

## Popular Agrarian Reform in Brazil from the Perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Land issues are related to everyday territorial and political affairs and constitute an essential dimension of sustainable development. It is assumed that access to land, natural resource management, and the social organization of the territory are prerequisites for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, this article analyzes how the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) plan interacts with the 2030 Agenda and contributes to the governance of the agrarian issue in Brazil. Governance, although defined as an institutional arrangement aimed at mediating interests toward sustainability, is a contested field that can obscure asymmetries and limit transformations, especially in the agrarian issue. Based on discursive textual analysis, it becomes clear that by challenging the notion of sustainable development, the RAP calls for a state policy aimed at democratizing access to land, social justice, and food sovereignty—fundamental aspects diluted in the rhetoric of the 2030 Agenda. It is clear that the RAP and the SDGs, although constructed to accommodate different interests, converge in defending a new model of land management, expanding access to land, and adopting sustainable practices, jointly contributing to rethinking the agrarian situation in the country.

**Keywords:** State; agrarian question; socio-territorial movements; social justice; public policy.

### A Reforma Agrária Popular no Brasil nas perspectivas dos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS)

### Resumo

A temática fundiária relaciona-se às cotidianidades territoriais e políticas, constituindo a dimensão essencial do desenvolvimento sustentável. Parte-se do pressuposto de que o acesso à terra, a gestão dos recursos naturais e a organização social do território são

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condições para alcançar os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS). Nesse contexto, analisa-se como o plano de Reforma Agrária Popular (RAP) dialoga com a Agenda 2030 e contribui para a governança da questão agrária no Brasil. A governança, embora definida como arranjo institucional voltado à mediação de interesses à sustentabilidade, trata-se de um campo em disputas, no qual pode ocultar assimetrias e limitar transformações, especialmente na questão agrária. A partir da análise textual discursiva, evidencia-se que ao tensionar a noção de desenvolvimento sustentável, a RAP reivindica uma política de Estado voltada à democratização do acesso à terra, à justiça social e a soberania alimentar, aspectos fundamentais diluídos na retórica da Agenda 2030. Constatase que a RAP e os ODS, embora construídos para acomodar diferentes interesses convergem na defesa de um novo modelo de ordenamento fundiário, na ampliação do acesso à terra e na adoção de práticas sustentáveis, contribuindo conjuntamente para repensar a situação agrária no país.

**Palavras-chave:** Estado; questão agrária; movimentos socioterritoriais; justiça social; política pública.

## **La Reforma Agraria Popular en Brasil desde la perspectiva de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS)**

### **Resumen**

Las cuestiones agrarias se relacionan con los asuntos territoriales y políticos cotidianos y constituyen una dimensión esencial del desarrollo sostenible. Se asume que el acceso a la tierra, la gestión de los recursos naturales y la organización social del territorio son prerequisitos para alcanzar los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS). En este contexto, este artículo analiza cómo el plan de Reforma Agraria Popular (RAP) interactúa con la Agenda 2030 y contribuye a la gobernanza de la cuestión agraria en Brasil. La gobernanza, si bien se define como un arreglo institucional destinado a mediar intereses hacia la sostenibilidad, es un campo controvertido que puede oscurecer asimetrías y limitar transformaciones, especialmente en la cuestión agraria. Con base en el análisis textual discursivo, se hace evidente que al cuestionar la noción de desarrollo sostenible, la RAP exige una política de Estado dirigida a democratizar el acceso a la tierra, la justicia social y la soberanía alimentaria, aspectos fundamentales diluidos en la retórica de la Agenda 2030. Es claro que el PAR y los ODS, aunque construidos para dar cabida a intereses diferentes, convergen en la defensa de un nuevo modelo de gestión territorial, ampliando el acceso a la tierra y adoptando prácticas sostenibles, contribuyendo conjuntamente a repensar la situación agraria del país.

**Palabras-clave:** Estado; cuestión agraria; movimientos socioterritoriales; justicia social; políticas públicas.

### **Introduction**

Discussions of land concentration in Brazil are closely linked to the sociopolitical contexts that marked different stages of the country's economic, social, and political development. Since the colonial period, characterized by slavery and the large-scale latifundium system, a pattern of concentrated land ownership has been consolidated, shaping rural relations. This model not only laid the foundations of the agrarian economy but also served as a cornerstone of Brazilian industrialization. In this context, agriculture and

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rural space have been progressively subordinated to the logic of agro-industrial chains, reinforcing historical inequalities and the centrality of the latifundium in the country's development (Castro, 1984).

By the late 1980s, the debate on land concentration and the trajectory of Brazilian agriculture became more explicitly linked to policies on agricultural modernization, land use and occupation, and access to and rights over territory. This period coincides with the country's democratization process, during which such issues gained prominence in political and institutional discourse. The constitutionalization of the "social function of land" principle represented a crucial legal milestone in this context. In contrast, various social movements emerged and consolidated in defense of men and women who live from and depend on the land, forests, and waters.

The Brazilian land structure results from historical disputes between antagonistic projects: on one side, land concentration linked to agribusiness expansion and the logic of significant capital; on the other, social struggles for the democratization of access to territory. This tension produces a recurring problem—traversed by political, economic, social, and environmental interests—that shapes both public policy formulation and the actions of social movements. Despite normative advances, such as the enshrinement of the "social function of land," academic and social debates face limits imposed by the political and institutional hegemony of the agro-export model, which keeps land concentration among the main barriers to building sustainable and inclusive alternatives in the Brazilian countryside.

According to Bernardo Mançano Fernandes (2006), the agrarian question arises from a set of processes that embody the contradictions of capital in its choice of specific productive models. Concentration occurs not only in land ownership but also in investment power, research, technology, and land-acquisition capacity —along with decision-making power under market control and agricultural policies. Among the consequences are "the concentration of wealth and land, simultaneous with the intensification of poverty and misery" (Fernandes, 2006, n.p.).

Within the broad theoretical discussion surrounding the land question, one may note, in a transversal way, the everyday realities embedded in the territorial and political contexts in which it unfolds. In this sense, the agrarian question takes on a paradoxical character, wherein land concentration transforms the land into an instrument of exclusion and inequality, denying rights and expelling rural populations. In contrast, territorial resistances emerge that reaffirm land as a space of life, dignity, and belonging. In this context, fundamental dimensions of human survival and dignity stand out — such as labor, health, housing, and education. These elements, recognized as human rights, are integrated into a complex scenario — simultaneously conceptual and concrete — that articulates productive

practices and techniques, governmental guidelines, public policies, the use of natural resources, and the social function connected to the habitat (Maniglia, 2009). In this context, fair access to land is an indispensable condition for ensuring fundamental rights and the realization of human rights, reinforcing the centrality of the struggle for land and agrarian reform in Brazil.

According to Mendonça (2011), the historically deterministic and productivist land structure represents the origin and the intensity of social and economic inequalities in the country. When the land structure is organized in a concentrated, exclusionary, and productivist manner, it denies democratic access to land and undermines the realization of social and collective rights. The result is the perpetuation of inequalities and the legitimization of violent practices stemming from the absence of policies that ensure agrarian justice.

In this regard, José de Souza Martins considers it to be

[...] particularly essential to understand that the form assumed by landed property 'binds' social relations, organizes class relations, sustains economic and political relations, builds a particular power structure, feeds relations of domination, and defines limits for the democratic participation of the different social classes, particularly the working classes. The current political edifice of Brazilian society would collapse if this foundation were touched, modified, or destroyed: one of the obstacles to the political progress of rural populations would disappear. Landed property constitutes the essential mediation of Brazil's political organization. (Martins, 1988, p. 67)

In the Brazilian context, land and property cannot be reduced to an economic or market attribute, but rather constitute sociopolitical devices traversed by historical relations of power. These structural elements form an integral part of the "obstacles" and "constraints" that hinder the implementation of the classical agrarian reform promoted by the State, thereby perpetuating territorial and economic inequalities. At the same time, these very obstacles legitimize and sustain the resistance embodied in the historical struggles of social movements, which organize to challenge the hegemonic narratives of the modernization process in the Brazilian agrarian sector.

Between "money, which seeks to dissolve everything, and territory, which shows that there are things that cannot be dissolved" (Santos, 2009, p. 7), lies, intrinsically, the overcoming of food standardization in both production and consumption.

Thus, when examining the history of agrarian reform in Brazil, what stands out are the discontinuous governmental actions driven by dominant political interests, which result in the persistence of land concentration and the deepening of socioeconomic inequalities in rural areas. On the other hand, social mobilization in and for the countryside — marked by advances and setbacks — continues to exert strategic influence on the formulation of public policies, especially those related to food sovereignty. This social dynamic encourages the

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inclusion of agrobiodiversity in the agenda of agrarian reform policies, promoting the appreciation of agricultural diversity and traditional production practices (Marchetti; Marques; Santos; Silva, 2020).

Through resistance to these processes and in opposition to the productive, sociocultural, and political homogenization in and of the countryside, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) has, since 2011, been constructing an agrarian program that differs from the foundations of the classical agrarian reform. It is a structural proposal that redefines how access to land and modes of production influence the management and use of natural goods and their repercussions on society as a whole (MST, 2013; Santos, 2014).

The unequal and interdependent dynamics within rural areas manifest through asymmetric economic dependencies, unequal access to resources, limited infrastructure, and concentration of decision-making power. Within this context, the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) presents itself as an instrument of contestation and mediation, capable of articulating dialogue between official agrarian policies and the proposals collectively constructed by communities. Its implementation seeks not only to reconcile social justice, legal security, sustainability, and rural development, but also to challenge historical structures of exclusion and land concentration that perpetuate inequalities. By understanding these dynamics, the RAP emerges as a strategy to mitigate agrarian conflicts and their territorial consequences, while promoting inclusive productive restructurings and giving visibility to socially marginalized groups, as analyzed by the *Grupo de Estudos Desenvolvimento Rural do Conselho Latino-Americano de Ciências Sociais* (CLACSO) [Rural Development Study Group of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences] in the book *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina: a questão agrária atual* (2008) [Peasantry and agribusiness in Latin America: the current agrarian issue].

Given the structural social, economic, and environmental issues that have shaped the historical course of the agrarian question in Latin America — and in light of the recognition by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which regards agrarian reform as a central action for strengthening initiatives aimed at sustainable development, promoting human rights, and achieving social justice — the proposal of the Popular Agrarian Reform proves to be highly relevant. This is mainly because it integrates long-tested strategies that contribute to eradicating hunger, combating food insecurity, and reducing rural poverty (FAO, 2003, 2006, 2023).

Similarly, the establishment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations (UN, 2015) approaches sustainable development as a balanced process based on three integrated and indivisible dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. It also recommends that, given local, political, and administrative specificities — and

particularly national priorities — each government is responsible for deliberating on the incorporation of policies and strategies that, although global in scope, must be managed and implemented within the boundaries of its own territory.

In this article, the concept of sustainable development is intrinsically linked to the agrarian question. It is recognized, however, that its applicability assumes distinct contours depending on conceptual perspectives, environmental practices, and sociotechnical approaches, all of which remain conditioned by political decisions. These disputes materialize in the everyday dynamics of socio-territorial movements and in land management defined by state directives, which governmental changes concerning agrarian reform have historically shaped.

Given this context, the question arises as to the extent to which the proposal of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) can strategically engage with land governance in Brazil and contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Accordingly, this text seeks to reflect on how the perspectives of the RAP are articulated with the SDGs and in what ways they can strengthen the governance of the agrarian question in the country.

It should be noted that this study does not focus on the theoretical disputes between the classical agrarian reform proposed by the State and the reform presented and defended by the MST. Instead, emphasis is given to the governance of agrarian reform, considering its articulation with the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs in light of the agrarian plan developed by the movement.

To carry out this qualitative research, the study adopts an exploratory and analytical approach based on the recursive process of discursive textual analysis (Moraes, 2003). The database comprises the agrarian program developed by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) published in 2021; the multi-year plan (PPA 2024–2027) issued by the federal government within the framework of the 2030 Agenda; the guidelines and goals of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations (UN, 2015); and publications, reports, articles, and books addressing the Popular Agrarian Reform.

To compose the structure of the text, in addition to this introduction, the exposition includes elements that characterize land governance and the agrarian reform (RA) in Brazil, highlighting the construction of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP). This is followed by correlations between the RAP and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), linking them to the respective targets proposed in the state planning propositions of the 2030 Agenda.

## **The governance of agrarian reform (RA) in Brazil and the construction of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP)**

When examining the historical connotations, one observes both the multiple dimensions and contexts involved and the limitations of understanding the interactions among the different social spheres, whether economic or otherwise. In this sense, the movements of the process — whether aimed at overcoming underdevelopment or consolidating a national development project grounded in the planning of the social structure and the formulation of policies (Furtado, 1975; 1992) — define the foundations of the State's role in its actions on land ownership and its social function, triggering proposals and disputes over Brazil's land structure.

Thus, even in embryonic yet clear terms, beginning with the 1934 Constitution, state connotations emerge concerning the use and right to property — precepts that substantiate the “traditional form” of proposing agrarian reform. From this point onward, legal proposals such as Law No. 4.504 of November 1964 — enacted during the repressive period of the Military Dictatorship and which established the *Estatuto da Terra* [Land Statute] — served as a State strategy to destabilize popular movements that resisted the unequal and contradictory dynamics of the countryside and the hegemonic models of production inherent to territorial control and occupation. This was followed by the National Agrarian Reform Plan of 1985 and the 1988 Constitution, whose Chapter III establishes the guidelines for agricultural and land policies and agrarian reform. However, these measures yielded few concrete results toward a genuine agrarian reform in the country (Maniglia, 2009; Ramos, 2021; Souza and Estevam, 2021).

It should also be noted that, within the same political and economic scenario — and under the aegis of the State, rather than of claims by social movements, peasants, and landless farmers — the agricultural policy was shaped by the invitation to modernize and restructure property as a rural enterprise. Furthermore, “the modernization of agriculture was strictly aimed at increasing productivity, no longer linked to land restructuring measures designed to resolve social tensions in the countryside” (Ramos, 2009, p. 30). Thus, the premises of Agrarian Reform and Agricultural Policy followed divergent trajectories.

The premise that productivity could be increased without transforming land structures — and, from this perspective, without addressing the intrinsic dynamics of the agrarian question — confined rural-urban dualities to purely economic, productive, and technological factors. This process took on the nuances of a technological reform detached from socio-spatial aspects.

When observing that 41% of the national territory corresponds to arable land, and that among properties with legal land titles, the national average is 69 hectares per property,

one finds that 1% of Brazil's 5,073,324 rural properties account for 47.6% of all establishments larger than one thousand hectares. In comparison, 50% of the establishments have up to ten hectares and occupy only 2.3% of rural territory (IBGE, 2017). We may infer that land issues shape territorial arrangements, intertwining political and administrative intentions with sectoral progress, thereby laying the foundations for the development process chosen as a political and institutional project. They also express disparities in land use and occupation — and, beyond that, the territorial and environmental dynamics intrinsically embedded in these relations — as well as their contradictions within the socioeconomic development of the country.

The discussion surrounding the social function of land is part of a process that requires more profound exploration of the sociopolitical and legal nuances embedded in the agrarian question in Brazil, as pointed out in several studies (Leite et al., 2004; Neves, 1997; Stédile, 2005) that address the historical and structural context of the political and social representativeness of land use and territorial occupation, based on analytical approaches directly involving struggles of resistance and the (de)constructed role of the State over the decades.

By broadening the analytical scope around the centrality of land, what emerges are conceptions that refer to its social function — in relation to justice and rights — through the representativeness of use and occupation, and the socio-cultural, political, and economic (re)production in and of the territory. Regarding the concept of territory, one that encompasses the understanding that:

The territory must be understood as the used territory, not the territory in itself. The used territory is the ground plus identity. Identity is the feeling of belonging to that which belongs to us. Territory is the foundation of work, the place of residence, of material and spiritual exchanges, and of the exercise of life." (Santos, 2009, p. 8)

It is worth emphasizing that, despite the existence of new debates and approaches, state narratives and measures still address old issues and persistent problems that reinforce the complexity of land restructuring. This process spans periods in which the investigation of the discretion of legal frameworks would be limiting and could lead to analytical misinterpretations.

For instance, the foundation of Agrarian Reform (RA) — rhetorical and recent for the Brazilian State — rests on the pillar of the settlement project, understood as "[...] a set of planned and developed actions in an area designated for Agrarian Reform, of interdisciplinary and multisectoral nature, integrated into territorial and regional development" (Brazil, 2004, p. 148). Furthermore, the agrarian chronology developed by INCRA, published in 2017, presents significant legislative milestones — inherent to both historical and tragic

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events in rural Brazil — highlighting the politically experienced conjunctures that reveal the continuous absence of structural reforms necessary for the effective implementation of Agrarian Reform (RA).

Considering these conceptions, the transitory nature of the role of Agrarian Reform becomes evident, as it oscillates between failures and successes, remaining centered on the creation of settlements as a palliative solution to land conflicts. Moreover, greater visibility is still required — on the part of the State and governments — regarding the sociopolitical relations experienced by communities emerging from these settlements, movements, and rural social organizations, in light of their socioeconomic and identity-based representativeness in rural and regional development.

Throughout this trajectory, what is commonly observed is the personification of the latifundium, which assumes new productive forms in the contexts of agro-industrial agriculture and agribusiness — or patronal agriculture — in the constant pursuit of “policies and territory, thereby maintaining a broad political space of domination” (Fernandes, 2004). As pointed out by Milton Santos, “the content of the territory has changed fundamentally with globalization — whether its demographic, economic, fiscal, financial, or political content” (Santos, 2009, p. 12).

In these terms, public policies nominally associated with agrarian reform became attempts to maintain control over the territory — the territory of the market. Consequently, they triggered programs for land access that provided the basis for the expansion of neoliberalism. The book *O Banco Mundial e a Terra: ofensiva e resistência na América Latina, África e Ásia* [The World Bank and the Land: Offensive and Resistance in Latin America, Africa, and Asia], published in 2004, contributes to understanding the offensives of international financialization upon national territories and the weakening role of the State in its duties. Through the market-led agrarian reform (MLAR) model—embodied in programs such as *Banco da Terra* [Land Bank Program], *Cédula da Terra* [Land Reform Credit Certificate], and *Crédito Fundiário de Combate à Pobreza* [Land Credit for Poverty Reduction Program]—social movements denounce what they call the “World Bank trap,” exposing the limits and consequences of such financing initiatives.

In this scenario, Horácio Martins de Carvalho (2009) warns that neoliberal practices — by prioritizing a deregulated market and a State aligned with the interests of capital — demand more complex and integrated forms of social and political resistance. Furthermore, such a logic “tends to affirm a single model — a Uninational State — regardless of the ethnodiversity and multiculturalism encompassed by its territory” (Carvalho, 2009, p. 13).

Understanding the struggle for land — or even land governance in Brazil — as an expression of resistance<sup>2</sup>, the peoples of the fields, waters, and forests contribute fundamentally not only to confronting oppression within their territories and forms of social reproduction, but also to embodying the continuous resistance that underlies Brazil's social and political formation. With the end of the Military Dictatorship in 1984, the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* – MST) emerged, establishing its foundations on the principles of the right to land linked to public policy and State presence, in favor of agrarian reform and land governance, alongside processes aimed at transforming power relations in society.

The defense of the democratization of land access, both within the MST and in State policies, has been marked by alternating conceptions and the redefinition of strategies that have sustained their positions over time. In this context, in 2011 the MST proposed the construction of an Agrarian Reform of a popular nature, incorporating not only the agenda of land distribution in rural areas but also within urban centers, thereby broadening the political and social scope of the debate.

This process of constructing and adapting the MST's proposals reached a new milestone in the mid-2020s, when the COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the structural crisis affecting millions of workers throughout Brazil. In this context, social vulnerabilities related to hunger, precarious housing, and income conditions gained centrality, highlighting the urgency of political and social alternatives capable of addressing such inequalities. In this scenario, parliamentary negotiations were initiated to develop a new agrarian reform proposal to expand social justice in rural areas.

The pandemic, by exposing social and economic problems, merely reaffirms what social movements have denounced for decades: the urgency of agrarian reform. In this context, the proposal presented (MST, 2020; 2021) is articulated from the perspective of a Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP), conceived as a project capable of materializing alternatives already under construction by socio-territorial movements, presenting itself as a concrete path to confront the historical paradoxes of agrarian structure and inequalities in Brazil.

The RAP represents a transitory stage from the central character of land access that guided the 1980s and shaped the determinants of Agrarian Reform in the 1988 Constitution, toward the precepts surrounding the contradictions arising from the agricultural model. Thus, after the 1990s, the integration of socio-territorial movements externalized, through their struggles, the prevailing land structure, focusing on the implications and consequences of this productivist mode, especially regarding land use and occupation, food security, and the production and access to food for the entire population.

<sup>2</sup> The expressions of traditional peoples — such as Indigenous, Quilombola, riverside, and peasant communities — are institutionally and legally recognized in dozens of countries through La Via Campesina.

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In this way, the aim is to overcome the stigmas associated with agrarian reform as being solely about land access and the MST. By fostering integration among diverse socio-territorial movements, the RAP gains representativeness and resonance beyond the rural space. It is a political struggle that seeks to highlight the “consequences of the destructive model” on the environment and public health (MST, 2021). Thus, it reveals reflections and actions in different spaces that culminate in the interdependencies of a socio-political and economic society structured by territorial divisions.

The articulation between land governance and socio-territorial movements constitutes a strategic field for strengthening public policies that democratize land access and promote a more equitable development model. Land governance, understood as the set of normative, administrative, and institutional instruments that regulate the possession, use, and allocation of territory, becomes essential to ensure legal security, mediate conflicts, and consolidate the social function of property.

### **Principles of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The proposal for a structural reform of the productive and social base — which concerns the interconnections between capital, the environment, and social justice — finds in the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) a practical expression of social transformation. The RAP goes beyond productive boundaries, introducing into the debate the “construction of new human relations”<sup>3</sup> as well as political struggles for economic and social representativeness that have historically emerged from the contradictions between rural and urban spaces. At a time when the real needs of the population come to the forefront, food and water security become fundamental pillars of the popular decorum of agrarian reform.

The RAP plan comprises seven guiding principles: land, nature, seeds, production, energy, education and culture, and social rights. Their combinations and interdependencies establish four fundamental pillars. Based on the Popular Agrarian Reform Program by the MST (MST, 2013; 2020; 2021), we highlight some of the central characteristics of this proposal:

- a) Land and labor: recognition, demarcation, and guarantee of Indigenous and Quilombola peoples’ territories; acquisition of unallocated public lands for agrarian reform; ensuring environmental reserves; suspension of subsidies and tax exemptions for agrochemical companies, redirecting these resources toward agrarian reform; incorporating agrarian reform policies into urban hubs; encouraging public policy planning for territorial

<sup>3</sup> It also encompasses the construction of new human, social, and gender relations, confronting issues such as machismo and LGBTQIA+ phobia (MST, 2021).

organization aimed at restructuring land modules in line with agroecological and agroforestry realities; fostering food production, income generation, and the right to work and food.

b) Production of healthy food: budgetary and awareness-raising incentives for diversified food production methods; simplified credit lines—without mandatory requirements such as the Declaration of Aptitude to the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF)—to include families in different productive and socioeconomic situations; continuous strengthening and monitoring of the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE).

c) Protection of nature, water, and biodiversity: safeguarding the diversity of Brazilian biomes; protecting water sources; restoring balance between production and natural resources through the implementation of agroforestry systems, tree planting, and the use of traditional, native, or agroecological seeds; demarcating and guaranteeing territorial rights for traditional peoples as a means to promote these measures.

d) Dignified living conditions in rural areas: investment in existing public policies that encourage rural populations to remain in the countryside with minimum living standards. Examples include strengthening the Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Valorization of Education Professionals (Fundeb), as well as the National Program for Education in Agrarian Reform (PRONERA); maintaining rural schools; creating programs to support housing renovations; ensuring public safety in rural areas, including services to address property-related and domestic violence; and strengthening and expanding the Unified Health System (SUS) in rural areas, particularly family health teams.

The fundamental axes of the RAP seek to broaden and integrate issues experienced in both rural and urban contexts. The demands depend on a new way of acting within Brazilian political culture, adopting strategies that are more integrated and less fragmented. It is a national State project, grounded in dialogue and the territorialization of actions with socio-territorial movements and regional spheres in budgetary and political-administrative terms.

Experiences from other associative and self-managed practices of food production, organization, distribution, and consumption substantiate the movement's pillars. These are concrete forms that promote social well-being and the potential for a public agenda aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When contrasting the aforementioned axes with the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their respective targets—whose core mission is to “end poverty, protect the environment and the climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030” (UN, 2015)—it becomes evident that the proposal for implementing land governance under the premises of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP)

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fosters the feasibility of state actions and the establishment of public policies capable of supporting and advancing, at a minimum, the following goals: (1) No Poverty; (2) Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture; (4) Quality Education; (10) Reduced Inequalities; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production; (14) Life Below Water; (15) Life on Land; (16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

The targets established under each SDG are linked to the feasibility of the RAP and other potential governmental strategies. Likewise, the fundamental pillars of the RAP are correlated with and conditioned by the implementation of practices that strengthen and materialize the 2030 Agenda.

In this context, by considering a state planning approach aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the experiences of socio-territorial movements regarding strategic development proposals that operate across different scales of power (local, regional, and national), and that establish technical, sociocultural, political, and financial cooperation, we highlight the following:

- a) the need to support accelerated investments in actions aimed at eradicating poverty; to implement programs and policies to eliminate poverty in all its dimensions; and to reduce exposure and vulnerability to extreme climate-related events and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters (SDG 1, Target 1.5).
- b) to stimulate the democratization of access to land in light of the socio-productive heterogeneities of rural areas, ensuring access to resources and inputs that promote sustainable agricultural practices, helping maintain ecosystems and soil microbiota (SDG 2, Targets 2.3; 2.4; 2.5; SDG 12, Target 12.2).
- c) to restructure the productive model and the management of chemical products and all residues potentially harmful to water, air, biome biodiversity, and human health; and to encourage the sustainable management and use of natural resources (SDG 12, Targets 12.2; 12.4).
- d) to value the traditional knowledge of rural and riverine peoples—mainly coastal and riparian populations—whose practices promote respect for the biological characteristics of aquatic environments; to demarcate areas and guarantee territorial rights for riverine and native communities. Based on these experiences, to foster and implement public policies for sustainable planning (SDG 14, Target 14.4).
- e) to eliminate legislative, policy, and discriminatory practices that prevent or hinder the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people. By promoting the rule of law, to ensure equality and social justice (SDG 10, Targets 10.2 and 10.3; SDG 16, Targets 16.3 and 16.10).

Regarding Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” and Goal 15, which seeks to “protect, restore, and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss,” both SDG 4 and SDG 15 demonstrate multisectoral and cross-cutting conditions, encompassing commitments that—in their broad set of targets—can be considered fully representative of the subjective and heterogeneous relations within and arising from rural space. They also stimulate the continuity of pluriactivity and diversity within rural communities.

In this sense, by guaranteeing the right and access to free, quality public education—of political, technical, and scientific character—and by integrating sociocultural experiences into educational perspectives, it is possible to generate a permanent movement of transformation in social, productive, and labor relations, as well as income opportunities.

The principles that promote social justice, in the face of the challenge of mitigating socioeconomic disparities, reducing social and political inequalities, and combating all forms of discrimination, are inherent to the Constitution promulgated in 1988. As Elisabete Maniglia (2009) notes, agrarian reform is a fundamental right grounded in the Democratic Rule of Law. Agrarian Reform is one of the pillars supporting food sovereignty, and public policies centered on human rights reveal the interfaces between Agrarian Law and food security in Brazil.

The premises of Brazil's commitment to the United Nations global agenda reflect the inseparability of institutional integration, coordination, and cooperation. In 2023, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), and the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for Latin America and the Caribbean reaffirmed their commitment to fostering dialogue around proposals that promote land governance in connection with efforts to articulate a regional agenda.

This joint strategy of technical and institutional cooperation and Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) is linked to the framework of the Brazil–FAO International Cooperation Program. Within this context, Brazil's actions are recognized as contributing to the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): (1) No Poverty; (2) Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture; (10) Reduced Inequalities; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production; (13) Climate Action; (16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

The guidelines to be developed are intended to be implemented under a territorial and sustainable rural development framework, reaffirming the symbolism and significance of

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family farming and agrarian reform. In Brasília, the monitoring of these initiatives is carried out by INCRA, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture (MDA) and the National Council for Sustainable Rural Development (Condraf). Among Condraf's strategies is the creation of the Permanent Committee on Agrarian Reform and Land Governance, established in the second half of 2024.

As stated by FAO (2023), the issue of land governance must be addressed through approaches that emphasize food security, equity, and the sustainability of land tenure and natural resources. Furthermore, the exchange of operational knowledge for administrative and land management is essential; however, as highlighted: "It is clear that we need political commitment. We have technical inputs, studies, projects, and methodologies. What is necessary is political support to move forward." (FAO, 2023).

In light of the fundamental objectives of the Republic, the government planning framework (Pluriannual Plan 2024–2027) for national development seeks convergence with the 2030 Agenda, across axes that encompass social and rights-based policies, economic development programs, socio-environmental and climate sustainability, and policies for the defense of democracy, the reconstruction of the State, and sovereignty (Brazil, 2024a).

Through Law No. 14.802 of 2024, which approved the Pluriannual Plan, the government established—for the first time in the history of such plans—the creation of transversal agendas<sup>4</sup>, defined as

a set of attributes that address complex public policy problems, potentially encompassing those focused on specific target groups or themes, which require a multidimensional and integrated approach by the State to be effectively and efficiently managed" (Brazil, 2024b).

Among these, the environmental agenda identifies the challenge of "reconciling environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources with socioeconomic development" (Brazil, 2024a). Its strategies involve the management and conservation of water resources, the protection and restoration of ecosystems and biomes, the prevention and control of deforestation, the mitigation of climate change, and the creation of a specific bioeconomy agenda (Brazil, 2024a; 2024b).

Ten years after Brazil's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015), and with less than five years remaining to meet the 2030 targets, what becomes evident is a bureaucratic government agenda, rather than a comprehensive state planning project aimed at achieving these goals. Under such circumstances, the government tends to explore budgetary resources and mobilize public–private financing mechanisms in areas with

<sup>4</sup> The thematic priorities of the transversal agendas are: 1) Children and Adolescents; 2) Women; 3) Racial Equality; 4) Indigenous Peoples; 5) Environment (Brazil, 2024b).

potential for sustainable development. As a result, this approach may favor resource allocation and actions aligned with a hegemonically modernized agrarian model, with only marginal “gestures” toward land democratization and the construction of a more equitable agrarian society.

Ultimately, as Josué de Castro pointed out as early as the 1980s, the “inaptitude of the political State to serve as a balancing power between private interests and the collective interest” results in “economic and social maladjustment” (Castro, 1980, p. 268).

The dialogues developed within the framework of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP)—bridging historically fragmented dimensions—constitute a necessary tactic for a concrete positioning within the contemporary agrarian question in Brazil (Santos, 2014). The reflections presented in this article reveal intrinsic elements that contribute to initiatives supporting the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, within the scope of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP), the contribution of socio-territorial movements becomes evident, as they bring historical demands for the recognition of rights, while simultaneously proposing territorial management alternatives based on agroecology, community cooperation, and cultural valorization—all in defense of integrated policies that can enable the achievement of the SDGs.

The Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP) emerges as a vector of integration between rural and urban spaces, consolidating production, distribution, and food consumption practices in alignment with land governance frameworks and territorial public policies. Structured around pillars that interconnect social, economic, and environmental dimensions, the RAP plays a crucial role in implementing the SDGs, positioning itself as a driving force for social justice, distributive equity, ecological sustainability, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Amid the conjunctural dichotomies and the apparent convergences between the RAP plan and the SDGs, it is essential to maintain the centrality of territorialized actions, transcending the political discourse of development in favor of genuine social justice. At the same time, the SDGs must surpass the current trajectory of the RAP in Brazil, ensuring that they are not confined to formalistic or institutional legitimacy alone.

## Closing remarks

The trajectory of agrarian structure and land governance in Brazil is grounded in an unchanging structural political alignment that defends and sustains a productive model oriented toward market logic.

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In this sense, there is a search for alternatives capable of integrating and articulating political and institutional cooperation with the 2030 Agenda, linking these efforts to socio-territorial experiences in order to consolidate a new model of land governance, ensure land distribution and access, and implement productive practices and techniques that promote food sovereignty.

The premises of the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP), proposed by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), are rooted in the socio-environmental problems arising from illegal deforestation, land concentration, patterns of land use and occupation, and environmental degradation. It is essential to value local communities' knowledge in educational processes and productive activities. Its feasibility depends on social transformation and on popular and political sovereignty.

The RAP is configured as an alternative to territorialize the 2030 Agenda, integrating social, economic, environmental, and political dimensions in favor of a model of sustainable development and social justice in Brazil. However, it is important to note that, in terms of priorities, the RAP diverges from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the SDGs pursue global consensus supported by multifaceted international agreements, the RAP proposes structural transformations rooted in popular struggles and social movements, emphasizing more profound changes more closely aligned with Brazilian realities. By problematizing the very concept of "sustainable development" as presented in official discourse, the RAP underscores that invoking sustainability in abstract terms is insufficient: it is necessary to guarantee access to land, social justice, and food sovereignty as fundamental rights.

Therefore, although the RAP and the SDGs are formulated within distinct frameworks and interests, they converge in reinterpreting the agrarian question and advocating a new system of land governance. Both proposals highlight the importance of implementing public policies that promote agroecological and agroforestry systems, linked to sustainable socio-economic and productive arrangements, thereby pointing to pathways to combat hunger and reduce social and regional inequalities.

Nevertheless, the challenges remain significant due to the prevailing political and economic interests that obstruct the expropriation of properties failing to fulfill their social function, as well as the ongoing need to foster agricultural and livestock production that values non-hegemonic forms of (re)production beyond the logic of capital.

In this scenario, the Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP), in dialogue with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), presents guiding principles that can be understood both within a legal framework and as part of a utopian political horizon. If such principles

were adopted by the State, they could strengthen the 2030 Agenda and contribute to the consolidation of a structural, enduring public policy.

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### Translator's notes (TN)

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**Reforma Agrária Popular (RAP)** – translated as *Popular Agrarian Reform (RAP)*, it refers to a proposal developed by Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) advocating structural social transformation based on land redistribution, agroecology, and food sovereignty.

**Quilombola communities** – Afro-descendant rural groups originating from historical maroon settlements of enslaved people. They hold collective territorial rights recognized under the Brazilian Constitution (Art. 68, ADCT).

**Riverside communities (ribeirinhos)** – traditional populations living along rivers, whose livelihoods depend on fishing, agriculture, and riverine ecosystems.

**Market-led agrarian reform (MLAR)** – model promoted by the World Bank in the 1990s, emphasizing market mechanisms (land purchase through credit) over state-led expropriation. In Brazil, this approach materialized through programs such as Banco da Terra and Cédula da Terra, often criticized by social movements as the “World Bank trap” for perpetuating land concentration and rural indebtedness.

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## Research data availability statement

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Regarding the availability of the research data, the authors of the manuscript “**Popular Agrarian Reform in Brazil from the Perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**” state that:

*The dataset supporting the results of this study is not publicly available.*

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## Individual Contribution Statement

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The scientific contributions presented in the article were jointly developed by the authors. Author **Danieli Cristina de Souza Muzeka** was responsible for the following roles: conceptualization, data curation, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, visualization, writing (original draft), and writing (review and editing). The second author, **Dimas de Oliveira Estevam**, was responsible for the following roles: conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, visualization, writing (original draft), and writing (review and editing).

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