

NETWORKS OF RESISTANCE: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN QUILOMBO DO BONFIM

REDES DE RESISTÊNCIA: SOBERANIA ALIMENTAR E JUSTIÇA SOCIOAMBIENTAL NO QUILOMBO DO BONFIM

REDES DE RESISTENCIA: SOBERANÍA ALIMENTARIA Y JUSTICIA SOCIOAMBIENTAL EN EL QUILOMBO DO BONFIM



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How to reference this paper:

RENSI, Julia Silva; AUN, Nádia Jarouche; SILVA, Ellen Monielle do Vale. Networks of resistance: food sovereignty and socio-environmental justice in Quilombo do Bonfim. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara v. 25, n. esp. 2, e025018, 2025. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp2.20037



| **Submitted:** 22/02/2025
| **Revisions required:** 26/08/2025
| **Approved:** 15/10/2025
| **Published:** 28/12/2025

Editors: Prof. Dr. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbauy
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ABSTRACT: This study examines the quilombola community Senhor do Bonfim, in Areia – PB, and its integration into the Communities that Sustain Agriculture Network in Paraíba (CSA Parahyba), highlighting processes of resistance, community organization, and food sovereignty. Founded in 2020, CSA Parahyba connects quilombola farmers with urban consumers, promoting sustainable agriculture, productive diversification, and cooperation between producers and co-farmers. The research combines bibliographic and documentary review with a case study, including semi-structured interviews and visits to productive and food distribution areas, allowing an understanding of the community’s historical trajectory, agricultural practices, socio-environmental challenges, and strategies to strengthen social networks. Results indicate that networks like CSA Parahyba enhance sustainable development, bring consumers and producers closer together, and contribute to the preservation of local biodiversity, highlighting the role of quilombola communities in building more just and resilient food production and consumption alternatives.

KEYWORDS: Quilombos. Family farming. Community networks.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa a comunidade quilombola Senhor do Bonfim, em Areia – PB, e sua integração à Rede Comunidades que Sustentam a Agricultura na Paraíba (CSA Parahyba), evidenciando processos de resistência, organização comunitária e soberania alimentar. Fundada em 2020, a CSA Parahyba conecta agricultores quilombolas a consumidores urbanos, promovendo a agricultura sustentável, a diversificação produtiva e a cooperação entre produtores e co-agricultores. A pesquisa combina revisão bibliográfica e documental com estudo de caso, incluindo entrevistas semiestruturadas e visitas às áreas produtivas e de distribuição de alimentos, permitindo compreender a trajetória histórica da comunidade, suas práticas agrícolas, seus desafios socioambientais e as estratégias de fortalecimento das redes sociais. Os resultados indicam que a formação de redes como a CSA Parahyba fortalece o desenvolvimento sustentável, aproxima consumidores e produtores e contribui para a preservação da biodiversidade local, destacando o papel das comunidades quilombolas na construção de alternativas de produção e consumo de alimentos mais justas e resilientes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Quilombos. Agricultura familiar. Redes comunitárias.

RESUMEN: Este estudio analiza la comunidad quilombola Señor del Bonfim, en Areia – PB, y su integración a la Red Comunidades que Sustentam la Agricultura en Paraíba (CSA Parahyba), evidenciando procesos de resistencia, organización comunitaria y soberanía alimentaria. Fundada en 2020, la CSA Parahyba conecta a agricultores quilombolas con consumidores urbanos, promoviendo la agricultura sostenible, la diversificación productiva y la cooperación entre productores y co-agricultores. La investigación combina revisión bibliográfica y documental con estudio de caso, incluyendo entrevistas semi-estructuradas y visitas a las áreas productivas y de distribución de alimentos, lo que permite comprender la trayectoria histórica de la comunidad, sus prácticas agrícolas, desafíos socioambientales y estrategias para fortalecer las redes sociales. Los resultados indican que la formación de redes como la CSA Parahyba fortalece el desarrollo sostenible, aproxima a consumidores y productores y contribuye a la preservación de la biodiversidad local, destacando el papel de las comunidades quilombolas en la construcción de alternativas de producción y consumo de alimentos más justas y resilientes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Quilombos. Agricultura familiar. Redes comunitárias.

Introduction

In Brazil, socio-environmental inequalities—historically experienced by marginalized populations—have intensified in the face of climate change impacts. These effects are particularly evident in quilombola communities, which, in addition to bearing the legacy of slavery, disproportionately confront the challenges imposed on their lands and ways of life. In this context, promoting food sovereignty in quilombola and Indigenous communities extends beyond food production; it also entails addressing historical inequalities and reducing climate vulnerabilities, thereby making a concrete contribution to environmental justice.

Action through social and productive networks has emerged as a key strategy to strengthen historically disadvantaged groups, promote food sovereignty, and create sustainable alternatives to conventional food production. Food sovereignty enables communities to exercise control over food production, agricultural techniques, and natural resource management, thereby enhancing their resilience to extreme climate events and economic instability.

Within this framework, the Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community, located in the Borborema Plateau in Areia, Paraíba, offers an emblematic case of resistance and community organization. Officially recognized as a quilombo in 2005, the community has developed diversified agricultural practices and internal cooperation mechanisms over decades, enabling food production, biodiversity preservation, and the maintenance of strong social bonds, even amid historical exclusion and socio-environmental challenges (Santos, 2017; Yogi, 2014).

The trajectory of Bonfim highlights the importance of family farming in securing local livelihoods, as well as the role of public policies, such as the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), in expanding access to markets and consumers. However, recent challenges—including the weakening of the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF) from 2016 onward and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic—have underscored the need for alternative strategies for distributing production. In this context, the Communities Supporting Agriculture Network in Paraíba (CSA Parahyba), created in 2020, has emerged as an initiative connecting quilombola farmers to urban consumers, promoting sustainable agriculture and strengthening interdependence between producers and co-farmers (FIOCRUZ, 2022; Junqueira & Moretti, 2018).

CSA Parahyba illustrates how network formation can articulate diverse social actors around shared objectives, combining bonding social capital—bringing farmers and consumers closer—with bridging social capital, which expands connections among distinct groups. The

CSA model arrived in João Pessoa with the “Flor de Mel” unit and currently comprises four active CSAs. The network serves approximately 47 families, involving farmers from the Bonfim and Mata D’Água quilombos, and projects expansion to Campina Grande with the Quilombo Grilo. Although it has not yet reached the stage of full integration with public policies and regional markets—linking social capital—the network represents a robust space for cooperation and mutual learning, consolidating agroecological practices and strengthening community autonomy (Queiroga, 2024; Nierdele; Wesz, 2018).

This study employs the case study of the Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community and CSA Parahyba to analyze trajectories of resistance, organization, and quilombola food production, demonstrating how network-based action can overcome structural inequalities and create sustainable alternatives for rural development. The research combines bibliographic and documentary review with fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews, visits to production areas, and monitoring of food distribution practices. This approach enables an understanding of the community’s singularity within the broader context of family farming, public policy, and food sovereignty.

The article is organized into three sections: (1) the first section presents a literature review on networks and food sovereignty; (2) the second section outlines the methodology and methods applied in the study; and (3) the third and fourth sections present and discuss the research findings from the Bonfim Quilombo case study.

The Importance of Networks for Food Sovereignty and the Strengthening of Quilombola Identity

The relationship between socio-environmental justice and quilombola peoples in Brazil demonstrates how the unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits is deeply shaped by racial and historical hierarchies. Quilombola communities—formed through resistance to slavery and recognized by the 1988 Constitution (Art. 68 of the ADCT)—remain in a condition of structural vulnerability. The absence of effective land titling, combined with pressures from mining enterprises, agro-export monocultures, hydroelectric projects, and exclusionary environmental policies, places these groups in a context of permanent dispute. This scenario reflects what Bullard (1990) and Acselrad (2004) define as environmental injustice and

environmental racism: Black and poor populations disproportionately affected by negative impacts, without access to state protection mechanisms.

The quilombola territory, however, is not limited to a physical space of production. It constitutes the foundation of the cultural, social, spiritual, and identity reproduction of these communities, functioning as a site of resistance and the construction of sustainable ways of life. Research by Arruti (2006) and Schmitt (2018) demonstrates that quilombola agroecological practices, community-based management, and traditional knowledge not only preserve biodiversity but also contribute to climate change mitigation. Such recognition situates quilombola communities within national and international debates on just transition, sociobiodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation, highlighting how local knowledge engages with multilateral agendas. The territory thus affirms itself as a locus of political and epistemic dispute, where quilombola ways of life challenge the hegemonic development model grounded in the commodification of nature.

In this context, food sovereignty assumes a central role. Defined by La Via Campesina (1996) as the right of peoples to determine their own food systems, it values traditional agricultural practices, local cultures, and short production and consumption circuits. For quilombola communities, food sovereignty and the struggle for land are inseparable, as collective territory ensures traditional farming plots, productive home gardens, and community-based management practices that sustain subsistence and cultural continuity. Conversely, the expansion of agribusiness—marked by intensive pesticide use and export-oriented monocultures—threatens environmental integrity, food security, and the very existence of these communities. Food sovereignty thus becomes a strategic axis of resistance, linking the fight against hunger to cultural preservation and the construction of alternatives to the agro-export model.

The persistence of violence against quilombola leaders and the slow pace of land titling processes reveal the priority granted by the State to agribusiness and large corporate interests over collective rights. In this scenario, organization through social and political networks emerges as a fundamental strategy to strengthen marginalized voices, coordinate mobilization, and confront exclusionary power structures. Scherer-Warren (2006) characterizes civil society as a network of diversities integrating different levels of interest representation and civic values. Aun, Assis, and Rodrigues (2022) describe network formation as a three-stage process: initial approximation among actors, effective articulation with greater commitment, and integration with other social dimensions to avoid fragmentation. This dynamic relates to the notions of

bonding, bridging, and linking social capital (Lin, 2001), which are essential for consolidating social mobilization in communities and societies. In the quilombola context, such networks connect local dimensions—such as community associations—to regional and national representative bodies, including the National Coordination for the Articulation of Rural Black Quilombola Communities (CONAQ), thereby strengthening political advocacy and the construction of autonomous narratives.

Social mobilizations, as noted by Westerhoff *et al.* (2018), consist of coordinated actions that expand awareness and drive structural change. For Calabrese (2008), they represent expressions of activism and political commitment capable of transforming both institutional norms and social practices. In the field of food sovereignty, this implies examining how communities organize around food and the meanings they attribute to it. In such contexts, producing and deciding what to eat is a practice that ensures not only survival, but also identity and social and climate resilience.

The concept of food sovereignty is broader than that of food and nutrition security, which is linked to food quality and safety, and broader than the concept of food systems, which encompasses processes from production to consumption (Sabourin *et al.*, 2022). Food sovereignty integrates these dimensions by emphasizing the political and cultural autonomy of communities. As Sabourin *et al.* (2022) observe, the ways in which groups organize around food reveal collective identities, strengthen social bonds, and generate new forms of resistance. It is important to stress that understanding a community through the configuration of its social and technical networks provides key insights into its capacity for resilience in the face of external pressures, whether related to food production practices or territorial organization. This approach moves beyond an actor-centered perspective by conceiving social configurations as part of a macrostructure—a network of relationships connected to other networks (Niederle; Wesz, 2018).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) underscores that vulnerabilities to extreme climate events are shaped by factors such as geographic location, economic inequality, and social structures. In this sense, the formation of networks strengthens the capacity of marginalized communities to claim their rights. The experience of the Bonfim quilombola community illustrates this process: through land use and food production, the community asserted political and territorial recognition, demonstrating the centrality of food sovereignty in the struggle for environmental justice (Bullard, 2004; Acselrad; Mello; Bezerra, 2009; Milanez, 2011).

We therefore understand that, prior to integrating broader and more complex networks, it is essential to consolidate secure and sovereign internal bonds among members of each community. Once collective identity is strengthened, food becomes a focal point of the network, ensuring the material and symbolic sustainability of the group. In this regard, food sovereignty not only advances environmental and social justice but also serves as a strategic instrument for guaranteeing rights, preserving culture, and democratizing food systems.

Methodology and Research Strategy

The methodological approach combines bibliographic and documentary review with a case study conducted in the Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community in Areia, Paraíba. A case study with field research was selected to analyze the community's trajectory of resistance from the perspective of networks and food sovereignty. As Henriques *et al.* (2015) emphasize, working with case studies requires the researcher to understand the operational mechanisms of contexts characterized by multiple interactions. It is therefore a widely adopted strategy in research aimed at understanding a particular reality within a broader framework. In the same vein, Rezende (2011) argues that case studies address complex causalities, allowing researchers to focus on specific situations without losing sight of the broader totality in which they are embedded. Thus, by analyzing a particular quilombola community, the study seeks to understand its singularity within a more comprehensive context.

Data collection took place throughout 2024 in three distinct stages, conducted by a single member of the research team. In the first stage, semi-structured online interviews were carried out exclusively with those responsible for distributing the food produced by the quilombo. In the second stage, during an initial field visit, it was possible to observe the distribution process in person—including item organization, weighing, sorting, and delivery—as well as to engage in informal conversations with some consumers. Finally, a visit to the Bonfim quilombo was conducted, involving direct contact with production areas and collective spaces used for processing agricultural products and capturing water for crops, as well as the collection of additional information on the history of the group and its territory.

According to Rezende (2011), the present situation—the dependent variable—is a consequence of the initial conditions experienced by a group, and understanding the current context also creates opportunities for approximation—that is, for building bonds (bonding)—with the community. For this reason, the first stage of the research consisted of interviews. This

phase was essential for establishing sufficiently stable trust relationships and for understanding the initial conditions (Rezende, 2011) of the community's historical trajectory.

Field visits to the quilombo were complemented by semi-structured interviews with members of CSA Parahyba. The instruments used during this stage were structured interview guides. Recording equipment was employed when interviews were conducted remotely. Based on the information collected, it was possible to analyze the importance of quilombola farmers within the broader context of organic food production and distribution derived from family farming in the state of Paraíba.

Data analysis consisted of cross-referencing field data with official documents from the Federal Government and subsequently with previously published scientific studies on the Senhor do Bonfim quilombo. This process aimed to construct a critical reflection on the community's struggle for food sovereignty, highlighting the role of networks established between rural and urban territories through CSA Parahyba.

Senhor do Bonfim Quilombola Community

The location of the quilombola community in the Borborema Plateau, in the municipality of Areia, Paraíba, highlights the influence of geographic and environmental conditions on its productive practices. Although situated within the semi-arid region, the area is characterized by a high-altitude microclimate with high humidity and an average annual rainfall of 1,300 mm, distinguishing it as a brejo de altitude, or forest refuge (Marques *et al.*, 2015). This environmental specificity creates favorable conditions for agriculture but also imposes challenges, particularly due to the fragility of the soil (Eutrophic Red-Yellow Argisol), which is susceptible to erosion and fertility loss when poorly managed. In this context, the community's agricultural production depends on strategies that reconcile local potential—such as rainfall patterns and vegetation diversity—with sustainable management practices capable of mitigating socio-environmental risks.

The constitution and official recognition of the community as a quilombo are relatively recent processes. In 2005, the Palmares Cultural Foundation issued an ordinance in the Official Gazette of the Union, formally registering and certifying the community as a quilombola remnant (Brasil, 2005). This document marked the beginning of a lengthy process aimed at securing territorial rights and ensuring the community's permanence in the area.

The history of the community, however, dates back much further. Records indicate that as early as 1920 the area was a private property (Santos, 2017). Testimonies collected and consulted materials reveal a history of agricultural production centered on sugarcane (sugar and alcohol) and agave (sisal). In addition to field labor, there was a mill where cachaça was primarily produced, along with molasses, sugar, and rapadura. This system persisted until 1982, when sugarcane production declined. Ten years later, the mill was deactivated, and part of the land began to be leased for extensive cattle ranching.

According to Yogi (2014), throughout the period in which the farm was productive, workers responsible for planting, harvesting, and processing operated under a system the author termed subjection. This arrangement consisted of exchanging labor for housing and food. It did not establish a specific wage for the work performed, nor did it define daily working hours. Food was generally sourced from crops cultivated by the workers within their residential areas, leaving limited time for tending their own plots. When they occasionally received monetary payment, it was spent at the farm's grocery store on items they could not produce, such as soap, salt, or beans (Yogi, 2014).

This labor organization model, reminiscent of slave-based systems widely disseminated in various Brazilian regions—particularly in sugarcane and cotton plantations—persisted on the farm until the early twenty-first century, when the landowners decided to sell the property. Ironically, according to the testimony of one of the current leaders of the Bonfim quilombo, it was during this period that “everything worsened [...]” (Field interview granted to the authors, 2024). Following the sale, the new owners sought to expel the long-standing residents. Initially, they proposed allocating a small parcel of land to be divided among the families—who, according to Yogi (2014), numbered 25 at the time—but no agreement was reached. Threats and acts of violence against the Bonfim families subsequently ensued.

The conflict began in 2001. Living conditions were severely restrictive; residents “barely had clothes to wear” (Yogi, 2014, p. 27, our translation), and they lacked the means to leave the territory and rebuild their lives elsewhere. Throughout the years under the subjection regime, they had no access to healthcare or education. After decades living under such conditions and building their histories through agriculture and reciprocity among families, and facing limited prospects for relocation, the families chose to fight for their land. Years of armed violence, disrespect, invasions, robberies, and arson followed. With the support of the Association for the Support of Quilombola Communities of Paraíba (AACADE), the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), and federal agencies responsible for territorial regulation, the process

of demarcation and official recognition of the Bonfim quilombola community was initiated (Santos, 2017).

It is essential to understand that the concept of a quilombola community is directly linked to the colonial period between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such communities were formed by enslaved Black workers who escaped from plantations dedicated to coffee, sugarcane, and cotton and established their own settlements. After the abolition of slavery, however, many Black workers—still without land of their own and subjected to the same forms of prejudice—accepted, no longer as enslaved persons but as sharecroppers or rural laborers, conditions of subjection on rural properties. According to Santos (2017), this condition gave rise to so-called modern quilombos: communities that recognize themselves as Black populations belonging to a given locality, not because they have remained there since the slavery period, but because they established themselves there and developed enduring roots.

The right to self-recognition is guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution (Brasil, 1988) and ensures that quilombola communities such as Bonfim may claim their territory. The formation of such communities is invariably linked to collective resistance. Once organized as a community, members establish kinship and friendship ties and collaboratively construct the social, cultural, and productive characteristics necessary for survival—even when positioned at the margins of society. These histories encompass agriculture and food production, religion and cultural manifestations, as well as the refinement of techniques for building homes, tools, and other essential implements.

In 2025, the Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community will mark 20 years of official recognition, a milestone that has provided greater autonomy in the social and productive organization of its territory. The local economy is grounded in agriculture and service provision, whether on other rural properties or in the construction sector. Although children, youth, and adults now have greater access to schools and healthcare facilities, such progress does not in itself ensure the effective appropriation of rights or the full incorporation of benefits offered by the State, particularly given the community's historical marginalization.

Data gathered through interviews and field visits reveal the complexity involved in the Bonfim residents' efforts to constitute themselves as an autonomous community while simultaneously ensuring each individual's enjoyment of citizenship rights. Key challenges include: (i) location—the Bonfim quilombo is situated in the district of Cepilho, at the far western edge of the municipality of Areia, and the roads connecting it to the urban center remain difficult, especially during periods of heavy rainfall, hindering the transport of food and people;

(ii) sanitation—as a rural area, the community lacks potable water supply, sewage collection and treatment, and solid waste collection, with waste burned by residents themselves; and (iii) access to health and education—there are no early childhood or elementary rural schools within the community. Children up to the age of 10 attend school in the district of Cepilho and thereafter must travel to Areia or Remígio, whose urban center is geographically closer than that of Areia. The same limitations apply to access to healthcare facilities.

The community endured decades of severe restriction and isolation and is currently experiencing a process of reintegration into society, which includes redefining the role it intends to play within the new reality it has constructed. At present, the community comprises 122 hectares distributed among 21 families (CPI-SP, 2021). Its primary economic activity is agriculture—more specifically, polyculture. Many of the cultivated areas are located on sloped terrain, requiring greater physical effort from farmers, enhanced technical capacity—both for soil conservation and for implementing irrigation systems—and improved management of fallow land. The shift toward more diversified agriculture emerged from the condition of being a recognized quilombola community, endowed with autonomy and responsible for producing its own livelihood—not only food for subsistence but also surplus production to generate family income.

Resources for the construction of houses, cisterns, and reservoirs were secured through public funds, enabling families to develop greater financial autonomy, particularly by investing in agricultural production aimed at federal food procurement programs. In addition, farmers gained access to free technical assistance, which improved the management of natural resources and contributed to increased productivity.

There are no longer visible traces of the monoculture that dominated the local landscape for more than six decades. As previously noted, the brejo region of Paraíba, where the Bonfim community is located, possesses edaphoclimatic characteristics favorable to agriculture due to soil quality and the humidity typical of its geographic condition. However, it is surrounded by arid and semi-arid areas, resulting in a region marked by environmental fragility. Intensive monoculture practices can reduce local biodiversity and directly affect soil nutrient availability. Combined with anthropogenic occupation, climate change, and challenges in territorial planning, such practices may compromise, among other factors, water supply capacity for local communities and agriculture.

In the Bonfim quilombola community, a distinct reality is observed. Diversified agriculture contributes to the preservation of local biodiversity, while community organization

is reflected in the creation of an association and the collective construction of a flour house. There has also been a resurgence of secondary vegetation, particularly in areas surrounding reservoirs. As the community has become more structured, rural tourism initiatives have emerged, enabling visitors to learn about the history of the quilombo. Currently, a restaurant serves both visitors and residents, and some inhabitants offer lodging, constituting what is referred to as community-based tourism.

The narrative of current residents preserves the memory of human rights violations and prolonged state omission, both of which affected the territory in terms of biodiversity and human development. Nevertheless, the community succeeded in reversing this trajectory, reinventing itself within a broader macrostructure and overcoming the duality in which it was previously embedded by creating its own social and technical network (Niederle; Wesz, 2018). This process materializes only when residents recognize collective unity as a fundamental pathway. The manner in which interviewees recount their history, combined with observations of internal community dynamics, demonstrates how quilombolas organized themselves and began functioning as an articulated network centered on shared interests.

Throughout 2024, the Bonfim community was observed from different perspectives. Initially, contact was established solely with food producers, mediated by their production activities. Subsequently, engagement with the community's history occurred through street market coordinators and public administrators. The third stage took place within the community itself, where past experiences and their connections to the present were documented. Finally, at a public event held at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), it was possible to witness community members engaging with political actors, recounting their history and demanding redress for the State's historical debt.

The Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community is currently part of the CSA Parahyba Network, a Communities Supporting Agriculture initiative, with weekly food deliveries in João Pessoa. It is the first CSA in Brazil linked to a quilombo and continues to contribute to institutional food procurement programs while also serving consumers at street markets.

Network Formation: Connecting Quilombola Family Farming and Urban Centers

Network formation can be a powerful strategy for addressing collective challenges, as it enables the articulation of diverse social actors, communities, and movements around shared objectives. Such networks facilitate knowledge exchange, amplify marginalized voices, and

foster collaborative strategies to confront structural inequalities. By linking local, regional, and global scales, networks also create opportunities for sharing best practices, strengthening community resilience, and influencing public policies and global narratives on sustainability and social equity (Nierdele; Wesz, 2018).

A relevant example of network formation is the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. Inspired by the Teikei movement that emerged in Japan in the 1960s, CSA was introduced in Brazil in 2011 and currently encompasses more than 300 communities nationwide (Junqueira; Moretti, 2018). Operating on a non-profit basis, CSA functions as a network in which local consumers finance, for a predetermined period, the budget of a nearby agricultural enterprise, receiving in return agricultural products without additional costs. This partnership provides farmers with greater financial predictability and reduces waste, while ensuring that consumers—referred to as co-farmers—have access to organic products at fair prices.

Co-farmers also support management, organization, and food distribution, establishing community-based distribution points. The support is unconditional, with losses and surpluses shared between farmers and co-farmers, fostering solidarity and resilience (Santos, 2015). Beyond promoting sustainable agriculture, CSAs have offered practical training since 2014, equipping farmers and consumers with knowledge on creation, management, and diversified planning, thereby strengthening agroecology and promoting community organization (Queiroga, 2024).

Unlike centralized government food procurement programs, this network fosters the autonomous organization of society to secure food supply, directly connecting farmers and consumers. This strategy reflects the principles advocated by the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) and the Ministry of Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger (MDS), which support reducing the distance between producers and consumers as a means of improving food quality and strengthening food security.

The purpose of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative is to establish an agreement between consumers and farmers regarding the production, supply, and consumption of food in a mutually beneficial arrangement. Consumers must understand the processes involved in producing the food they wish to acquire, while farmers must recognize consumer demands and how to meet them effectively. Both groups must be aware of the interdependent relationship that connects them. According to the national board of CSA Brazil, a community that supports agriculture is composed of farmers, cooperatives, associations, and consumers. In

this context, the term “community” encompasses all individuals willing to unite in support of agriculture.

The national CSA network recognizes this organizational model as essential because it seeks to value the culture of those who work directly with the land. It is grounded in the understanding that farmers—responsible for food production and soil preservation—often receive limited recognition in society, particularly in urban settings. CSAs therefore emerge as an alternative framework that highlights the role of cultivators, promotes environmental stewardship, and directly links producers and consumers. Based on agroecological principles, CSAs stand in contrast to the market-driven model of conventional agriculture. By emphasizing local production and consumption, they enhance the sustainability of the supply chain, creating a shortened circuit that prioritizes direct and transparent relationships between farmers and consumers, without intermediaries (Queiroga, 2024).

In Brazil’s Northeast, there are approximately 33 CSA initiatives, both active and in formation, underscoring the region’s significant potential, as it concentrates the largest number of family farmers in the country (Queiroga, 2024; National Confederation of Agricultural Workers [CONTAG], 2024). It is important to note that family farming in the Northeast displays distinct social and geographic characteristics compared to other regions. One notable feature is that 73% of family farmers in the region identify as Black or Brown, a percentage significantly higher than the national average of 55% (Aquino, 2023).

In Paraíba, farmers from the Senhor do Bonfim quilombo structured much of their agricultural production with the support of public food procurement programs, particularly the Food Acquisition Program (PAA). However, following the weakening of the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF) beginning in 2016, compounded by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the group faced difficulties in marketing surplus production, making it necessary to seek new consumers. According to interviewees (Anonymous interview granted to Nádia Jarouche Aun, 2024), this context served as the starting point for the creation of the Network of Communities that Support Agriculture in Paraíba (CSA Parahyba). On one side, there was interest among certain individuals in forming a CSA group; on the other, there was a community of farmers in need of reliable outlets for their produce.

An analysis of CSA Parahyba reveals its evolution through three fundamental stages: initial approach, articulation and strengthening, and integration and consolidation. In its initial phase, the network formed through personal ties and affinities, characterizing bonding social capital, which united local farmers and consumers around the shared objective of supporting

sustainable agriculture. Founded in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, CSA Parahyba began operations with its first unit in João Pessoa, named “Flor de Mel,” establishing a partnership between urban co-farmers and a farmer from the Senhor do Bonfim quilombo. Since then, the network has expanded and currently comprises four CSAs operating in João Pessoa—“Flor de Mel,” “Flor de Quilombo,” “Flor de Areia,” and “Mata D’Água”—involving farmers from the Bonfim quilombo and from the Mata D’Água territory in Alhandra, Paraíba. In addition, a new CSA is being planned in Campina Grande, with farmers from the Grilo quilombo in Riachão do Bacamarte, Paraíba. At present, the CSAs in Paraíba serve approximately 47 families, demonstrating significant growth in the articulation between local producers and consumers (Fiocruz, 2022).

As the network expands, efforts are made to broaden connections among different groups—farmers, consumers, and cooperatives—thereby fostering bridging social capital and building bridges among these actors. CSA Parahyba exhibits all the essential components for the formation of a functional network: (i) a shared objective centered on food production and consumption; (ii) a diversity of individual social capital among participants; and (iii) a collective understanding of the importance of bringing consumers and producers closer together. According to the project’s coordinators, however, the primary challenge lies in effectively articulating these elements and promoting flows of interaction and trust capable of sustaining this connection.

In this regard, CSA Parahyba has not yet reached the stage of integration and consolidation that would enable it to advance into broader spheres—such as public policy and regional markets—through linking social capital. Achieving this stage would be fundamental to ensuring the network’s long-term sustainability and expansion. Nevertheless, CSA Parahyba has already established itself as a solid initiative, contributing to sustainable development and to the direct connection among the various actors involved.

Final considerations

The study of the Senhor do Bonfim quilombola community and the CSA Parahyba network highlights the importance of social and productive networks in promoting food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, and community organization. The Bonfim experience demonstrates that historically marginalized communities can achieve autonomy and strengthen

social ties through diversified agricultural practices, internal cooperation, and participation in public food procurement programs.

Overcoming a past marked by sugarcane and sisal monoculture reveals how legal recognition of land rights, combined with access to public policies supporting family farming, proved essential for diversifying production, preserving biodiversity, and consolidating economic autonomy. A combination of factors—including free technical assistance and investments in infrastructure such as cisterns, reservoirs, and housing—has contributed to increasing the community's resilience in the face of the environmental vulnerability characteristic of the Paraíba highland forest region (brejo paraibano).

The creation and expansion of CSA Parahyba demonstrate the potential of Community Supported Agriculture initiatives to connect quilombola farmers with urban consumers, fostering solidarity, mutual learning, and appreciation of local agricultural labor. Although the network has not yet achieved full integration with public policies and regional markets, its consolidation already contributes significantly to sustainable development, biodiversity preservation, and the expansion of the socioeconomic impact of family farming.

Community organization and participation in networks such as CSA constitute central strategies of resistance and of building sustainable alternatives for production and subsistence. The experience of the Quilombo do Bonfim demonstrates that collective articulation strengthens food security and economic autonomy, while recognizing these populations as key actors in shaping a more just and sustainable development model. In this regard, public policies must ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities, while respecting quilombola specificities. Their inclusion in debates on food security is essential to addressing socio-environmental inequalities and expanding adaptive capacity in the face of climate change.

The study further shows that initiatives such as CSA Parahyba promote not only access to quality food but also the consolidation of community autonomy, establishing models of social and productive organization that connect local, regional, and urban interests in a collaborative and resilient manner. Future research may deepen this discussion by examining public policies and community-based experiences aimed at enhancing resilience and inclusion among quilombolas and other socially vulnerable groups.

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CRediT Author Statement

- Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the quilombola residents of the Quilombo do Bonfim and the members of CSA Parahyba for welcoming us and granting interviews.
 - Funding:** Researcher Nádia Jarouche Aun received funding from the Paraíba State Research Support Foundation (FAPESQ–PB).
 - Conflicts of interest:** None declared.
 - Ethical approval:** All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of the participants, including authorization for audio recordings. Visits to the Quilombo were likewise authorized by community leaders.
 - Data and material availability:** The interview research instrument has been submitted as an attachment.
 - Authors' contributions:** Julia Silva Rensi contributed to the overall research, organization of information, and final revision of the manuscript. Nádia Jarouche Aun conducted the field research (interviews and systematization) and contributed to drafting the manuscript. Ellen M. Silva contributed to the bibliographic research and technical revision of the article.
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Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation

