Leadership Strategies for Landless People in Brazil: A Case Study

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Introduction
The landless workers movement in Brazil exists in 23 of the 28 states. Since 1985 the movement has provided leadership to nearly 1.5 million members that are seeking to obtain agricultural lands for the people that it represents with the government. There are two major leadership groups in the country, MST (Landless workers movement) and CUT (Unified workers’ confederation). The groups share similar goals which is to speed up the bureaucratic process of land distribution. In Brazil, it is estimated that less than 2% of the landowners control almost half of the cropland (46.8%). To date, the MST movement has been successful in helping about 350,000 families obtain land. The success of the movement is their ability to help people organize and teach individuals strategies to obtain land for agricultural purposes. Landless people in Brazil show their interest in obtaining land through political activism. Each family files paperwork declaring their desire to farm and as a political action group they gather in predetermined locations to protest their desire for agricultural property. Landless workers setup housekeeping in roadside ditches where they plant vegetables and construct makeshift housing waiting their turn for a chance at a piece of land.

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to describe the leadership strategies used by CUT (Unified workers’ confederation) to help landless people obtain land in Brazil.

Methods
In order to identify the leadership strategies used by CUT an interview guide was developed. During June 2006, landless people living nearby Dourados city in Mato Grosso do Sul state in Brazil, were interviewed by a native Portuguese speaker. The study was authorized by a local movement community leader. Six people from distinct households participated in the case study and the snow-ball approach was used to select the participants. The length of the interviews ranged from half an hour to 45 minutes. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder; data was transcribed and translated into English by a native Portuguese speaker.
**Results**

Most individuals spent more than one year waiting in ditches for agricultural lands to be given by the government. The CUT political movement teaches people the process of protest so that they can obtain property. Nearly all individuals interviewed reported knowing almost nothing about growing plants or raising livestock. Moreover, the respondents knew very little about any potential adult education that might be offered by CUT after land was obtained. However they showed interest in learning agricultural practices such as: cattle management, artificial insemination, and crop production. According to the respondents, CUT’s mission was to help individuals through motivation, strategies to obtain land, to teach them how to fight for their rights and leadership training about how to effectively protest.

**Implications**

Lacking a system of adult education (extension) most individuals will struggle to make agricultural profits on marginal properties with limited production strategies. It is less likely that individuals lead by this movement will be able to turn marginal agricultural lands into profitable rural enterprises. In order to increase the likelihood of successful agricultural production, CUT could provide leadership in terms of including agricultural education as a priority issue in the government agenda for individuals that obtain land.

**Key words:** Leadership, social movement, agriculture, Brazil, education