

SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ALTERNATIVES AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN MUNICIPIOS OF ZONA DA MATA OF MINAS GERAIS IN BRAZIL

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Abstract:

This article will discuss some socio-environmental alternatives to rural areas of Brazil, with a view to their participation and role in the development process of the country, and links with new concepts and practices that indicate important transformations related to its rural development, such as a differentiated use of natural resources in agriculture and those from the forests, and new approaches such as the rural-local sustainable development. It includes a discussion of experiences of groups of family farmers with activities on Conservation Agriculture (CA) in four municipalities of the Zona da Mata region of Minas Gerais in Brazil, especially agroforestry, and formulations about these 'new' socioenvironmental and socioeconomic practices and their role for agriculture and forests in the country.

The discussion is based on a multidisciplinary research project done about experiences in Conservation Agriculture, exemplified by the Agroforestry Systems, aimed at deepening the knowledge about these 'new' socio-environmental and socioeconomic practices, the political-institutional relations that develop through them among different stakeholders, and their role in agriculture and forestry in the country. These are examples of experiences that are occurring in different ecosystems and biomes of countries such as Brasil and others in Latin America and other developing countries, that seek to counteract problems confronted by many communities of the rural areas in those countries, related to the major socioeconomic, climate, and energy crises affectings many countries in the world today.

These experiences show that many rural areas, and especially agriculture and forests in developing countries, suffer serious consequences of those and other crises presently, but at the same time present possibilities to build up alternatives to use the natural resources still existing in the agricultural and forest sector in more sustainable ways. The major purpose of the article is to call attention to important dimensions of those experiences and the social and institutional actors involved in them, which show that major changes are underway in the use of natural resources such as soils, water, and the land, in production systems by family farmers that generate income for them and their families and save the environment, which are basic development goals not yet obtained by many of the previous development strategies.

The análises of those experiences is associated with new perspectives of development – as the Local Sustainable Development Approach, that may contribute to implement those practices, which seek to help reduce poverty, recover degraded natural resources and stimulate changes in the land and biodiversity use of the area, and promote viable processes of rural-local and sustainable development for different groups in rural áreas. The paper will be divided in seven sections, including: Introduction and Background; Development, Sustainable Development, and Rural-Local-Sustainable Development; Socio-environmental Alternatives for Rural Areas – Role of Agriculture and Forestry; New Livelihoods Strategies and Local Development in Municipalities of Zona da Mata of Minas Gerais; Agroforestry and Sustainable Local-Rural Development; Concluding Remarks.

