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Quilombola Communities of the São Francisco Valley: Policy Analysis, Territorial Diagnosis, and Action Agenda

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Abstract:

The realization of quilombola territorial rights in Brazil, although supported by a robust legal framework, remains marked by slowness, institutional fragmentation, and power asymmetries, especially in regions under strong agro-industrial pressure, such as the São Francisco Valley. This article, based on a qualitative, bibliographic, and documentary approach, analyzes public policies directed at quilombola communities in the region, focusing on land regularization, quilombola school education, health, productive inclusion, and territorial governance. Using specialized literature, legal instruments, and institutional documents, it develops a synthetic diagnosis of the main barriers to the realization of rights, highlighting land insecurity, weak intersectoral coordination, insufficient provision of differentiated public services, and weak participatory mechanisms. Based on this diagnosis, the article proposes a governance framework grounded in the interdependence between territorial rights, sectoral policies, and productive inclusion, in quilombola protagonism, and in the role of the university—particularly UNIVASF—as a regional center of knowledge and mediation. This framework unfolds into a policy matrix, specifying objectives, actions, actors, and indicators, and into a short-, medium-, and long-term implementation roadmap. The article concludes that aligning land titling processes, public services, and community development strategies is a necessary condition for building a just territorial development agenda in the São Francisco Valley, placing quilombola communities at the center of regional planning.

Keywords: quilombos; public policies; territorial governance; socio-environmental justice; land conflict; São Francisco Valley.

Abstract

The enforcement of quilombola territorial rights in Brazil, although supported by a robust legal framework, remains marked by slowness, institutional fragmentation and power asymmetries, especially in regions under strong agro-industrial pressure such as the São Francisco Valley. This article, based on a qualitative, bibliographic and documentary approach, analyzes public policies directed at quilombola communities in the region, focusing on land regularization, quilombola schooling, health, productive inclusion and territorial governance. Drawing on specialized literature documents, legal instruments and institutional, it develops a synthetic diagnosis of the main barriers to the realization of rights, highlighting land insecurity, weak intersectoral coordination, insufficient provision of differentiated public services and fragile participatory mechanisms. Building on this diagnosis, the paper proposes a governance framework grounded in the interdependence between territorial rights, sectoral policies and productive inclusion, in quilombola protagonism, and in the role of the university – particularly UNIVASF – as a regional hub of knowledge and mediation. This



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framework is unfolded into a policy matrix, specifying objectives, actions, stakeholders and indicators, and into an implementation roadmap in the short, medium and long term. The article concludes that aligning titling processes, public services and community-based development strategies is a necessary condition to build a just territorial development agenda in the São Francisco Valley, placing quilombola communities at the center of regional planning.

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INTRODUCTION

The quilombola communities located in the São Francisco Valley form a group diverse sociocultural experiences anchored in historical ties, traditional practices and ways characteristic of collective organization. Located in a territory marked by intense transformations. From a socioeconomic standpoint, these communities face complex challenges ranging from guaranteeing... from their territorial rights to access to public policies capable of promoting development. social, food security, economic autonomy and socio-environmental justice.

The region, characterized by the presence of large agro-industrial projects, by the growing urbanization and the productive reorganization around irrigated fruit farming makes it a space of ongoing disputes, in which traditional populations seek to assert their presence and secure decent living conditions.

Analyzing the quilombola communities in this region requires close attention to their interactions between territory, identity, and public policies. The São Francisco Valley concentrates dynamics that sometimes They widen inequalities, while at other times they open opportunities for sociopolitical affirmation. Changes in the use of land, water pressure, the expansion of agricultural enterprises, and land disputes They create a scenario in which the continued existence of quilombola communities depends on their capacity for mobilization, institutional articulation, and historical resistance. These elements make The territory is not only a geographical space, but also a social construct oriented by memories, ancestral traditions, and collective practices that shape community life and give meaning to... contemporary struggles.

In this context, understanding the reality of quilombola communities in the São Francisco Valley requires... to address how groups organize their strategies for material and symbolic reproduction in relation to to the structural transformations of the region. Food production, the traditional management of resources Natural resources, the transmission of knowledge between generations, and local governance constitute dimensions. essential for interpreting the permanence of these communities. At the same time, state action through targeted public policies, especially those involving food security, Strengthening family farming, land regularization, and social inclusion plays a role. decisive in guaranteeing rights and reducing inequalities that have historically affected these



populations.

However, even with some progress, many policies suffer from discontinuity. Implementation difficulties and institutional limitations prevent its effects from being realized. consolidate into structural changes. The observed reality demonstrates the coexistence of initiatives relevant with persistent gaps, especially with regard to equitable access to government programs and the effectiveness of actions aimed at territorial protection and sustainable development. This combination of advances and obstacles reflects the complexity of relationships between the State, territory, and traditional peoples in the Brazilian semi-arid region, highlighting the need for more integrated approaches that are sensitive to the sociocultural specificities of quilombos.

Thus, this article aims to develop an in-depth analysis of the communities. quilombola communities in the São Francisco Valley, encompassing three central axes: territorial diagnosis, Community governance and public policies. From this perspective, the aim is to understand how Historical and structural factors influence collective trajectories, social organization, and... prospects for local development. The study highlights that these communities do not represent... Static vestiges of the past, but living expressions of resistance, adaptation, and political creativity. whose actions continually redefine territorial relations and the way the State and society interact. Traditional peoples understand.

By highlighting the relevance of these communities and the challenges they face, the article This contributes to broadening the debate on socio-environmental justice, territorial sovereignty, and the inclusion of groups. historically marginalized in regional development policies. The proposed analysis seeks to strengthen the understanding that the future of the São Francisco Valley necessarily depends on recognition, appreciation and protection of the quilombos that make up its history, its diversity and its social dynamics. It is, therefore, a study that articulates memory, territory, and political action. to understand the permanence of quilombola communities and to point out possible paths for the construction of more equitable and sustainable societies.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley constitute important spaces of Historical resistance, community organization, and identity construction in the Brazilian semi-arid region. Their Territories are formed by ancestral ties, traditional practices, and unique ways of living together. that span generations, forming a profound relationship between memory, territory, and collective life.

The region has undergone significant transformations in recent decades as a result of The advancement of irrigated agriculture and the expansion of agribusiness. These processes have modified



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deeply exploring land use, access to water, and local socioeconomic dynamics, introducing

New pressures are being placed on traditionally occupied territories. In many cases, such changes...

These have generated tensions that directly affect the autonomy of the communities and the continuity of their culture. sociocultural practices.

The struggle for natural resources, especially water, reveals persistent inequalities in

The way different social groups relate to the territory. While large

Businesses receive priority in water allocation, traditional communities frequently

They face limitations in accessing this essential good. This scenario becomes even more complex.

Given the lack of land regularization, which prevents the full implementation of public policies aimed at to the quilombola communities.

In this context, the importance of social participation in the defense of territories is highlighted.

As Santos (2018, p. 102) observes, "*participation only becomes a reality when accompanied by*

"Mechanisms that ensure an active voice for historically silenced populations." This reflection

This reinforces the need to strengthen governance spaces that allow communities to expand their

Capacity for dialogue, advocacy, and political influence.

Thus, this article proposes an integrated analysis of the quilombola territory in the Valley.

of the São Francisco River, examining the socio-environmental conditions, existing public policies, and the

governance mechanisms, with the aim of understanding the structural challenges and indicating

pathways to a more just and inclusive territorial development.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this study is based on a qualitative approach, chosen for its...

ability to interpret social phenomena in depth and to grasp meanings, values and practices

present in the daily lives of the quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley. As Minayo states

(2014, p. 57), "qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, emotions and

"perceptions that constitute human relationships."

The methodological approach was structured around four axes: literature review, analysis

documentary research, institutional surveys, and territorial observation. The literature review included

studies on contemporary quilombos, territory, development and governance, allowing

to relate historical, political and socio-environmental elements. Gomes (2017, p. 101) reinforces that "the

Studies on traditional communities require a constant dialogue between theory and context.

The document analysis included reports from the National Institute of Colonization and Reform.

Agrarian (INCRA), data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), regulations

public documents, council records, and records produced by the quilombola communities themselves.



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This procedure made it possible to map advances and limitations in public policies and processes. recognition. Minayo (2014, p. 63) highlights that “documentary analysis allows the researcher “to reveal contradictions, omissions, and tensions present in the materiality of policies.”

The institutional survey sought to understand government programs and actions. aimed at quilombola communities, especially in the areas of food security, education, and assistance. social and land regularization. This analysis highlighted the fragmentation of policies and their distance from each other. of the real needs of the territory. Santos (2018, p. 102) emphasizes that “public policy is only realized when it reaches the territory and engages in dialogue with the individuals directly affected.”

Territorial observation made it possible to understand community practices and conditions. Environmental factors, internal organization, and daily challenges of quilombola communities were observed. Land uses were also considered. situations of access to water, community spaces and forms of sociability. For Gomes (2017, p. 115), “the territory must be understood from the perspective of those who live in it, since each community produces proper senses”.

The coordination of these strategies ensured an integrated understanding of the quilombola territory in The São Francisco Valley, allowing for an understanding of the conflicts, potential, and limitations of policies. public. This qualitative approach, by combining technical rigor and social sensitivity, reveals processes invisible to quantitative methodologies and offers support for the construction of strategies. of fair territorial development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Territorial Diagnosis

The territorial diagnosis of the quilombola communities in the São Francisco Valley reveals a set of structural challenges related to water insecurity, lack of infrastructure, Pressures from agribusiness and delays in land regularization. It is observed that many communities They face limitations in access to water, dependence on wells or water trucks, and vulnerability. environmental issues are linked to the intensive use of natural resources by large-scale projects.

The expansion of irrigated agriculture alters water flows, reduces water availability, and It modifies the regional landscape, directly affecting traditional production practices. The situation Land tenure represents one of the most critical issues, with slow and challenging titling processes. territorial conflicts. As Almeida (2019, p. 133) points out, “the territoriality of communities Traditional [relationships] are constantly threatened by economic models that disregard their relationship. “historic with the land.”

Understanding the quilombola territories of the São Francisco Valley requires considering that



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These spaces are not merely physical areas, but historical processes of territorialization constructed by through collective strategies of resistance and social reproduction. As demonstrated by Santos (2020) and Arruti (2006), the formation of quilombos results from trajectories of mobility, alliances Intercommunity and ongoing territorial reconfigurations challenge fixed interpretations of... Identity and territory. In this perspective, Leite (2010) emphasizes that quilombola territories They constitute spaces for the production of social interactions and rights, whose legal fragility amplifies the Vulnerability in the face of the expansion of agro-industrial projects.

In the São Francisco Valley, this territorial vulnerability is exacerbated by processes of Selective territorialization associated with irrigated agribusiness, which reorganizes land and water use. and intensify socio-environmental conflicts (Castro, 2018; Carneiro & Matos, 2021). Such conflicts They reveal the coexistence of incompatible production models, in which traditional communities They face structural inequalities in access to natural resources and public policies.

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Recent institutional data reinforces the structural dimension of these challenges. According to IBGE (2022) and INCRA (2023) show that the number of certified communities is growing faster than the processes of definitive titling, highlighting a gap between legal recognition and territorial implementation. In the semi-arid region, this gap is compounded by structural water vulnerability. characterized by inequality in access to water, dependence on precarious sources and impacts increasing climate (Costa & Barbosa, 2023).

In this context, territorial insecurity is not limited to land ownership, but also involves access. Water, markets, public policies, and cultural recognition, creating a framework of injustice. systemic socioenvironmental (Freitas, 2021).

Thus, the territorial diagnosis reveals profound inequalities that demand policies. Structural public policies and actions that guarantee territorial security, productive autonomy, and protection. environmental.



Public policies aimed at the Quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley cover areas such as food security, social assistance, education, health and development. rural. Programs such as the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National Program of School feeding programs (PNAE) and productive inclusion policies are fundamental, but they suffer. Discontinuity, execution failures, and poor institutional coordination. Many communities report... difficulties in accessing institutional markets, lack of technical assistance and fragility in Mechanisms for monitoring government actions.

The literature on quilombola policies indicates that institutional fragmentation stems from... absence of intersectoral coordination and integrated territorial mechanisms. Santos (2020) This demonstrates that policies aimed at quilombola communities often operate in a way... sectorized, without coordination between education, health, production, and land regularization. This Dynamics limits structural impacts and reproduces historical inequalities.

In the semi-arid region, Pereira and Silva (2019) show that family farming in quilombola communities has high productive potential, especially in agroecological systems adapted to the Caatinga biome, but It depends on ongoing technical assistance, adequate credit, and access to institutional markets. Discontinuing programs like PAA and PNAE jeopardizes the sustainability of these initiatives.

The lack of land titling limits access to structural policies, reducing the impact of existing initiatives. Ribeiro (2014, p. 57) states that "the fragmentation of actions Governments create incomplete policies, incapable of transforming complex realities. Thus, Despite some progress, public policies still do not fully meet the needs of... quilombola communities, requiring greater continuity, intersectoral integration and adaptation to territorial specificities.

Territorial Governance

Territorial governance in the Quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley involves coordination between community associations, local councils, territorial forums and bodies governmental spaces allow for political participation, defense of territories, and formulation of collective demands. However, governance faces challenges such as a lack of integration. institutional, limited leadership training opportunities, and power imbalances that hinder Effective participation. Community associations act as the main organizational structure. They are internal, but lack technical, financial and institutional support.

Territorial governance in semi-arid regions demands multi-scalar institutional arrangements.



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capable of connecting the State, communities, and universities. Furtado (2020) highlights that experiences Successful regional governance models combine participatory planning, leadership training, and... integration of territorial public policies. In the case of quilombola communities, Oliveira (2016) emphasizes that the Territorialization is also a political process of identity affirmation, in which recognition The state must engage in dialogue with the community's own forms of organization.

The absence of this dialogue contributes to power imbalances and the reproduction of practices. Technocratic policies that ignore local knowledge, contradicting principles of democratic participation. substantive (Santos, 2018).

Municipal councils do not always guarantee an active voice for communities, reflecting historical inequalities. As Santos (2018, p. 102) points out, "participation only becomes a reality when accompanied by mechanisms that ensure an active voice for historically silenced populations." Thus, strengthening territorial governance requires expanding spaces for dialogue and ensuring recognition. institutional and ensure resources that enable the continued operation of communities.

Action Agenda

Building an action agenda for the territorial development of communities.

The quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley should rely on three strategic pillars: territorial security, Strengthening community economies and socio-environmental governance. The first axis requires To accelerate land regularization, guaranteeing definitive land titles and protection against external pressures. The second axis aims to strengthen agroecological practices, sustainable management of the Caatinga biome, and production. community and access to institutional markets.

Territorial development strategies for quilombola communities should consider The interdependence between food sovereignty, environmental protection, and economic autonomy. (FAO) (2022) highlights that traditional territories exhibit greater food diversity and resilience. Socioecological impact occurs when public policies strengthen local production systems. In the São Francisco Valley Francisco, the expansion of irrigated agribusiness has produced socio-environmental impacts. significant, including land concentration, water pressure, and changes in lifestyles. traditional (Silva & Gomes, 2022).

Therefore, territorial policies should prioritize agroecological practices and certification. participatory, short supply chains and valorization of traditional products, strengthening Community economies and reducing external dependence.

The third axis involves expanding social participation and creating permanent programs for Training for leaders and coordinating policies in health, education, social assistance, and rural development. In a pertinent reflection, Gomes (2017, p. 115) states: "The construction of territorial strategies needs



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to involve all the subjects who inhabit the territory, recognizing their histories and ways of being.

"organization." The action agenda, therefore, guides ways to strengthen autonomy, guarantee rights and promote fair development in quilombola territories.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Quilombola communities of the São Francisco Valley represent important subjects collectives in the construction of territorialities marked by resistance, historical continuity and Identity affirmation. The analysis developed throughout this study shows that these territories They carry social, political, and environmental complexities that need to be recognized and addressed. through consistent public policies and strengthened governance.

The study demonstrated that the territorial dynamics of the region are strongly influenced through structural processes that extend beyond the daily lives of communities, including the expansion of irrigated agriculture, the intensive use of natural resources, and the persistence of historical inequalities that shape the relationship between the State and traditional populations.

The territorial diagnosis showed the living conditions of the quilombola communities. They continue to be affected by a lack of infrastructure, irregular access to water, and by... Obstacles to land regularization. The analysis revealed that many of these challenges are not limited to not only to material limitations, but also to political processes involving power struggles, Lack of institutional mediation and weaknesses in territorial planning.

The environmental impacts stemming from agribusiness, coupled with economic pressure on... Traditional territories accentuate vulnerabilities and generate territorial insecurity, hindering... continuity of sociocultural and productive practices essential for the autonomy of families. quilombolas.

Research into public policy has indicated that important milestones have been built. over the past few years, especially in the areas of food security, education and development. rural. However, a significant gap was identified between the formulation and the execution of these policies, hampered by institutional fragmentation and a lack of administrative continuity.

The lack of intersectoral coordination compromises the effectiveness of actions and limits their reach. of essential programs to ensure rights and promote inclusion. It was also noted that the lack The lack of definitive land titling acts as a decisive obstacle, reducing access for communities to structural policies, public funding, environmental programs and initiatives of strengthening productivity.

Territorial governance has emerged as a central element for understanding both the challenges Regarding the identified potential, the quilombola associations, territorial forums, and councils...



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Municipalities play a fundamental role in defending territories and articulating demands.

collectives. These instances constitute spaces for dialogue and the construction of action strategies, despite of the numerous obstacles they face, such as resource limitations, low participation of Governmental institutions and inequalities in decision-making processes.

The governance experience developed by the communities shows that there is great potential to expand participatory territorial management practices, provided there is commitment. institutional and ongoing technical support.

The results showed that the permanence of quilombola communities in the Valley of San Francisco is not limited to a physical matter, but involves cultural, historical and... policies that underpin collective identities and specific ways of life. The presence of these Communities contribute significantly to environmental preservation and biodiversity. sociocultural and for the production of traditional knowledge that makes up the intangible heritage. of the region.

Given this, the construction of a fair territorial development agenda for the Quilombola communities require structural and sustainable actions, including strengthening the Community economies, the promotion of agroecological practices, and the encouragement of traditional production. and full access to institutional support programs. The definitive titling of the territories constitutes an indispensable step to ensure the rights of communities and guarantee conditions for their Collective projects move forward autonomously. The realization of quilombola rights depends on... articulation between the State, civil society and communities, building practices that integrate Economic development, socio-environmental justice, and cultural recognition.

Thus, this article reinforces the importance of understanding quilombola communities as protagonists in building alternative futures and public policies that guarantee protection. Territorial security, dignity, and adequate living conditions for present and future generations.

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