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Public policy for the solidarity economy as leverage of the viability of businesses: the case of CESOL, Bahia

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines how the technical assistance services of the Public Center for the Solidarity Economy in Bahia leveraged the sustainability of businesses in the solidarity sector. The study uses a qualitative approach, drawing on 22 semi-structured interviews with program actors. The results show that efforts to reduce mortality transformed businesses by developing their sustainability, supporting increased productivity and dealing with commercial issues, and that this resulted in social gains, including quality of life, self-esteem and citizenship. The social implications of the study are that it provides evidence of the effectiveness of public policy while identifying gaps to be explored in future research, such as the reasons for low use of credit and the need to measure value generation for a better understanding of its potential for capital accumulation.

Keywords: Public policy, Solidarity economy, CESOL, Solidarity enterprises, Identity territory.

Resumo

Este estudo buscou caracterizar os empreendimentos solidários à luz do enfrentamento de sua viabilidade por programas de política pública, tendo como alavancagem o serviço de assistência técnica dos Centros Públicos de Economia Solidária implantado na Bahia. A pesquisa exploratória utilizou abordagem qualitativa, por meio de 22 entrevistas semidiretivas com atores do programa. Os resultados evidenciaram a transformação dos empreendimentos por meio de esforço para a redução da mortalidade a partir da construção de sua sustentabilidade, apoiada pelo aumento da produtividade, passando pelas questões comerciais e culminando em ganhos sociais (qualidade de vida, autoestima, cidadania e outros). O estudo tem impacto social à medida que revela a efetividade da política pública frente aos seus propósitos ao mesmo tempo que possibilita a identificação de lacunas a serem desenvolvidas em novas pesquisas, como o baixo uso de crédito e mensuração da geração de valor para uma melhor compreensão de seu potencial para acumulação de capital.

Palavras-chave: Política Pública. Economia Solidária. CESOL. Empreendimentos solidários. Território de identidade.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Recent discussion on the social role that companies must play has broadened the perspective in which they operate, moving away from an exclusive focus on profit environmental, political incorporating social perspectives. At the same time, different actors have started to demand that organizations act in ways that meet the social needs of their stakeholders (Vieira, Parente, & Barbosa, 2017), not least the people who are directly involved in carrying out the activities of the organizations. Given this new way of evaluating performance of companies, economic activities have become more flexible, giving rise to different ways of acting within the traditional public and private sectors, and changing the relationship between organizations stakeholders.

Since the last three decades of the twentieth century, the pressures imposed on the market by globalization in terms of greater rationalization and greater competitiveness have highlighted the relevance of organizations that are located outside the traditional sectors of the economy and capable of creating a new perspective work (Monzón, on 2006; Wallimann, 2014). New forms of action occur by means of cooperatives, informal productive groups, mercantile societies and associations that undertake different business activities (Medeiros & Comonelli, 2017), including commercialization, production, credit solidarity finance and service provision, in both rural and urban environments (Gaiger, 2003). These groups have come to be known as solidarity enterprises (ES) or solidarity economy enterprises (EES), and they have inaugurated an economic sector called the solidarity economy. Sahakian and Dunand (2015) noted the wideranging nature of solidarity economy services, which include credit and savings services, fair trade initiatives, community gardens, microcredit programs, producer cooperatives, agricultural projects and exchanges managed by communities.

According to Singer (2002), these enterprises are characterized by their non-capitalist methods. Laville (2009) went further

in stating that EES bring together a set of activities that contribute to a fairer economy through the engagement of individuals, configuring a new type of relationship between the economy and society; these activities are based on a democratic organization of work, with a strong element of solidarity and mutual trust and a focus on the progress of enterprises and the community. For a business to be considered as belonging to the solidarity economy, it must have specific solutions to inhibit injustice, exploitation and discrimination (Bellucci, Bagnoli, Biggeri, & Rinaldi, 2012). In this connection, Kumbamu (2018) argued that EES are based on reciprocity and redistribution, in the sense of expressing, as a point of principle, a community and social benefit for the business worker.

However, the mere presence of EES as a form of economic activity capable of creating inclusion and distributing economic gains in a fair and equal manner, as proposed by Gaiger (2003), Bellucci et al. (2012) and Kumbamu (2018), does not always lead to the desired results. Depending on the location, this activity may even produce a weakening of the conditions necessary for its viability at a local, regional, national or global level (Loh & Shear, 2015). In these cases, one way to strengthen EES is through public policies that support the creation and strengthening of such businesses. Such consolidation is justified by the ability of EES to create employment and, above all, bring income to a stratum of society that would otherwise be excluded from formal jobs.

In Brazil, Silva (2014) found that public policies for supporting EES are still under development, but that they have gained strength from events such as the creation of the Brazilian Forum for the Solidarity Economy (FBES) and the State Forum for the Solidarity Economy of Piauí (FEESPI). According to Silva, the benefits include the capacity to distinguish between experiences at the local and at the national levels, a practice that has already begun in forums related to the theme and is attracting growing government interest. However, EES still face difficulties in relation to sustainability over time and in relation to their dependence on governments in their different spheres (federal, state and municipal) to make themselves viable.

These difficulties derive from deficiencies in terms of technical, legal or management issues, and they indicate the need for an organized plan to ensure the sustainability of these businesses.

The purpose of this article is therefore to investigate how the EES sector can be leveraged and made sustainable. Its aim is threefold: (a) to characterize the design of a public policy to support solidarity economy enterprises; (b) to identify types of technical support for leveraging solidarity economy enterprises; and (c) to examine the results in terms of their contribution to the viability of the enterprises. In relation to objective (b), it should be noted that this study uses the term leverage in the sense of Ferreira (2009), that is, of "lifting" businesses by using managerial technical support services to stimulate their activities in ways that promote their operational and, consequently, financial sustainability (Assaf Neto, 2010). The State of Bahia is selected as a case for analysis of a public policy practice and its results. Bahia is an appropriate choice because, since 2007, it has had a program of assistance designed specifically for the solidarity sector.

The study is presented in five sections. Following this introductory section, Section 2 presents the theoretical framework for the study, and Section 3 describes the methodological procedures adopted. Section 4 discusses the results, on the basis of which Section 5 draws final conclusions, identifies the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines how the concept of ES has been developed in the literature and identifies the main guiding purposes of public policies relating to the solidarity economy.

2.1 The solidarity economy

The solidarity economy is a social and economic phenomenon that has received attention in several countries for its mitigation of exclusionary economic behaviors that generate social inequality, such as unemployment and poor income distribution (Rangel & Manolescu, 2012). In Brazil, since the 1990s, there have

been several attempts to establish forms of community that organize production democratically and lead to a new form of consumption (Gaiger, 2003). The hope is that their success will result in economic equality for the working classes, as well as the reduction of poverty and the establishment of better living conditions through increased income generation (Rangel & Manolescu, 2012).

The EES model seems to encompass this intended scenario and can be understood as "experiences that are based on the development of economic activities for the achievement of social objectives, also contributing to the affirmation of citizenship ideals" (França Filho, 2002, p. 13). Leite (2008) examined how EES produce social bonds and are, therefore, capable of determining the dynamics of private enterprises with objectives that converge on the collective interest and not solely on profit. On this approach, economic motives are aligned with a social purpose in ways that strengthen bonds of solidarity, encouraging reciprocity and mutual assistance as the center of economic action.

A number of studies have focused on the marketing of EES (Betanho, Eid, & Eid, 2003; Faria, 2017; Laro, 2005); its importance for the sustainability of business has been clearly demonstrated, since the marketing component is also about social enterprises. Despite directing their efforts to the strengthening of the solidarity chain, authors such as Mance (2002) and Singer (2004) have clarified this point, defending the idea that these commercial practices should primarily involve other EES. Azambuja (2009) noted that, in such situations, it is possible for workers to have alternatives means of producing income, such as through cooperatives, popular banks, self-managed companies and other models that contribute to self-management, autonomy and economic emancipation. In line with this, Gaiger (2003) pointed out that, as well cooperatives and self-management companies, EES include associations and production groups that carry out a combination of economic activities and that value the principles of community and social collectivity.

In Brazil, given the impact on the labor market of changes in the economic and social environment, public policies have been adopted to encourage economic activities that are based on solidarity (Nagem, 2011). Despite the stabilization of the economy that followed the Plano Real (1994), the employment crisis that arose from the modernization of production processes in the late 1980s and, more intensely, during the 1990s (E. L. G. Alves, Soares, & Cunha, 1997; Cardoso Amorim. Ponchmann, 2000) added to the exchange rate problems of 1999 (Murta, Brasil, & Samohyl, 2003), with effects that continued to be felt into the 2000s. In this context, EES can be regarded as a tool for recovering from the losses exacerbated by these events. This is possible because of the capacity of EES to combat the effects of unemployment by creating jobs and income. Alongside the positive effects of the solidarity economy in the face of the modernization of production and the currency crisis, the alternative employment and incomes provided by this sector helped to mitigate the decrease in the supply of formal jobs in Brazil in 2008 (Nagem & Silva, 2013) and, more recently, between 2014 and 2015 (Schiochet, 2020).

Although there is little consensus on how to define the solidarity economy, certain elements are common to different definitions: the need to value human work at a social level; the use of economic activity to satisfy everyone's needs fully; the recognition of the role of women as fundamental; the search for a better relationship with nature; the valorization of solidarity and cooperation (J. N. Alves, Flaviano, Klein, Löbler, & Pereira, 2016); the absence of exploitation; processes that are driven democratically; and the preservation of the environment (Mance, 2005). Therefore, the present study takes these elements of the solidarity economy as its theoretical basis, focusing on the points common to the different approaches discussed in this section.

2.2 Public policies supporting the solidarity economy

Schneider, Dittrich, and Dias (2020) asserted that public policies are born from people's reality; it is possible to identify variations that are significant in a given region or situation and which require the drawing up or

implementation of a public policy. Thus, it is to be expected, especially with regard to social assistance policies focused on work and income, that public policy will take into account social problems, situations of social vulnerability, and the lack of work experienced by much of the population.

One of the actions taken in Brazil to minimize unemployment was the creation, in 2003, of the National Secretariat for Solidarity Economy (SENAES), an entity coordinated by the then Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE). The Secretariat took steps to register enterprises involved in the solidarity economy and used the resulting bank of information to promote, subsidize and give visibility to EES (Rocha & Diniz, 2019). This aim was operationalized in a set of objectives to strengthen and integrate networks of production, trade and consumption; to promote fair trade and ethical consumption; to provide information to guide the development of public policies; to facilitate research; and to obtain public recognition and support for the solidarity economy through increased visibility (Ogando, 2013), with the aim of generating employment and income.

In Bahia, one of these public policies was the creation, in 2007, of the Territories of Identity Program (PTI/BA), in which the State government started to make use of a new territorial division. The delimitation of the territories was based on an understanding of the specificities of a region and what distinguishes it from other regions, with the objective of setting up planning units for public policy (Flores, 2014). Within this approach, a territory of identity can be understood as a geographical section of a larger area that is regarded as unique because of its cultural, environmental and economic characteristics, even if these change over time (Oliveira & Dias, 2015). As Flores (2014) argued, the careful demarcation of territories, when based on dialogue between organized civil society and the governmental bodies involved, can facilitate the creation of appropriate public policies. Altogether, there are 27 territories of identity, and the criteria used for the division and creation of each one were based on the characteristics of each community and

representation of the localities (SEPLAN, 2020). This practice offered the Government of Bahia a greater possibility of development based on regionality and sustainability, since it allowed EES actions to be monitored and improved by the government.

Another action that strengthened public policies in favor of EES in Bahia was the publication, in 2011, of State Law No. 12,368, which provides for the creation of the State Policy to Promote the Solidarity Economy in the State of Bahia (PEFES/BA) and the State Council for the Solidarity Economy, as well as the provision of technical assistance services by the Public Center for the Solidarity Economy (CESOL), which meets the purposes expressed by SENAES in 2003. These Public Centers had already been created in 2008 to offer technical assistance services to solidarity enterprises, but it was in 2012 that the State government decided to expand this provision by hiring social organizations (OS) to implement and manage CESOLs in the different territories of identity of the State (Bahia, 2011). By 2018, under the management of the Secretariat of Labor, Employment, Income and Sports in Bahia (SETRE), 13 CESOLs had already been implemented, with a further 16 forecast by 2022.

The managerial technical assistance offered to enterprises aims to leverage their and, operational consequently, financial sustainability, with a focus on improving activities, processes and techniques articulating the territories, introducing products markets. and the management, commercialization and strengthening of ties (Setre, 2018). The OS hiring processes of 2012 and 2013 resulted in 2,151 enterprises, of which 1,169 were urban and 982 rural (Setre, 2019). Seven territories were not covered by these hiring processes, and, for reasons that are outside the scope of this study, it was decided not to investigate them. The 2018 hiring process was regarded as a second step for the sustainability of the projects and for the generation of income. Here, the focus was on the marketing of products from the solidarity economy within a trade network characterized by fairness and solidarity. The OS that were hired are required to monitor the performance of the services and their activities according to specific goals and indicators.

Thus, in the State of Bahia, CESOLs were conceived as multifunctional spaces of territorial scope with the purpose of encouraging sustainable development of EES through socioproductive support and technical assistance, based on the principles of local and territorial understanding and an emancipatory perspective on the potentialities and characteristics of the administration of workers. The results to be pursued by these centers are the technical, market and financial training of the beneficiaries by means of managerial training, with prospects for sustainable development, and encouraging the construction of a new model of local for sustainability development Vasconcelos, Oliveira, & Monteiro, 2016; Paul Singer, Silva, & Schiochet, 2014).

From the literature reviewed here, there is evidence that the EES movement gained greater relevance throughout the 1990s. The primary aim was to enable these production, marketing and consumption networks to promote fair trade and ethical consumption, thereby fostering the creation and maintenance of a business environment in which the concept of sustainability prevails, while promoting development and creating inclusive. emancipatory and equitable social relationships. Gaiger (2003) and Bansi et al. (2011) pointed out that, in this context, enterprises encounter difficulties in formalization, in accessing credit for the acquisition of equipment, and in developing the production and organization of the commercialization of their products. However, Marconatto, Ladeira, and Wegner (2019) argued that, through public policies, these ventures can be made sustainable with the support of technical assistance programs, incubation and networking, with ultimately positive impacts on the communities in which they operate.

2.3 Key aspects of the solidarity economy and public policy

The theoretical framework presented here provides a conceptual understanding of the

solidarity economy and public policy that suggests certain attributes as key aspects of this study. In terms of the solidarity economy, the following features stand out:

- Inclusivity
- Business sustainability
- Strengthening ties of solidarity and cooperation
- Valuing human labor and nonexploitation
- Valuing women's work
- Environmental sustainability
- Democratic decision-making.

In terms of public policy, the following features stand out:

- Mapping the activities of enterprises and articulating the territories
- Improving the management of public policy for the solidarity economy
- Promoting enterprises
- Generating jobs and income from the solidarity economy
- Introducing products into markets
- Diversifying the technical assistance provided to enterprises.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

For the operationalization of research, we sought territories that are relatively homogeneous; we therefore selected the territories of Jacuípe Basin, Irecê, Piemonte Norte do Itapicuru and Recôncavo. This allowed a deeper focus on support services and on the results and benefits perceived bv beneficiaries of the relevant policies. The research was exploratory in nature, taking a qualitative approach to data collection. This was appropriate to the research aims of exploring the respondents' perceptions according to specific objectives, and of obtaining a deeper understanding, within the scope of public policy, of the support received and the results obtained.

The primary data were collected between November 4 and November 29, 2019 from 22 semi-directive interviews, four of them with CESOL coordinators (one representative for each CESOL targeted in the study), eight of them with representatives of the EES, and ten of them with managers of the Public Policy for the

Solidarity Economy of the State. For each of these three groups, a customized interview script was used. The scripts consisted of questions on the following themes (here, with the associated objective in parentheses):

- Could you talk about the public policy environment in Bahia? (exploring the structuring and implantation of the CESOL)
- Could you describe the technical assistance services? (exploring the purposes of each service, their occurrence in the period, and evidence/perception of results achieved in the period; the formation of solidarity values and initial CESOL activities; technical assistance services for credit access; managerial technical assistance services; assistance services in technical marketing, planning and network formation; specific technical assistance services from various consultants)
- Could you comment on the infrastructure of these enterprises? (exploring the acquisition and use of machinery and equipment)
- Explore other dimensions of the services. (exploring training in management practices; training in tools to support inventory/cash flow control; training in product quality, marketing and dissemination; inclusive actions aimed at women, young people and the elderly)
- How do you evaluate the Program's results in view of the income generation factor? (exploring changes in the social conditions of families)

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. In the content analysis, the themes of the script constituted the main categories for identifying significant content in the statements of the respondents. NVivo software supported the process of pre-

analysis, exploration, treatment, analysis and presentation of results. The purpose was to identify the key contents (called "nós") latent in the set of statements from the interviewees, thus transforming the textual data into meaningful information that made it possible to synthesize the description of the phenomenon under study.

For the purpose of analysis, the illustrations related to the interviewees' statements were identified according to their origin: those in the "Ci" segment are coordinators; those in the "Ei" segment are representatives of the enterprises; those in the "Gi" segment are public policy managers; and those in the "i" segment are from the informing unit.

It should be noted that, particularly in relation to objective (a), the theoretical framework adopted here guided the understanding of public policy aimed at the solidarity economy and made it possible to deepen the scope of the study.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis are presented for each objective, giving an overview of the interviewees' perceptions of the construction and delineation of public policy with respect to the solidarity economy. The technical assistance services are then presented in parallel with the responses concerning the everyday activities in which the CESOL program and the enterprises are involved. Finally, the outcomes of the implementation of the public policy practices are presented and discussed.

4.1 Objective (a): characterizing the design of a public policy to support EES

The public policy of technical assistance to EES in the State of Bahia is intended to secure the continuity of the enterprises and to reduce business mortality and non-viability. In Brazil, new businesses and entrepreneurial ventures appear every day, including small and micro companies, but business mortality is also very high, hence the technical assistance and

advisory services offered by Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Enterprises (SEBRAE).

In this context, the public policy of providing technical assistance to EES is regarded as an incentive for these businesses. According to respondent G1, "sometimes, the absence of a technical assistance policy makes these undertakings unfeasible, so it must be permanent to help maintain them." However, according to the solidarity economy policy team, this solidarity economy movement is "the people discovering their ability to generate income from their own talents" (G7). It also plays a role in terms of inclusion and of providing an alternative within the framework of the work.

The public policy of solidarity economy is a possible way for us to be able to do a job of inserting it [...] (G2).

It aims to include, through decent work, people with work capacity, who can develop economic activities and, with that, earn income, it is not the matter of employment, but of work, earning income to improve their life, have a quality of life with another perspective, with another look, another condition of sustainability (G3).

As perceived by the beneficiaries, this public policy ends up reaching actors that tend to be forgotten in public policies, including small productive groups, farmers and even the small cities of the State.

- [...] reaching the small, valuing, giving opportunity, qualifying, we were always at the mercy of these big ones, only the big ones. The government has always looked more at the big, never looked at the small, and this space of solidarity is already growing, and the people with self-esteem, with knowledge, development, it is very important, a big difference (E3).
- [...] this question was very well thought out, because it acted on the problem. The farmer's problem, if the problem of the person who is there in the farms, the craftsman, is to make his product and not being able to put it on the market, and not being able to compete with something industrialized, there is an alternative provided by the State government, which is to directly assist that enterprise to value your product, to value your work (E4).

[...] we see it like this, the group before CESOL and the group after CESOL. Before, we were just here in the city, we worked ... most worked in their own homes, in an every-man-for-himself approach, and then they went out, sold to a neighbor, to a friend, to a relative. Today, we get together, we have the group, today we already participate in fairs, we already have new knowledge, in fact, we participate in events, we managed to find a space that we did not have before, at home, today we are expanding our work, it is totally different (E7).

[...] based on this public policy [...] groups from the interior of the State began to have access [...] and the Public Center got to a moment when we longed for a place to sell, which we didn't have [...] except when there was a small town hall event, which invited us just to compose that scenario (E8).

In the opinion of the CESOL coordinators, this is an innovative public policy, one that affirms and strengthens, but is at the same time a policy still in development, with the aim of developing productive groups for the purpose of generating income.

[...] an affirmation policy, the policy that gives the right to empowerment. But we know that not everyone, not every manager thinks that way. Sometimes they think of agribusiness, sometimes they think of industry, of the great powers, they think that the development of the State, of the municipality will be generated through this (C1).

Within the Public Center, we have already managed to advance a lot, but I still think that it is a very fragile policy for the dimension that it takes [...] in view of the responsibilities that it has (C2).

[...] the Public Center for Solidarity Economy has the proposal to strengthen the productive groups. So, the productive groups see this public policy as a strategy to strengthen the generation of income [...] together the productive groups meet a lot when they have this support. This happens in the sense of perceiving more potential, more conditions to make the wheel spin in a different way, in a stronger way (C4).

It should be noted that each Public Center that currently exists in the State has a specific focus and is managed by the OS hired for the purpose; since they operate in different territories, the enterprises are part of the active portfolio of each CESOL, which also has different characteristics, but with production and marketing profiles.

The social organizations involved, have a commitment and responsibility in this execution, where we are partners, because it is a private entity performing a public activity, this makes all the difference (G3).

These projects entered the active portfolio of Public Centers cumulatively, we always work here cumulatively [...] this is the idea of permanent and continuous technical assistance (G1).

[...] the biggest criterion for CESOL to select the groups was to have a profile of production and commercialization [...] that was one of the main bases for the group to be part of [...] a group, never individual, because otherwise it would not be a solidarity economy, to be part of an association or an informal group or a cooperative, to have a team that works collectively (C1).

The public policy of technical assistance implemented through the CESOL emerges clearly from the interviewees' statements as a policy for transforming attempts to overcome poverty and as a milestone for the generation of work/income and the sustainable economic development of people and productive groups. For example:

[...] a public policy necessary to transform the overcoming of poverty as a milestone for the economic, sustainable development of people, individuals, and different groups (G1).

As a policy still in the government's point of view, it is a policy that stills within a concept of overcoming poverty, our understanding is that it needs to be a structuring policy (G9).

[...] reflects the question of a government policy as a State policy, a transforming policy (C1).

As a result, the CESOL has helped to bring businesses more closely in line with the practices of the solidarity economy, integrating into the life of the city and the territory in which they operate.

4.2 Objective (b): identifying types of technical support for leveraging EES

From the outset, the existence of a CESOL is linked to the provision of technical assistance to the enterprises it serves. Although that can take different forms, the respondents expressed more concern with assistance with the commercial parts of the enterprises than with any other type of assistance offered by the CESOL.

In most cases, when approached about the types of technical support offered to the EES served, the coordinators mentioned that their actions were linked to the commercialization of the products of the enterprises. In this sense, their statements were quite similar, with the following emphasis being typical:

> [...] at the beginning, we worked more in management aspects, having organizational process, a more socially productive, accounting process, a little of these. Now, in this contract we have been working more on marketing, communication and advertising and we still need to work a lot on this, the question of marketing, the question of product presentation, which is about the labeling and the packaging improvement, and the question of the marketing itself, of the product standardization. So, in the current moment, commercialization has been the main target, the aspects related to commercialization have been a greater guidance (C3).

As in the above statement, there was frequent use of expressions that indirectly suggest a focus on marketing, such as concerns about advertising, making business cards, using bags, hats and company shirts, and other actions that favor increased sales.

The managers who responded expressed similar priorities, making direct and repeated mention of marketing. Indirectly, guidelines and actions were cited concerning the need for products to have barcodes and certifications (for example, the National Agency for Sanitary Surveillance—ANVISA). There were also references to customer service training and

teaching, being encouraged to adopt credit card sales, and the importance of using social networks as a sales platform.

If it is a product of plant origin it has to be certified by Anvisa [...] or it cannot go on the shelf [...] in order for Anvisa to give the certificate for that product to be marketed (G7).

[...] the issue of virtual platforms [...] there is Facebook, people started to view Facebook, Instagram. Some platforms [...] assist also in trying to find the channels between our projects and those commercial spaces, ok? (G1).

Similarly, the responses of the representatives of the enterprises focused on technical support for the commercial elements of the businesses. Indirect mention was made of support received in terms of getting barcodes onto products, calculating sale prices, using social networks to promote products, having business cards and participating in different fairs, sometimes even outside Bahia.

It is notable that more than one interviewee in each of the three categories of respondents mentioned the importance of using appropriate packaging and informative labels (expiration date).

[...] they answer these questions of labeling and nutritional questions, in that part that we often do not have the knowledge ... the question of expiration date, we do not have this notion ... And there is also a whole apparatus in the question of packaging [...] and then CESOL also helps in marketing, picking up the product, taking it to the markets, doing that first performance, taking it to fairs, things like that (E4).

The finding that the CESOL makes great efforts to promote the commercialization of EES products is in line with Singer's argument (NBR, 2015) that one of the weaknesses of the solidarity economy is its lack of access to the consumer market and a lack of measures for improving access. According to Singer, the other weaknesses of EES are the lack of access to capital and to knowledge (that is, the low level of qualifications of the people involved). Other studies have highlighted market concerns in relation to EES (Betanho et al., 2003; Faria, 2017; Laro, 2005), but these actions are specifically supported by the strategy outlined

by the Government of Bahia. From the outset, a focus of the technical assistance activities was the introduction of products into consumer markets; the 2018 hiring notice went further, establishing the marketing of products as the top priority.

However, the statements of the respondents also noted the CESOL's support for production activities. The search for better quality was a recurring theme in the responses from all three categories of respondents, along with the previous analysis of the economic viability of production.

We can't just think that we're going to the enterprise to get the product and take it to the market, because if we do that, we won't take a high-quality product. So, we have to be concerned since the production until it reaches the market [...] it is our responsibility, from production to the market (C1).

We work on the quality [...] you have it today, the product can only go on the shelf if it has some stamps, some certifications (G9).

We had nothing of quality [...] We had no idea. We weren't even selling yet, consumption was only at the community. Because the quality wasn't enough. Then, when CESOL arrived, which provided some training to the people there, the product got improved, it has already taken the product from people who already had better quality and started to enter the market (E3).

The understanding that the CESOL's greatest efforts are aimed at selling justifies actions aimed at production methods and techniques in terms of technical encouragement, since the sales of any product depend (albeit not exclusively) on its quality.

When talking about production, mention was made of the term "productive partner" (coordinators and managers), in line with the social inclusion provided for in the legislation, guided as it is by the solidarity economy's concerns with reducing unemployment and increasing income generation. Support given by the CESOL in the areas of management, accounting and legal support was also mentioned, albeit to a lesser extent. Other

positive results of this assistance related to citizenship.

The positive impact of the CESOL's actions on its beneficiaries can also be measured indirectly. The responses of the representatives of the enterprises showed the presence of a political conscience.

- [...] knowledge course, sales course, how we learn to sell our product, to value our product (E7).
- [...] two seminars have already been held [...] here focused on conscious consumption. So, in this conscious consumption thing, it came for the enterprises to have a notion of what they are buying in order to produce, to have more value, a look at the returnable product, the recyclable product, this is being considered a lot, for feeding [...]. Even so, we never left out people who were illiterate, because even though they were illiterate, on the days they were supposed to go to the workshops, they were going. We knew there would not be a satisfactory result for me to pass on to people in the group, but that is part of it. Because if we left these people excluded, it would be more terrible for them (E8).

If we have a network, it becomes easier, for example, we got the barcode for 12 more enterprises [...]. Our role also in the Public Center is to make people dream, to help people to believe in themselves, because many do not believe, sometimes they were people who did not have the freedom to leave the private space, leave their homes, leave to think life, to study, to be trained, there are groups that we need to help even on rewriting the meeting notes, because when you take the notes record book, there isn't a single correct record (E2).

[...] Me going there in my garden to pick the passion fruit or take umbu and even bring it and produce it myself, imagine what enormous wealth it is, I am not talking only about nutritional wealth or whatever, but the wealth related to giving value to the thing the person has, it's not like many urban things that you have to buy (E5).

The empowerment of the political conscience of the respondents can have a positive impact on their living conditions as local actors, either individually or collectively, since knowledge of their rights and duties can affect the results that the enterprises are aiming for.

4.3 Objective (c): examining the results in terms of their contribution to the viability of the enterprises

The participants who are responsible for the enterprises mentioned in their responses that the implementation of the CESOL and the services it offered enabled the beneficiaries to gain new knowledge and opportunities.

- [...] for you to qualify a little one and unleash his potential, so many people that are capable of turning a little thing into the most beautiful thing in the world, valuing those little ones who live far away, who have no opportunity [...] it was valued a lot and it needs a lot more, because a lot of people are still in these small places there, in these small communities that are still hiding there without any knowledge, there is still a lot to disclose and really, to further develop this group and it will make a difference, it will make everyone have opportunity and donate more of these opportunities [...] (E3).
- [...] we need the contribution of these bodies, these organizations so that they can help us in the group, because they are small farmers and most of them don't have much education. So, you need these qualifications, training courses, way of working, everything to be happening (E6).
- [...] the staff here [CESOL], can help a lot. Just as they are helping us, they can also develop a lot of entrepreneurship, many of them. I believe that they must make a real difference if it continues at this pace and if it keeps going, I believe (E3).
- [...] we pass on what we briefly know and the others pass on what they also briefly learned, because we all pass on what we learn (E5).

Thus, people's qualification and level of empowerment in their communities are essential for the development of groups, for the improvement of their products and for creating appropriate conditions for commercialization in new markets. The relationship with knowledge is evident in the statements of the respondents, showing that this is an important element in building the personal and professional esteem of the beneficiaries in their relationships with the group, with the business and with the management of the enterprise.

Among the aggregations of value for the groups that the CESOL serves, some were particularly evident: product improvement, the conquest of new markets, the visibility of enterprises and their products, participation in the consumer market in the municipality, integration into the territory, and the opportunity to generate income.

[...] before CESOL, we produced a lot, but few people were aware of the differential of [...]. So, few people came looking for us, just those people from the village [...] we needed to reach a market in the city, and we still hadn't managed to do that, because we didn't have a label, we didn't have, thus, any market knowledge in the city. And then CESOL acted very well in this process (E4).

CESOL does this work in relation to product improvement, the organization of groups, so that we can strengthen and be able to generate income from it, developing communities, developing these family farming activities (E6).

[...] it can help many people and it can help a lot more, because this human part that it sees as "I'm going to take this community out of this level that is today and put it on a higher level" already makes a big difference and is of a great help. Because if this didn't exist, we would never have the world views that we have today, the view today is different, very different (E3).

The CESOL's contribution to the structuring of the enterprises leads to an improvement in relations between the community and the consumer market, which ends up recognizing this beneficiary as an important social and economic actor.

The actions developed by the CESOL promote effects that are present in the daily lives of enterprises, such as access to the consumer market, improvements in the quality of services provided, increased economic autonomy of women and higher incomes for the beneficiaries' families. The contrast with the period before the CESOL services was clear from the responses.

[...] it arrived at a time of difficult product flow, we were having difficulty in the product flow to the region, and then we got in touch with CESOL and CESOL started helping us in some points so we could enter the market, in terms of labeling, validity, packaging, and then we were introduced to the market. That was CESOL's help, it contributed a lot for us to have potential and today there is even a shortness of products for us to deliver to the markets. After CESOL, the name started to expand [...], and today we are not being able to meet the requests (E4).

We changed, from the enterprise [...] we changed the lives of many people, in terms of quality of service, in terms of value for people who work directly there, who have economic autonomy, women who never left home and who today work there. We have poor people, I believe that the main criterion for working there is the question of income. So this is a very big value for us (E2).

The formation of enterprise networks for the purchase of raw materials, equipment and logistical support within a network contributed to these outcomes. In particular, respondents noted the importance of registering the internal purchasing network (that is, dynamics of supply from purchases within the enterprise network itself).

Well, I appreciate that they have grown, mainly because they buy in networks. Some have this thing of getting together to buy a product, to decrease the cost. Also, if I am in the municipality of [...], and there is the group that produces the cookie, then this group will be the supplier. So we also do this a lot [...]. So, all of this generates a gain in their income. All of this increases income a little (C1).

So, they buy the flour from other CESOL enterprises to produce avoador [cookie], everything. So, there is an exchange between networks, also, from them, which help each other very well (C2).

The proposal of the groups to articulate themselves in cooperatives, in networks, to facilitate management is an alternative that I am absolutely sure is a way out [...] but the internal and external partners are also a great way out, and the autonomy that people have been looking for to our groups (E2).

However, even with the support of the CESOL, the beneficiaries reported difficulties, such as a lack of working capital, a difficulty in obtaining the certifications required for some products (especially those of animal origin), the unavailability of customized financing and the lack of knowledge of sales techniques:

Our biggest difficulty is working capital, this is a difficulty that we have. Working capital is our difficulty, it is our bottleneck (E1).

- [...] the issue of certification, we never tried to obtain a certification [....] the question of financing machinery and equipment is lacking (E4).
- [...] the selling itself [is] the group's biggest difficulty [which] would be marketing [...] we must have courage, but we are ashamed to sell. The worst of the groups is the trading, commercialization of products, we don't know how to sell (E5).
- [...] despite the challenges, these situations that we face in relation to commercialization, the main challenge, which is seeking commerce, the government public policies that previously helped us a lot, are being excluded everyday [...] (E6).

Currently, women's work is predominant in actions linked to the solidarity economy, often owing to collective work, to the alternative to unemployment it offers, and to greater time flexibility. As a result, women are increasingly present in the production, commercialization management and solidarity EES served by the CESOL, as the interviewees confirmed.

> [...] it is very strong because most of the heads of the family are women, more than 70% of the families are headed by women, supported, directed, consolidated, aggregated by women, women are the vast majority, whether by choice [...] by having children and not getting married, which is something that is not directly associated, either because the relationship started and ended, or because of widowhood, women, especially black women, are the great heads of family, and they have to provide for themselves in some way and then if you look at the perspective of violence in Brazil, where you are afraid to go out to work and leave your child at home, where you are afraid [...] that your child will go alone for school, jobs with greater possibility of flexibility and mobility are the ones that are most accessible, and also the lack of information, all of these leads women to seek jobs that are more associated with the solidarity economy (G6).

> [...] we always have this partnership of having a collective thought. We also have decisions that are democratic there, there is

not only one who makes the decisions, there is always the participation of everyone, even when one cannot go we call to find out what is the opinion of that person before we make the decisions. So these are fundamental principles, and we also always look for the fair price of the product, we do the calculation for us to see, we are not losing or exploiting anyone (E8).

Sometimes it is not easy because they are different minds, nobody is bigger than anyone, but everyone has the same goal and the same burden, nobody is bigger than anyone in the group [...] the resources we collect are divided evenly among us, nobody gets more or less, we have this concern, because nobody is employed and nobody is a boss, everyone forms the same body together in search of the single objective, which is the improvement of the quality of life, of the development of those families (E6).

[...] we fought for us to have a new form of enterprise, for us to form a single body and fight together to achieve a goal, but that we could learn to work in solidarity, which is the principle of the solidarity economy. So, this form of collective work where we share the work, share the income, without having a boss or employee, someone who commands and someone who obeys, besides everything we always try to help ourselves, help others (E6).

And when you get together and work together, the same work, what will make this practice of solidarity economy, is a job that everyone is doing together because alone there is no way to go, you cannot move forward. And when it is a group work, it is easier for you to look for other agencies or a city hall, a space, even a fair, because for you to participate in a fair, you have to have a group [...]. This is working in a group, working together (E7).

Thus, the principles of solidarity economy are reaffirmed by the CESOL's public policies. The presence of women is an element that adds value to their families in establishing the foundations of collectivity and mutual aid, and in bringing effective results in the generation of income and increasing the knowledge of those involved. The results of this study indicate that, despite the shortcomings and difficulties in the implementation of this public policy, it remains a relevant instrument for overcoming inequality and for encouraging

fairer social relations in the context of these enterprises.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory study examined how the technical support services provided by the CESOL program leveraged the sustainability of businesses in the solidarity sector. It used a qualitative approach to data collection; its results therefore take the form of hypotheses shaped by the evidence extracted from the set of responses and are subjective in nature.

Within this perspective, the results show that, in the case under study, the Solidarity Economy Public Policy was more than an assistance-based program; it is clear from the responses of the different actors interviewed that enterprises were transformed through efforts that reduced the mortality and increased the sustainability of businesses. This synergistic effort was anchored in a technical empowerment program for beneficiaries of the solidarity economy in the context of administrative management. It included the development of an economic feasibility study, the provision of cash flow control instruments, and assistance with pricing (calculations of cost and profit margin); in terms of production, it trained beneficiaries to standardize products and implement good practices in food production; and in terms of marketing, it covered improvements to different aspects of a product (labels, stamps, visual appearance, expiration dates. packaging, nutritional tables), brand development, distribution and replacement logistics, and product/brand promotion (including participation in trade fairs and use of social networks).

The policy has its strengths and weaknesses. An important issue remains unaddressed: the lack of access to and use of credit. Further work is required to overcome the resistance of these small entrepreneurs to the use of such resources. Nonetheless, the technical support offered by the CESOL public policy has not only allowed businesses to address their management difficulties. Through the increase in economic autonomy it has generated, it has also had a positive impact on the self-esteem of

those involved, especially the women. Our findings provide clear examples of the contribution of technical support services to marketing and production, which seem to have played a role in leveraging the sustainability of the enterprises.

The results that the enterprises have achieved thanks to the technical support they received include improvements in products, increases in sales, greater productivity and greater management capacity. Social aspects, too, have seen improvements in terms of increased social interaction, higher self-esteem, better community relations and greater empowerment of citizens. This set of achievements reinforces what Alves et al. (2016) and Mance (2005) presented as principles of EES, operationalized in two dimensions: a psychosocial order and an economic order. The responses participants in the present study provide examples of political formation, collectivism and self-esteem, autonomy, women being the predominant agents in production, and the generation of work and income.

If, on the one hand, the solidarity policy incorporates economic economy activities with less accumulation power, on the other hand, it is an important element in the promotion of social innovation. In these ventures, it reproduces a business dynamic that is similar to the practices of enterprises of expanded accumulation (for example, in terms of productivity), thereby structuring relations with the market and network operations. This social innovation also facilitates improvements in the quality of life of its beneficiaries and their families, an impact that spreads outwards across the community as a result of the integration of the enterprises into the territory.

Despite the advances already made in the implementation of public policy in support of the solidarity economy, as evidenced in this study from the CESOL program in Bahia, gaps remain for future studies to address. These include the need to understand why credit is underused as an element of business expansion and the need to measure value generation for a better understanding of the potential for capital accumulation.

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