in national publications and periodicals. After discussing the story and drawing references to the American example I was told that the question of whether a non-black worker was an appropriate staff person within black

communities was a non-issue in Frechal because PVN protected the values of Frechal and would not let people who did not support the values of the organization or the community into the *povoado*. According to PVN, they are able to screen, and assess people's interests before they even let outsiders enter the community. When I asked Frechal a similar question about their feelings towards the research that frequent the area they responded similarly. Frechal said that PVN is able to screen and ensure that people who come into the community are sensitive to Frechal's culture.

3.2 Effectively modeling community participation

EMATER is able to relate to the community using consensus and participation building approaches. According to Felipa residents, EMATER has clearly caused community cooperation and leadership to grow within the community.

The net of community cooperation is a relatively recent phenomenon in Felipa. Before the incorporation of Felipa into the agrarian reform settlement members did not have social support, community members were very individualistic and community members did not come together to solve their collective community problems, like the extreme poverty that they faced, the violent neighboring land conflicts, rapid urban migration, or the health problems of many members of the community. One of the main reasons for the lack of social support structures was that the community was being ripped apart by an internal family class conflict. Several siblings controlled the entire land while the rest of the community was delegated to land-less laborer status. Many residents left Felipa to find better opportunities in the city, because they were unable to support themselves.

Many agents feel that the organizational success of Felipa is non-replicable because few other areas have strong patterns of cooperation like Felipa. According to agents the community has always been better able to allocate their fields and cooperate on the harvest than other communities in the settlement. Surprisingly, the cohesiveness that EMATER workers attribute to history or culture, is actually, according to the community of Felipa, a result of EMATER's intervention in Felipa. When I later pushed agents to be more specific about Felipa's strong patterns of cooperation they would say that the true success of Felipa lies in the work patterns of the community, Felipans collectively harvest and plant crops. Although upon reflection many agents could name other communities that also harvested together in Itapecuru-Mirim. The participatory tools agents taught Felipa caused the community dwellers to work together, and create their own cooperative net—which has spill over effects into how they collectively organize their agricultural production. As a result, the elder siblings began to die and were not replaced because their control diminished as residents learned to act collectively. Before the arrival of EMATER in 1986 the community was very divided by class leading to urban out-migration, a decade later (1996) the community is now united. Several members who left for the city have moved back to the community and the migration for work pattern has been reversed. Residents now hire urban commuters to work as day laborers on plots of Felipa land.

The consensus building model in meetings significantly affects the way community-level leaders organize within their community. The current president is excited by the prospect of forming an agricultural cooperative. I asked him why the community was

adopting the agricultural cooperative so slowly if it was such a good idea. He explained to me that it was necessary that every member of the community support the cooperative in order for them to implement it. In other words, Felipa needed to reach a consensus.

When I asked if he had talked with the few dissenting members of the community he said, “yes,” but emphasized that according to the training he had been receiving with EMATER it was necessary for the individuals to make up their own mind based on the available information. The president was willing to wait and hold off on the proposal until everyone voluntarily understood and supported the value in the proposed agricultural cooperative. Later, he told me that he had learned the importance of this consensus building technique as a facilitator and participant in EMATER meetings.

The remarkable way residents of Felipa support one another in times of need is a demonstration of the effectiveness of the trainings they are receiving. There is also mounting evidence that the training has enabled the communities to develop institutions which can help to establish effective norms of collective behavior. Several examples illustrate this point. First, a man in Felipa was recently involved in a bicycle accident. As a result of his accident he is unable to walk, must use crutches, and cannot work in the fields. Felipa has volunteered to set aside a portion of their crops to support his family while the man recovers the set aside is a voluntary amount and varies based on individual household production. Additionally, individuals take turns assisting him with trips to the market, to vend the donated crops and purchase items for his household. Second, Felipa neighbors also set aside a portion of their crops for the association president in a similar

structure because they recognize that he is unable to take care of all of his work because of frequent agrarian reform settlement meetings. These two examples are only small illustrations of a larger scheme of community cooperation which has led to the establishment of community norms for behavior, and community institutions which are effective channels for problem solving. The cooperative net has similar arrangements for widows, the elderly, and the infirm. These newly created post-EMATER structures in Felipa provide an opportunity for residents to practice participation.

Frechal is a very clear example of community member cooperation, although it is not as clear that PVN, the outside agent, created this cooperation as in the Felipa case. According to several elder leaders of Frechal the agency's intervention strengthened rapidly declining levels of cooperation within the community. These Frechal leaders explained that in the late 1980s Frechal was in the process of losing their strong community organization as young people fled to the city and became urbanized and began to "forget the ways of the ancestors." The introduction of history and cultural training of PVN re-infused the diminishing values to young people who were becoming heavily influenced by less community centered values.

One of the most important examples of cooperation which has led to the creation of community institutions of support is the sharing of resources between one area with access to electricity and another area without access. One part of Frechal does not have electricity and the neighbors across the river invite the other part of the community into their homes to watch television and store perishable foods in the refrigerator. The same

sharing of material resources, the television and the refrigerator, exists in a similar way in Felipa. Poor members of Felipa who cannot afford expensive durable appliances, use the appliances of their neighbors. I noticed that the refrigerator at the house of one leader in Felipa was seen as a form of common property. Neighbors come in and out of the house at will to get their food regardless of whether family members are in the house to let them in. Frechal and Felipa have both established an open door policy with respect to their individually purchased refrigerators. In general, community members feel free to go into each other's homes when the owners of the house are not present is further evidence of their trust of one another and faith in the community generated norms of behavior. Before community members viewed property much more individualistically, currently individual property is viewed communally.

3.3 Strength of Community Organization: Ability to handle conflict

The two communities of Felipa and Frechal demonstrate that residents are able to take their responsibility for projects to a higher level managing conflict and altering projects to meet community needs. For example, in Felipa residents exhibit an entrepreneurial spirit and boldly troubleshoot production problems. In Frechal, community members are prepared to fight for their interests by holding their ground and ensuring that development plans maximize their community's interest.

In a brainstorming activity I watched Felipa participate in at Entroncamento, agents ask members to list the barriers they face in improving the quality of their *chachaça*, sugar cane liquor. Quality is a major concern for liquor production because it affects the

market price of the good. Members listed concerns about quality that were unknown to agents. The openness of the meeting created several unexpected answers which were extremely specific to the community. *Assentimento* members even addressed ways in which some individuals worked in the plant. For example, when several community workers are on duty they do not properly clean their work area or their equipment. The carelessness of these workers lead to a snowball effect on the quality of production because the workers that followed these shifts spent a large share of their time doing tasks which had been neglected or performed shoddily. The perspective of the community is vital to understanding how to improve the quality of their *chachaça* because as this example illustrates one shift had an effect on the entire production process. Without the community's input agents would never have known about the problem. Subsequently, the community generated recommendations would have been missed if agents relied purely on a sporadic expert observation, instead of the feedback of the community member workers. In Felipa, as for the agrarian reform settlement as a whole, community members are asked to outline their own problems and obstacles which prevent the successful implementation of projects, without micro-management by agents.

Community holding traditional staff roles

The instability of funding in PVN leads the organization to be highly flexible because PVN relies on part time consultants and volunteer staff from their network of consultants. These temporary staff come to communities for brief periods of time to instruct the community on specific topic areas. For example, a black women's health

collective from Brasilia¹⁶ conducted a workshop on women's health, nutrition, and traditional healing practices, and historians from the south of Brazil teach black history at the community level.

Collaborating with so many different actors leads the organization to have limited information about specific events within the community. The PVN project mission is becoming broader because the history and cultural aspects of the community have already been documented. Frechal currently needs more technically trained development staff. As the pressures for more staff escalate because of decreased donor support, principally from the Ford Foundation, the agency needs to figure out how to creatively find new staff. PVN is forced to draw on a pool of outside workers. Part-time consultants and volunteers from SMDDH and other progressive organizations are the only way to meet the additional burdens. These volunteers may be talented but frequently know little specific information about Frechal.

In Frechal consultants received very little direct supervision from the PVN office. As a result of budget problems and overworked NGO staff patterns, PVN workers are seldom able to send a full-time paid staff representative with the volunteers or consultants. Although despite the frequent turnover with volunteers and part-time staff, PVN still retains its relationship with the community. This happens because consultants are highly respected by the community because they are dedicated to rural black communities, their motivation for working in Frechal is personal satisfaction, these

¹⁶ Representatives of the *Grupo de Mulheres Negras Mãe Andresa*.

volunteer or part-time workers seldom receive compensation for the work that they do, or if they do receive compensation it is not equivalent to the amount of time that they work.

As Frechal looks towards solving their present and future concerns, the community requires more assistance with grants and economic development. Staff with less information *must* rely more heavily on community knowledge and gain understanding through valuable exchanges with residents. These meetings depend on the community's input. In the meeting that I observed in Frechal the discussion revolved around the allocation of UNICEF funds. Agronomists from SMDDH (the human rights society) led the session and advised the community about different paths for development. These volunteers stopped off for a few days on their way to another community meeting a few hours away. The volunteer agents did not have a well established relationship with the community and they were dependent on community members to provide information about specific crops and Frechal's internal system of organization. The community was completely engaged, involved, and informed in the planning process. Community members seem to be very confident of their knowledge of their own community and in Frechal leaders often corrected the "expert representatives," if they made a mistake in describing Frechal's system, or reminded agents that there were community mechanisms for decision making that needed to be respected.

I observed that when the consultants of SMDDH tried to influence Frechal, community members were able to effectively intervene. The intervention technique members used was to state that all community members were not present, therefore no

decision could be made because there was incomplete information about the needs of the group. The community then suggested reconvening several weeks later with a larger group. This type of intervention technique was particularly astute because it was a demonstration of the communities' understanding of the goals of the NGO—to engage the community in planning implementation and evaluation. The residents of Frechal are able to communicate with the NGO using the language of the NGO to take back their power in a situation which was becoming unbalanced by asserting their “expert” status and reminding consultants of the community's role in the planning process. Frechal community members are experts of their own condition who are aware of their status and are confident enough to remind outsiders who attempt to encroach on their status.

Community members as advocates

In Felipa, members rely on one another to disseminate information about projects. This has create channels for community members to debate plans and take and active role in advocating for their future. Representatives at the *assentimento* meetings are typically community officers. In Felipa, the president generally attends because the *povoado* contributes virtually all of the sugar cane they produce for the sugar cane liquor (*chachaça*) plant through their chief representative. The second delegate is an interested community member. The rotation of substitute “representatives,” contributes to more community members having information about the events of the meeting, therefore one leader is unable to horde information from other members. The substitution of members began when *povoado* leaders were unable to attend all of the meetings. Members who

attend meetings are required by both EMATER and their constituents to hold a community level meeting to report key information. Many residents follow the events of the settlement so closely that they are able to ask specific and difficult questions of their representatives. After a debriefing on a agricultural cooperative meeting I watched residents of Felipa ask very informed questions about the cooperative structure to their meeting representatives. The representatives were stumped by the questions about the feasibility of the cooperative. Specifically, the most difficult question was how Felipa could avoid repeating the failures of several neighbors who had already initiated a cooperative agreement. Additional concerns arising from the group included the fear that the community was not literate or educated enough to handle complicated bookkeeping necessary for a cooperative, and some members' satisfaction with the current system of each individual producing and vending for his or her family. In the subsequent week, the leaders of Felipa shared this information with the larger *assentimento* -wide group for discussion.

The importance of community perspectives in the decision-making process is an important factor in explaining Felipa's success. I talked with representatives from other *povoados* in the agrarian reform settlement and took a day trip to visit the other black community in the assentimento, Oitero. Felipa's most successful cash crop is pineapple, so I was particularly interested in learning about the experiences of other *povoados* who produced pineapples through EMATER's assistance projects. During this day trip to the other black neighboring region I was told that Outiero hated growing pineapples

because it was arduous and dangerous work. The sharp spines of pineapple makes the harvesting and planting of pineapple complicated. Pineapple production requires the use of heavy weight clothing, gloves, boots, and protective goggles. Residents felt that they would be more adept at growing watermelons, like several non-assentimento neighbors down the road. When I returned to Felipa, I asked why they were so enthusiastic about their pineapple production, and were willing to don heavyweight clothes and subject themselves to the dangerous working conditions of pineapple harvesting. They explained that they were engaged in the project because they were integrated in the planning process, and were able to influence what plants they produced, they requested pineapples. Evidence of how Felipa learned to work with the EMATER agency can be seen in the allocation of agricultural projects in the region. In 1986, Felipa concentrated principally on subsistence crops (rice, corn, and manioc), with assistance from Banco do Brasil's PROCERA credit program, these crops continued to remain the primary agricultural production until 1991. In 1991, Banco do Nordeste gave assistance for 12 producers of beans and banana, using the recommendations and technical assistance of EMATER-MA. In 1992, a cattle project began with 15 producers (30 head of cattle, 16 bulls and 14 calves). The first year of the project 4 animals died, and the community began to voice their concerns about the project because the animals were useless to a community with a high level of lactose intolerance, and little need for animal traction or transport. These funds were later redirected for cash crops. The community managed to shift the crops of the project to represent their needs by putting pressure on agents, and continuing to exert a large effort, even with less desirable projects. In 1993, EMATER

helped to administer the Banco do Nordeste (BNB) funds in three crops: banana (19 producers), sugar cane (17 producers), pineapple (13 producers). Felipa struggled to make these projects successful, but still thought that they would be better suited to the less perishable pineapple production. Felipans found that bananas were too weak because they had to be sold quickly after harvesting and were susceptible to pests and disease. Further bananas did not earn a high price in the market. In 1994, 3 more pineapple producers were added while banana production fell by 11 producers and sugar cane fell by 19 producers. This change represents Felipa's growing interest in pineapple, and their growing capacity to advocate for their needs. The increase of 3 pineapple producers in and of itself does not adequately reflect the growth of employment in pineapple production, because additional members of the community were hired by producers. Meaning that, projects grew in number of laborers, but additional producers were not added to the project rosters.

Originally EMATER started with banana production, Felipa's calculated strategy to grow pineapple was effective because Felipa residents dialogued with agents and structured their argument for pineapple production, while simultaneously committing themselves to work hard to make the banana project a success. Felipa residents encouraged EMATER agents to decrease the banana project and add more funds for pineapple. The current project is almost entirely for pineapple producers. The exchange of information between Felipa and EMATER agents has led the community to become more proactive and engaged in their development, and has created opportunities for them

to become more strategic about how they interact with the EMATER agency to create opportunities for success.

4. Building community pride by eliminating community perceived barriers to action

One of the main observations in this research is that it is not necessary for specific black approaches to be employed for success, although approaches employed should be adaptable and recognize barriers specific black communities may face. Although projects employed by EMATER were geared towards all types of communities within the municipality, the program had specific qualities which enabled black communities to succeed and demonstrate pride for their community. In Felipa, the use of objective criteria encouraged the creation of Felipa's internal institutions to regulate and increase the quality of participation in EMATER agricultural production projects. In Frechal, PVN, was able to reinvent the notion of being a black community, changing it from a label of embarrassment and shame to an expression of pride, which led to increased political mobilization.

All of the communities I visited had a deep understanding and consciousness about their "blackness." This identity was largely shaped by a perception of higher levels of scrutiny by non-black outsiders. Many felt that what they did was watched and if what they did was not successful they would be plagued by additional stereotypes.

Communities felt that as black areas they had little room to hide and were forced to be "representative" of all black people. Felipa expressed their identity through a fear that they would receive fewer chances for development as a black community, and therefore had to maximize their project resources, while Frechal used their black identity to gain

cultural pride and use stories of ancestors as motivation to launch a highly political land battle.

4.1a Building pride, transforming the impact of scrutiny in black communities: Felipa

Felipa’s identity as a black community is very important in understanding how they were able to effectively maximize the development opportunities introduced by EMATER. Felipa is a small and simple community with low levels of literacy. Less than half of the adults can read or write, and many considered literate can read and write little more than their names.¹⁷ Additionally, the community had no experience with politicians or the politics of project implementation. Despite these limitations the community is an exemplary community, within a “model” *assentimento*, why?

Felipa represents an interesting case of rapid development. The community had not received development assistance before the late 1980s, but were motivated to maximize opportunities presented to them because they felt an added burden to be successful as a black community within larger predominantly non-black *assentimento*. Their awareness of the racism they face, or potentially may face, caused them to feel that they must perform at a higher level than their non-black neighbors. Felipa residents feel that the reason that they had not benefited from previous project funding was because they are black. Ultimately the community feels that they are less likely to receive support if they do not perform well. Felipa also feels very “grateful,” and are more appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the *assentimento* than the other black and non-black

¹⁷ Statistics are from EMATER evaluation and project records, where more than half signed of project beneficiaries project reports and legal documentation with a finger print.

communities that I observed. I think that this is due in part to the isolation of Felipa, because the *povoado* is not very accessible there are few outsiders who come to visit. This isolation helps to shield the community from newcomers, as well as from opportunities for development. When someone does come to the community, Felipa residents are genuinely appreciative of the effort that the person made to get to their area. Being isolated also means that some outsiders think that the community is backwards, because they are in a remote area and black. When Felipa was given a mechanism to prove their worth to outsiders they created internal institutions to ensure that development opportunities were maximized.

According to area leaders the awareness of higher levels of scrutiny was recognized as early as the first loan program in 1986 the Banco do Brazil PROCERA credit for rice, corn and manioc. Felipa has never had a community member default or make late payments for credit. Felipa banded together and decided under the direction of the first association president Benedicto, that they would take the new project administered by EMATER and INCRA (PROCERA credit), as seriously as possible because they were afraid that this first chance to work with an outside agency, EMATER, could be their last if Felipa did not perform well. This success is based in part on Felipa's no-default rate on their loans. The rate is achieved through group pressure exerted on individuals who seem likely to default. Failure of one person to make their payment is viewed as a failure for the entire community. According, to the first president of Felipa, members know that they have to meet financial responsibilities, there is no other alternative Felipa

has implemented an internal no-default tolerance policy. Felipa has effectively established norms of behavior around projects which has improved the quality of participation by individuals and results in benefits for the collective as a whole.

The other black community in Entroncamento, named Oitero, is having more difficulties with the impact of racism, which I will now contrast. By being extremely successful in comparison to their agrarian reform settlement neighbors,¹⁸ has enabled Felipa to cushion itself from negative stereotypes about black communities. Based on some very preliminary impressions of Oitero I tend to think that the community has internalized racist stereotypes. One telling example is that despite the fact that I spent only one day and one night in the community Oitero is the only community that I visited where I found black people insulting one another with racial slurs. As I was touring a agricultural site several younger men teased one another about being “so black and ugly.” These residents of Oitero also criticized Nigerian and black Brazilian soccer players for their physical appearance, slurs included remarks about their skin color, hair texture, and comparisons between body structure and those of animals. I did not see any of this type of behavior in Felipa where I spent considerably more time. Felipa residents took the scrutiny and changed it into a motivating factor, while Oitero seemed to stagnate and internalize the racism that they faced.

¹⁸ The agrarian reform settlement (assentimento) of Entroncamento is known as one of the two most successful settlements in the state of Maranhão. Felipa is considered the most successful community in Entroncamento based on improvements in quality of life, and agricultural production. In addition, a trend towards out-migration to cities has been halted, and residents of Felipa now hire urban commuters to work their land.

Felipa's positive internal institutions of cooperation are being noticed by government agencies and neighbors. Projects which the community had to wait years for approval are completed rapidly because of Felipa's reputation of being a community that works well together. Currently, a home building project is being implemented because Felipa residents told EMATER agents that an old house had collapsed. EMATER agents supported the community, by notifying INCRA to act quickly to remedy the situation. A road project is also being established because the community has a great reputation in the area. Felipa's neighbors are taking an interest in the *povoado* and have begun to collaborate on several events with Felipa, including several festivals with Felipa's recently revised Afro-Brazilian music and dance presentation the *Tambor de Creole*.

4.1b Building pride, transforming the impact of scrutiny in black communities: Frechal

Frechal members suffered from violence and discrimination by nearby municipal capital politicians and landowners during the land conflict. Residents were in a period of low self-esteem when PVN entered the community. The intervention of PVN instilled a sense of pride in community members, and even managed to change some of their external critics into supporters.

The pressure of perceived racism causes the community to perform responsively to projects. In Frechal the community felt that they received their "consciousness" from PVN which gave them a way to deal with the racism that they were facing, through the re-telling and re-interpretation of community stories spurred by the PVN project. CCN emphasizes documenting the history of the area and the strength of Frechal's founding

members. Understanding and discussing the hardships that earlier community leaders experienced gave Frechal members the motivation to prove themselves and fight the racism that they faced by being as vigilant as their ancestors.

Black history programming by PVN, originated with a project to record the history of the community, and current activities include seminars, and research about the community. The information community members receive has “given them strength to survive their racism because they have learned about the strength of their ancestors” which sustained them through land conflicts and a municipal battle for funding allocated by the state. Major obstacles to progress in Frechal came from two powerful external entities according to the community, Magna Cruz, the land owner of the land which they were occupying without title, and the mayor of Itapecuru-Mirim. When Frechal started learning about the “strength of their ancestors,” they then began to combat racism by using cultural pride and preservation of their culture to develop internal institutions for political organizing. Some of the values and actions that Frechal has identified as ways of the “ancestors” include, (1) working very hard, (2) respecting all people and nature (men discussed respect for women, women discussed respect for children, they all talked about living in harmony with nature), (3) building consensus at meetings, and (4) having cultural pride exhibited through activism fighting racism. Additionally, neighboring communities have changed their perceptions of the black people who live in Frechal. Frechal residents are currently considered exemplary and hard working, in comparison with other nearby residents of black communities who are still considered substandard and lazy by some

inhabitants of the municipal town of Mirinzal, because they have not over-achieved within the municipality or garnered the support and attention of outsiders or the media, in the same way that Frechal has been able to do.

Frechal's cultural pride and fortification of internal institutions is an important factor for understanding the mayor's decision to support Frechal in a fight against a wealthy land owner. In fact, the white mayor of the municipality told me how proud he was of the success of Frechal. Originally the mayor did not support the *povoado*, and according to the residents of Frechal, they felt that he had acted against them in a racist and un-supportive way by not taking an interest in their earlier problems. The decision to support Frechal in their land battles and in later cultural events was a political one, according to residents of the municipal capital. The mayor felt that although Frechal was a black community he would be able to gain non-black supporters by joining their land struggle because Frechal represented a model land-less, *sem terra*, community.

In 1989, Thomas Magno Cruz.¹⁹ put the land up for sale and hired gunmen (*pistoleros*) to terrorize local people and force them to vacate the land. Community members felt that Magno Cruz had bought the land to use as an ultra-modern farm. They thought that he was disappointed after realizing that his investment dreams were not possible because descendants of slaves had been peacefully living and controlling the land for centuries without intervention from the previous landowners.²⁰ In his anger Magno Cruz lashed out to maximize his investment. First he used the gunmen. Later, he

¹⁹ Thomas Magno Cruz, owner of the Redimix cement company in São Paulo.

²⁰ Frechal was founded in 1792, and is one of the first identified black lands in the Maranhão region.

followed with a plan to increase the value of his property by running power lines to the eight bedroom and bath former slave owner's plantation house. Magno Cruz paid for electricity, in the remote part of the land where the fazenda was located, under the condition that residents be denied access to it. The power company later reconsidered because of pressure by the black resident's association, some areas surrounding the *fazenda* currently have electricity. By January of 1997, the power company planned to work in conjunction with the resident's association to install electricity in all homes at a cost to the homeowners association of Frechal.

The mayor has become so outwardly supportive of the area that his name appears as one of the financial supporters for the Frechal founders day festival. The newly found pride has a positive reputation throughout the municipality. I observed a pull cart operator leap from his cart to stop and ask members of Frechal for assistance when his bull was behaving stubbornly. The cart operator asked what techniques they used in Frechal, because he felt that they were more advanced in getting animals to cooperate and respond to their owners. Changing the perceptions of Frechal members and outsiders is a valuable part of development because it has transformed being black into a source of pride for the residents.

5.0 Conclusions

The case of Felipa presents a refreshing example of how government agencies do not need to alter their scope of projects, or change staff to provide extraordinary opportunities for black communities. Typically, non-governmental organizations are

given responsibility for empowerment and community building programs, while governments have been considered effective at larger-scale, standardized impersonal projects, which lack a need for cultural sensitivity. The cases illustrate that government agencies are capable of implementing community-building approaches for black communities through their existing institutions. Even more interestingly, government agencies are able to provide opportunities for black communities to increase community pride and build community institutions in ways similar to the cultural development NGO, when agents are trained in new techniques.

If EMATER agents are able to incorporate community perspectives in project planning and implementation to improve the quality of life for a black community, are there lessons to be learned for other types of agencies working with black communities? This research has demonstrated to me that cultural development NGOs do not have a monopoly on what black communities need. A technique like EMATER's which gives communities an opportunity to express their **own** needs can also be effective and address black communities' concerns.

The cream of the crop of successful government and NGO approaches obtain similar high-quality outcomes for black communities in Maranhão. The research shows that in some cases government agencies can work with marginalized black communities as well as a culture development based NGO, but does that mean that government agencies should administer all programs for black communities? This research shows that in ideal conditions if there is a choice between the highest quality PVN or EMATER approach, there is a high probability that a successful project will be implemented regardless of the

agency selected. Both NGO and government are able to assist communities in building strong internal community organizations which can collectively act to resist local-level racism. But more research is needed to answer the broader question of how planners and policy makers should choose “preferred” programs for the entire state? Is it better to have targeted black cultural development projects like PVN, or a more universalist approach like the *assentimento*, where black communities benefit from existing services with their non-black neighbors? In order to make more generalizable conclusions about which types of programs donors should favor additional composite research is necessary. This research should have a larger sample size and a have a higher number of projects and programs of varying quality (not just high performing projects, as in this research), after these steps have been taken broader recommendations about policy may be more apparent. In the mean time, I feel pleasantly optimistic about the examples of strong programs and high quality performance by both members of black communities and public and independent sector agents who dedicate their time to improve the quality of life for people in rural areas of the Northeast.

6.0 Recommendations for PAPP

It is valuable for the PAPP program to continue recognizing the importance of projects for black communities. Felipa and Frechal demonstrate that simple interventions by outsiders can have tremendous effect on the quality of life for black regions. Further, it is appropriate and necessary for state agencies like PAPP to demonstrate their continued

support for black areas through targeted black programs and more generalist projects (similar to the Gespar agrarian reform settlements).

Government agencies represent a vital lifeline of support (financial, technical, and developmental) for black regions. Without state government level programs black regions miss out on valuable high quality opportunities for development. It is not always necessary for the government to wait for black community experts before working to establish programs for black regions. Instead, through trainings like Gespar which emphasize community participation and giving credibility to community perspectives in decision-making, black residents are able to develop their own projects in conjunction with the state agency to address their specific cultural needs as black areas. Further, existing agents within existing institutions can benefit greatly from trainings like Gespar which emphasize incorporating community perspectives in project planning and implementation. Interestingly, even the most troubled agencies benefit from Gespar trainings because they are receptive towards trying new responses because they are dissatisfied with the results that they have attained.

PAPP projects should also recognize the unique political dilemmas black communities may face within their region. Sensitive projects provide an opportunity to establish coping mechanisms to deal with negative external forces effecting the communities. If dealt with these factors can motivate communities to be resilient against oppression through political organizing (Frechal), or organizing around agricultural production (Felipa).

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