

# The Ecological Modernization Paradigm applied to fiduciary donations to traditional peoples organizations in the Brazilian Cerrado Biome

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the *modus operandi* used by the *Center for Alternative Agriculture in Northern Minas Gerais (CAA)*, a non-governmental organization of traditional peoples from the northern region of the state of Minas Gerais, in the course of the implementing the *Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples, Quilombolas and Traditional Communities of the Brazilian Cerrado Biome (DGM Brazil Project)*. Based on an empirical study carried out while I was an employee of a non-governmental organization, I propose a differentiated theoretical-methodological format for interdisciplinary research, combining professional experience, documentary analysis and bibliographic review. The article is concerned with linking this experience to other economic and political contexts, with emphasis on the recent dynamics of management and implementation of fiduciary donations by non-governmental organizations in Latin America. It supports the hypothesis that these experiences reproduce the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm*, based in the belief in efficiency as a means of achieving sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Traditional Peoples and Communities; Cerrado Biome; Philanthropy; Sustainable Development; Ecological Modernization.

**Article originality and practical implications:** This article critically examines the limitations of fiduciary donations within traditional communities, revealing how reliance on the Ecological Modernization Paradigm may undermine genuine sustainable development and exacerbate inequalities in the Brazilian Cerrado.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the current times of the *Anthropocene*, we are seeing the bad consequences of understanding the environment as economic resource, money as the engine of modern societies and the *Technical-Scientific-Informational Environment* (Santos, 1997)<sup>2</sup> as an imposed system of life.

In this context, a group of global actors and agencies are looking to capital for solutions to their deepest contradictions. They appropriate terms, concepts, notions and lexicons that, in the recent past, have called these hegemonic forces into question, with the aim of making development more tasty (Esteva, 2000).

Establishing a practical alliance between economic efficiency and ecological prudence, these actors have transformed *Sustainable Development* into the best showcase for *Business Development*. In Brazil, the confluence of discussions of global interest and the socio-environmentalist demands of civil society were debated at the Rio-92, when the idea of the natural environment as a resource was propagated through the discourse of sustainable development. Since socio-environmentalism was in vogue at the time, it ensured that major international players took part in this promising market (Viola & Leis, 1995).

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<sup>2</sup> The *Technical-Scientific-Informational Environment* is the current stage of development of the capitalist mode of production. The concept was developed by Santos (1997), and is characterized by the presence of technical objects, the application of science and intense information flows in the context of globalization. These elements transform space and have an impact on the natural environment and human society.

The Rio-92 Conference launched the formation of an alliance. On the one hand, there was the approach of multilateral organizations, religious foundations for international cooperation, among others, interested in the political capitalization of agroecology. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations, organized in the format of private associations, relying on the work of technical staff specialized in the area of management of fiduciary resources, begin to use the logic of *capitalism of results* in the incidences and institutional actions carried out.

After all, is this phenomenon the result of the incorporation of the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm* into the routines of non-governmental organizations, or a sophisticated mechanism to remain active with their beneficiaries?

The *Ecological Modernization Paradigm* is based on the belief in efficiency as a means of achieving sustainability (Blowers, 1987). Investments in technological improvements have been made without, however, changing the logic of production associated with consumers. Another characteristic of the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm* is the development of management techniques with the aim of creating consensus. For example, joint deliberative participation commissions, where organized civil society, global actors and state agencies meet to discuss common and strategic issues.

Political articulations following the Rio-92 Conference established the National Commission for Traditional Populations (CNPT) and resulted in the creation of the Cerrado Network Association, made up of fifty civil society organizations that identify with the preservation of the biome<sup>3</sup>. Since then, large international capital agencies have guaranteed the functioning of these institutions through successive donation contracts.

Among the non-governmental organizations that are part of the Rede Cerrado Association, we highlight the work of the Center for Alternative Agriculture in Northern Minas Gerais (CAA), based in Montes Claros, Minas Gerais, structured since 1989 as a non-profit civil organization involving leaders, rural workers associations, which has the support of specialized advice, a team composed of professional agronomists, social scientists, administrators and forest engineers (Caa, 2018). It is a place of advocacy for agroecology and the rights of traditional peoples and communities, with an extensive network of funders<sup>4</sup>.

CAA is a non-governmental organization created and ran by representatives of trade unions, family farmers and traditional peoples. For this reason, its origins can be traced back to a social movement that was formally institutionalized, with the aim of carrying out actions in defense of the collective interests of the rural reality in the north of Minas Gerais.

Back in the 1980s, the institution advocated for formal and informal networks fighting for fair land reform, with the strategy of occupying public lands with no social function, in order to put pressure on state institutions to guarantee an ecologically balanced environment, housing, territory, decent education and health. As a service provider for this public, it has carried out a series of collective social actions that have enabled civil society to organize itself and express its demands in the form of a social movement (Gohn, 2011).

When CAA internalizes the *Environmental Adequacy Paradigm* and began to execute fiduciary donations from international cooperation, it becomes yet another example of how the corporatist logic of sustainable development has generated structural and daily changes in environmental non-governmental organizations in Brazil and around the world (Costa Ferreira, 1999; Sklair, 2019; Lacruz, Rosa & Oliveira, 2023).

In 2012, an initiative called the *The Dedicated Grant Mechanism* (DGM Global) was launched at a global level with the aim of supporting sustainable community initiatives with community associations and organizations that support traditional peoples and communities in countries in Africa, Asia, South America and Central America (Dgm, 2022a). Hosted under the Forest Investment Program (FIP), the DGM is part of the Climate Investment Fund (CIF), with the World Bank Group as the financing entity. Its initial objective was to apply the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism around the world, as well as to expand conservation, sustainable management and forest carbon stocks at local, national and global levels (Dgm, 2022b). In Brazil, between March 2015 and January 2022, the first phase of the *Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples, Quilombolas and Traditional Communities of the Brazilian Cerrado Biome* (DGM Brazil Project) was executed, with a financial contribution of US\$ 6,500,000.00 for investment in sixty-four community subprojects in ten different states (Dgm, 2022a).

I worked professionally at the DGM Brazil Project from 2019-2022. Over the course of three years, my professional career was marked by continuous coordination, exchange of information, advices, institutional routines, deadlines to be met

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<sup>3</sup> The Cerrado Biome is strategic for economic and environmental reasons, as well as food security. It is a forest-savannah mosaic located in central Brazil, south and east of the Amazon region, covering almost a quarter (2.04 million km<sup>2</sup>) of the country. Stretching across 10 states (Goiás, Tocantins, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais, Bahia, Maranhão, Piauí, Paraná, São Paulo) and the Federal District, it is the largest area of wooded savannah in a single country and its area holds significant reserves of carbon, water resources and biodiversity.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout its thirty-five years of activity, CAA has received support from various agencies, such as the *World Bank Group* (USA), *Brot für die Welt Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e. V.* (GER), *Misereor Katholische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe e. V.* (GER), *Swiss Church Aid HEKS/EPER - Brazil Country Programme* (SWI), *Action Aid* (ZA), *Kindernothilfe* (GER), *Inter American Foundation* (USA), *Global Environment Facility* (USA), *Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund* (USA), *Food and Agriculture Organization for United Nations* (USA), among others.

and hours of work spent meeting the demands of an extensive network of contacts and stakeholders. During this journey, it was possible to see that the DGM Brazil Project proposal 'differed' - in the words of the institution's members - from the CAA's initial 'project', which was built on the back of a lot of solidarity between natives, social mobilization, victories and defeats, exchanges, sharing experiences, joint efforts, alliances, repossessions and judicializations throughout northern Minas Gerais. But what has DGM Brazil brought to the institution and its members?

This article presents an empirical example of how this process of management and execution of fiduciary donations has reproduced the *Paradigm of Ecological Modernization*, using as a case of the execution of the DGM Brazil Project by CAA. To this end, my experience as a collaborator of the entity allowed me to analyze the consequences and repercussions of the DGM Brazil Project, as well as to relate them to global dynamics of green capitalism from the second half of the 20th century. The main exercise of this article is to establish a theoretical-methodological approximation between professional experience as a social scientist registered in the job market, documentary analysis and correlated academic literature.

## METHODS

For this article, the following methods were used:

(1) *Bibliographic research*: it was organized in the format of a narrative review, based on the study of academic works in the field of Social Sciences and Political Ecology, with the aim of establishing a theoretical framework that dialogues with the objective and problems presented. It focused on the study of the following subtopics: sustainable development; geopolitics; political economy; decolonial studies; ethnic rights and sociology of power relations.

In terms of the theoretical limitations of this article, it is important to say that the conceptual platform of Political Ecology uses neo-Marxist conceptions to explain the social phenomena in question, and for this reason it can generate concerns and questions on the part of the academic community that disagrees with its precepts.

(2) *Documentary research*: the aim was to identify the subjectivity of each document analyzed and associate historical facts with contexts, as proposed by Vianna (2014), who treats documents as ethnographic pieces, with the aim of highlighting them as portraits of the social reality researched and inserting them into the narrative that will permeate the entire article. It included cataloging, reading and analysis of technical documents related to the execution of the DGM Brazil Project, as well as institutional documents of the non-governmental organization.

(3) *Direct observation*: the Social Sciences have been challenged to analyze globalizing processes and carry out multi-sited ethnographies so that ethnographies of the state - as well as corporations - can also shed light on practices aimed at controlling territories and managing conflicts and dissent (Zhour, 2018). Bronz (2016) justifies the reasons why this method contributes to better elucidating certain social phenomena, since, for the author, the difficulties encountered when researching "powerful" people would be false obstacles, with the Social Sciences having the task of finding links to these social worlds.

I took advantage of my former profession as a consultant, establishing observations from a privileged position in terms of access to information. Inspired by this method, I draw on my professional experience to discuss the objective results obtained in the execution of the DGM Brazil Project in the face of global political-economic dynamics.

My professional experience at CAA has made it possible to see how the non-governmental organization's institutional routine is governed by two distinct narratives:

i) a *political narrative*, when we look at its actions to promote agroecology and the rights of traditional peoples and communities;

ii) a *technical narrative*, related to the routine demands of administrative management. Therefore, the direct observation method was applied in the form of *Participant Observation* (Brandão, 1982), with the aim of better understanding and analyzing how institutional routines cause conflicts between the political narrative and the technical narrative.

In terms of the methodological limitations of this article, the Participant Observation method can bring difficulties for the researcher after fieldwork. Even so, the effects of empirical work should be valued as an advantage in obtaining privileged information, thus bringing density to the discussions held throughout the text.

This analysis was possible due to my active participation, assisted by theoretical approaches, hypotheses, objectives, and methods—in other words, my subjectivity in continuous engagement with the observed social reality.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The reflective work in this theoretical section is based on interdisciplinary critical engagement between geographers, anthropologists, critical sociologists, economists and other humanities professionals<sup>5</sup>.

Since the 1960s, environmental issues have become the focus of major international debates involving the main global economies. The production of the Club of Rome, which began in 1968, and its final report are regarded as pioneers in the discussion of concerns about the impacts of industrialization on the environment. That same year, the United Nations (UN) convened the first conference on the environment and mankind, which was held in Stockholm in 1972. On this occasion, the problems arising from human action on nature were discussed, especially environmental degradation and its consequences.

At the time, development and the environment were seen as opposing ideas. It was after the Stockholm Conference that the search for solutions to mediate the impacts of the capitalist mode of production on natural resources led to a “flight forward”, with the main goal being to consolidate the idea that ecology could also be economics. In these terms, ecological capitalism would aim to incorporate ecological constraints into the logic of capital (Dupuy, 1980; Castoriadis & Bendit, 1981; Chesnais & Serfati, 2003).

At the end of the 1980s, the perspective proposed by ecological capitalism in the previous decade contributed to the popularization of the concept of *Sustainable Development*. The publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987 gave for the concept a polysemic character with three distinct dimensions: statist, community, and market (Viola & Leis, 1992). In the market dimension, the era of financial capitalism marked the alliance between neoliberalism and sustainable development along the lines of the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm*, which brought new possibilities for shareholding by different stakeholders (Sachs, 2000; Esteva, 2000).

Sustainable development is an example of how the environment (as a natural resource) and ecology (without class struggle) began to serve the logic of capital, which came to compose a set of instruments observed in the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm* (Blowers, 1987; Sachs, 1993; Brüseke, 1995; O’Connor, 1998).

This paradigm does not question the capitalist mode of production or modernity. As Zhouri & Laschefski (2010) point out, just seeks to make adjustments, but with the aim of perpetuating the model. Often, however, the adjustments happens on the part of society, traditional ways of life and the management of natural resources to the detriment of large economic corporations. The private sector develops technologies that seek to dialogue with social movements.

In the context of Latin America, the discourse supporting the sustainable development has placed society and development in an evolutionary and totalizing conception of economic growth, driven by the global market as a regulator of sectoral policies, especially since the creation of the World Trade Organization. To legitimize this practice, partnerships have emerged between state institutions, non-governmental organizations and international cooperation agencies.

At the end of the 1990s, a period in which the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm* gets strength, large financial institutions such as the World Bank ‘greened’ themselves, created sectors for discussion about sustainable development, and together with their economists, technicians and experts, prescribed conditions and mechanisms for access to financial resources for Latin American countries to execute projects linked to the socio-environmental and climate change agenda.

Since then, the World Bank has opened a specific department for the application of resources in sustainable development, called *Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy Global Practice*, with its main headquarters in Washington-DC, but which has also maintained offices in strategic countries in Central and South America. This structure, in addition to allowing decentralized management, enables local governance actions, an important aspect present in sustainability concepts.

It was through partnerships and cooperation agreements that, in mid-2010, members of the World Bank regional office in Brasília-FD approached the top management of the Ministry of the Environment (MMA), the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI) and the *Interministerial Committee* of the FIP. The objective was to propose an investment project capable of contributing to the reduction of the impacts of climate change, based on initiatives that would generate improvements in the livelihoods, land use and forest management of the territories of traditional peoples and communities of the Brazilian Cerrado Biome. To achieve this objective, political articulation with social movements became essential.

The constitutional right of participation, inserted in a broader context of the demand for collective rights in the 1980s, adds new possibilities for intervention to organized civil society. In terms of ethnic rights, these have existed since

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s, activists from a libertarian version of environmentalism began to criticize the logic of capital and its actors. Over the decades, the intellectual activism of academic researchers in the field of *Political Ecology* has become quite comprehensive, favoring the formation of common engagements through dialogue between different areas of knowledge. *Political Ecology* discusses ecology as a challenge to the capitalist way of expropriating natural resources.

1992, as a result of the political articulations and negotiations carried out after Rio-92, when the CNPT was created. Thirteen years later, in 2005, the CNPT migrated to the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and was renamed the National Commission of Traditional Peoples and Communities (CNPCT) - later National Council of Traditional Peoples and Communities (ConPCT), at which time the number of civil society seats increased.

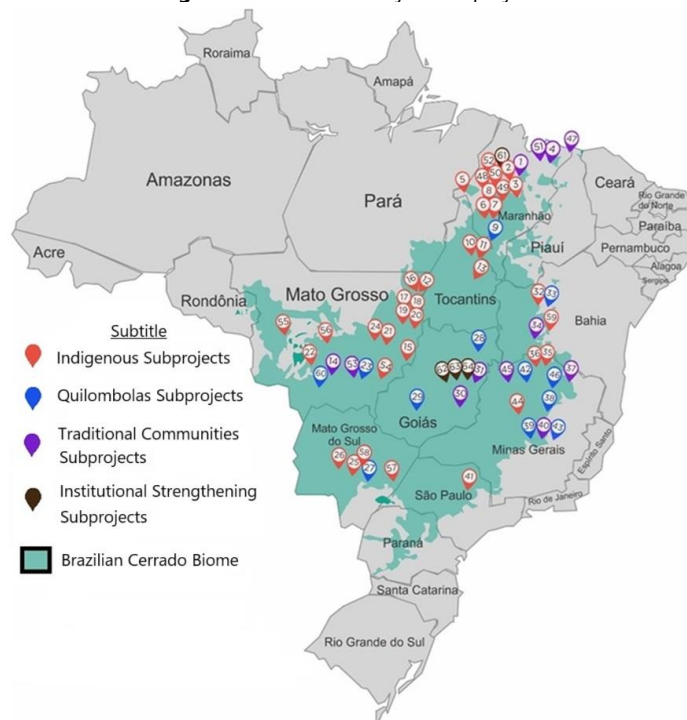
The political action of the Cerrado Network Association at ConPCT led to the CAA's name gaining traction to become the executing agency of the DGM Brazil Project. As an organization based on harmonious action between *native knowledge* and *technical know-how*, the CAA focused on encouraging social protagonism through collective institutional planning activities. Organized as an association of farmers, the vast majority of whom come from traditional peoples and communities, it currently has around seventy members (Caa, 2018).

At general meetings, the members get together to work out strategies for action and the institution's priorities. In short, it's the place where everyone has the right to speak and vote. Because it is a native institution with its feet firmly planted on the ground, in 2015 it was selected by the World Bank as national executing agency for the DGM Brazil Project.

## RESULTS

The fiduciary donation of US\$ 6,500,000.00 brought great prominence to the non-governmental organization, considering that organizations the size of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Institute for Society, Population and Nature (ISPN) applied to make the fiduciary donation. In addition to the need to restructure the administration and technical staff due to the increased demand for work, it also brought with it the need for transit and understanding of the specific lexicons of the *Ecological Modernization Paradigm*. The DGM Brazil Project aimed to strengthen the engagement of traditional peoples and communities in the Cerrado in discussions about the REDD+<sup>6</sup> and similar climate change-oriented programs at the local, national and global levels (Dgm, 2022a).

**Figure 1.** DGM Brazil Project Subprojects



**Note:** author's own work, based on Dgm (2022b).

This is a major challenge for achieving the target. Throughout the execution of the project, the beneficiaries had difficulties understanding the logic and benefits of REDD+, especially with regard to the possibilities of financing, considering that these are procedures which require the continuous articulation of specific Brazilian State Agencies. In 2016, there was a drastic reversal in the position of the agents on the national political scene, where the Public Administration, influenced by another ideological proposal, began to fight the environmentalist agenda, thus resulting in the total absence of public funding via REDD+ in the execution of the DGM Brazil Project.

<sup>6</sup> REDD+ is an economic instrument developed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which provides financial incentives to developing countries for their verified results in combating deforestation and forest degradation, as well as in promoting increased forest cover.

Another issue worth discussing concerns the types of Sustainable Community Initiatives - or subprojects - that is eligible to receive financial donations. The selection rules were drawn up by the National Steering Committee (NSC)<sup>7</sup>, and involved other proposals in addition to discussions linked to REDD+, such as agro-ecological production; small agro-industries; the processing and marketing of socio-biodiversity products; the strengthening of craft production; community-based tourism; and the institutional strengthening of representative organizations (Dgm, 2022a).

Only the proposals that proposed actions such as replenishing the Cerrado Biome with native species, recovering springs and degraded areas, and monitoring and territorial and environmental management presented possibilities for formally requesting carbon credits, even though this did not happen during the course of the DGM Brazil Project.

The subprojects were selected in two different stages:

The first, called pre-selection, consisted of the launch of calls for proposals so that applicants could submit an Expression of Interest, listing the set of activities and costs to be supported (Dgm, 2022b).

The second stage was called final selection and preparation of the technical project, divided into two stages: (1) Qualification: screening was carried out to check that the proposal submitted met the qualification standards, according to the documentation provided in the calls for proposals; (2) Selection: preparation of a technical opinion. If the proposal met the cut-off mark, it was presented to the NSC; those shortlisted were visited to discuss any adjustments; finally, the NSC gave its final approval and the technical project was drawn up (Dgm, 2022b).

Despite complying with a set of procedures established by the World Bank, the choice of initiatives was influenced by decisions, agreements and political consensus reached through dialogue between the networks that made up the NSC<sup>8</sup>. For example, the first agreement reached concerns the percentage distribution of subprojects by identity segment: 60% for indigenous people and 40% for quilombolas and traditional communities.

From the World Bank Group's point of view, by listing a group of networks representing traditional peoples and communities in the Brazilian Cerrado Biome to make up the management body of the DGM Brazil Project, it considered that the issue of popular governance and social interest among its target audience had been resolved. However, the way it was carried out ensured the prevalence of certain representative groups to the detriment of others, thus reviving historical conflicts, a situation that was also reflected in which entities were covered.

In the calls for proposals published, a total of two hundred and sixty-four Expressions of Interest were received, two hundred and nine of which were qualified and analyzed, sixty-four of which were approved, and many of them proposed by partner entities of the networks that made up the NSC. The first forty-five subprojects were approved in September 2016, and the bidding and procurement process began between May 2017 and March 2018. During the second half of 2018, another nineteen were approved by the NSC, bringing the total to sixty-four community initiatives located in ten Brazilian Cerrado Biome states (Dgm, 2022a).

## DISCUSSION

My interest in issues that connect the environment and development was directed towards the attempt to carry out critical readings of *locally situated global social phenomena*.

As a political actor, I was driven by an interest in analyzing power relations along the lines proposed by Foucault (1979), seeking to write them down through intellectual and analytical exercises. After all, I believe that understanding scientific practice through the prism of social phenomena makes it possible, above all, to transpose discourses and bring them into discussion from their subjectivities.

I had always heard that the CAA was not only confronting the economic development model present in the North of Minas Gerais, but was also taking a critical stance on important regional socio-environmental issues, such as land use and occupation in the Cerrado Biome and worsening water problems. However, being inside the institution, I realized that its challenges are mainly ideological, practical and political. I'll deal with these points below. As a member of the non-governmental organization's technical staff, there were many occasions when these tensions came to the fore. The Board of Directors<sup>9</sup>, CAA's deliberative body, often questioned and queried the DGM Brazil Project Coordination, which was carried out by a hired professional, in relation to the presentation of the results obtained at the general meetings, given the national scope of the proposal and its complexity of terms, regulations and previously established procedures.

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<sup>7</sup> The NSC is the deliberative social control group of the DGM Brazil Project, made up of six indigenous representatives, two quilombolas, four traditional communities and three from the Brazilian Federal Government (Dgm, 2022b).

<sup>8</sup> Networks represented by the NSC: 1) Indigenous: Mopic, Apoinme, Terena Council, Wyty-Catë and UNIX; 2) Quilombolas: Conaq and Articulação Pacari; 3) Traditional Communities: Rede Cerrado (*Cerrado Network Association*), Articulação Rosalino and Retireiros do Araguaia.

<sup>9</sup> The CAA's Board of Directors is made up of three members: General Director, Administration and Finance Director and Secretary Director, all representatives of the Rural Workers Unions of Northern Minas Gerais (Caa, 2018).

Throughout this journey of execution, many hours of work ended up being spent building possibilities for interaction that would feed the expectations of the members, and how best to publicize and share the DGM Brazil Project with the work established regionally. In practice, this intersectionality didn't happen due to the existence of interest and power games crossing the path of decisions. Above the structures, the political decisions of the actors involved took precedence. Day-to-day management needs forced me to internalize a terminology of administrative lexicons and ecological modernization practiced by the World Bank, trying to translate them with the local managers of the subprojects in order to unlock purchases, tenders, subsidies and accountability. This work has led to advances in financial execution aimed at the physical progress of the initiatives, within the context of the bidding, procurement and contracting rules adopted by the World Bank, together with the communities proposing the subprojects.

In the universe of fiduciary donations, numbers, statistics and performance indicators are operated by technical knowledge in the face of a reality based on objective diagnoses and results. There is uncertainty or fragility in the results released, organized in the form of tangible products, results, monitoring and management, because such rationality fails to express the set of rules, values, organizational methods and, above all, the experiences accumulated by the communities.

From the World Bank Group's point of view, the DGM Brazil Project aimed to promote sustainable practices through a donation of US\$6,500,000.00. However, it did not consider the beneficiaries as guardians of knowledge's, know-how and practices that differentiate them in terms of ethnicity, historicity, territoriality, identity, productive arrangements and political organization. But, after all, how was the DGM Brazil Project operated?

The majority donors, gathered in the FIP, transferred the resources to the World Bank because it was an organization with recognized prestige in the administrative sphere, with rules and regulations that conveyed security and guarantees of good practice. These business routines were imposed on the executing agency, in this case the CAA, which began to demand the same criteria from the communities, the vast majority of which were agroextractivist associations or cooperatives in their first experience of executing resources. This is a contemporary example of the *coloniality of knowledge* (Lander, 2005). The position I held brought me into direct contact with everyday challenges, such as the groups' difficulties in accessing information technology. It was important to have an internet signal and basic computer skills in order to manage a subproject. Contrary to this need, digital inclusion was definitely not a reality for everyone. As soon as they signed the subdonation agreements, the proponents became contractually responsible for the physical and financial management using the Subproject Management System (SIGCAA), an online tool to support the activities of the DGM Brazil Project.

Hosted on the CAA website, SIGCAA included: (1) *Dashboard module*, which allowed the technical and financial performance and progress of each sub-project to be viewed; (2) *Registration module*, specifically for filling in the details of legal representatives and legal entities; (3) *Technical subproject module*, where each proposal was subdivided based on a Logical Framework and a Work Plan; (4) *The Entity Module*, in which it was essential to record and report all the activities carried out in videos, photos, texts, attendance lists, and at the end of each semester it provided a half-yearly report template to be filled in (Dgm, 2022a). The bidding and purchasing demands were supported by an administrative team based at the main headquarters of the non-governmental organization, in Montes Claros, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Even though the local coordinators of the subprojects were trained in how to use SIGCAA, there were still difficulties in understanding how the tool worked throughout the project. Complaints about difficulties and resistance in carrying out activities in accordance with the rules established by the World Bank Group became constant. There were also problems with planning activities within reasonable timeframes, which required continual readjustments to their proposals, changes to procurement plans and compromised deadlines for carrying out the stages of the bidding processes. Physical and financial challenges marked the execution, and the NSC decided to restructure the initial design several times, which extended the execution by thirteen months - the initial closing date was set for December 2020, extended to January 2022.

It is also important to mention, on the one hand, the impacts and consequences of Covid-19 on the delays observed and, on the other, the importance of the emergency resources allocated to communities in the acute phase of the pandemic between 2020 and 2021. In March 2020, NSC approved an initiative called the Solidarity Network, with the aim of providing emergency support to families directly involved in the subprojects, with financial support and acquisition of supplies for prevention. A second phase of aid provided institutional strengthening support to the proposing organizations, with the acquisition of permanent materials.

Considering the exchange rate fluctuations of the dollar throughout the period, of the amount of US\$ 6,500,000.00, 61% was used in *Component 1 - Community, Sustainable and Adaptive Initiatives*, which involved the execution of 64 subprojects, verification visits and the Solidarity Network; 21% was spent on *Component 2 - Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening*, for the execution of the Capacity Building Plan and training activities; 4% was allocated to *Component 3 - Management, Monitoring and Evaluation*, an item that made possible the creation of SIGCAA; and, finally, 14% for *Component 4 - Operating Costs*, used to pay employees and hold NSC meetings.

In synthesis, for every US\$1 invested in the communities, US\$0.64 had to be allocated to technical and operational expenses. Would this be the most effective way to implement such an important financial donation for the people of Brazilian Cerrado Biome?

## FINAL REMARKS

Since Rio-92, a series of technical reports and studies have revealed the failure of sustainable development from the perspective of the *Paradigm of Ecological Modernization*: conflicts over territory, ownership, responsibilities, the components of nature, identities, the cultural reproduction of traditional peoples and communities and, above all, as this article has sought to exemplify, governance models that have failed to guarantee an orientation towards a plural, decolonial, democratic political project in search of a more just, egalitarian and environmentally viable society.

The moment they began to apply ecology as a conservation science, large transnational capital institutions inaugurated a movement, observed from north to south, interested in professionalized and specialized action, an alliance between environmentalism and capitalism for results. An ideology positioned in denial of environmentalism as a libertarian, autonomous and critical political practice. We have in the contractual relationship built for the execution of the DGM Brazil Project, which involved the World Bank Group, NSC and CAA, an example of how the hegemonic instrument of fiduciary donations operates: they focus on technical alternatives inserted within the scope of market objectives; they seduce, through the contribution of financial resources, entities representing social subjects in a condition of subalternity; they appropriate their political capital when they bring them closer to their logos and institutional missions; and, finally, they submit these organizations to the *Paradigm of Ecological Modernization*, without first taking advantage of their appeal in the face of public opinion and all that they represent, in current times, for the maintenance of traditional ways of life and other ways of practicing agriculture.

Even in the 1990s, when CAA opted for the strategy of attracting financial resources from international cooperation, it did so in order to increase the institution's articulation potential, strengthen community actions and, above all, organized groups, unions and associations in the north of Minas Gerais. When the non-governmental organization took over the execution of the DGM Brazil Project, given its scope, complexity and magnitude, it was faced with the following institutional conflict: on the one hand, the narrative of the farmers and traditional peoples and communities of northern Minas Gerais, struggling to keep an original ideological project eloquent and convincing; and on the other, the perspective of CAA as a National Executing Agency made up of specialized technical staff dedicated to carrying out good administrative management.

In conclusion, given the aspects discussed in this article, what is happening behind the scenes at the CAA is a dispute over narratives, profiles and, above all, institutional identity, the effects and consequences of the seductive influence of the *Paradigm of Ecological Modernization*.

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