

**BUILDING SUPPLY CHAINS AS A STRATEGY FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
STRENGTHENING OF SOLIDARITY ECONOMIC VENTURES.**

**OLIVEIRA FILHO, Marco Aurélio Maia Barbosa; CORTEGOSO, Ana Lucia**

[mambofilhopanda@gmail.com](mailto:mambofilhopanda@gmail.com); [ana.lucia.cortegoso@gmail.com](mailto:ana.lucia.cortegoso@gmail.com)

**Affiliation: Núcleo Multidisciplinar e Integrado de Estudos, Formação e Intervenção em  
Economia Solidária da Universidade Federal de São Carlos (NuMI-EcoSol/UFSCar) –  
BRASIL.**

## **Introduction**

The Regional Incubator of Popular Cooperatives of the Federal University of São Carlos (INCOOP/UFSCar), current Multidisciplinary and Integrated Core of Studies, Training and Intervention in Solidarity Economy (NuMI-EcoSol), established in 1998, adopted as a central form of its operations the incubation of popular ventures and solidarity economy initiatives around networks and production chains with a focus on a urban territory, coupled with initiatives of promotion of citizenship rights, since 2007.

The Solidarity Economy, as conceived in Brazil, can be defined succinctly as "(...) a set of economic activities – of production, distribution, consumption, savings and credit - organized and conducted in solidarity by workers and workers as collective self-management "(ATLAS, 2006). In this set of activities and forms of organization highlights four basic characteristics: cooperation, worker's self-management, economic dimension and solidarity. It is identified also as a movement that includes a number of instances of civil society and governmental organizations, fostering institutions, in addition to ventures with basis essentially popular.

The ventures that operate under the paradigm of the Solidarity Economy are called solidarity economic ventures (SEV), and comprise various forms of economic organization, arising from the free association of workers and based on principles of worker's self-management, cooperation, efficiency and viability. These ventures are presented in different formats, such as cooperatives, associations, self-managed enterprises, among others, with collective basis, and carry out activities in the sectors of production, services, marketing or credit.

According Gaiger (2003), the appearance, in growing scale, of popular ventures based on free association, cooperative work and self-management, represents a ponderable option for low-income social segments, strongly affected by the context of structural unemployment and the impoverishment. Also according to this author, this situation, besides quickly induce the support of activists, agencies endowed with social programs and public departments, evoke the interest of scholars to the problem of the viability of these ventures in the long term, as well to the nature and meaning contained in their social traits, of socialization of the goods of production and labor. In this context appears entities of support, assistance and promotion (ESP), that are organizations which develop the various forms of direct support along the SEV, such as: training, advisory services, incubation, technical and organizational assistance and monitoring (ATLAS, 2009).

Among the ESP, the technology incubators of popular cooperatives, university outreach programs, advise workers groups historically excluded from the labor market in

perspective of generating job and income guided on the principles of the cooperative movement and within the Solidarity Economy. Seeking recovery of citizenship, the worker's self-management and the participation of workers, the programs of technology incubators of popular cooperatives aim to transfer the knowledge developed in universities, through an educational process of interaction with the community.

With reference of neighborhoods located in the south area of a city in the interior of São Paulo, identified as an area of high social vulnerability, the project aimed to build public policy guidelines of Solidarity Economy, understanding this as a territorial development strategy. Therefore, the general team of NuMI-EcoSol was organized on specific teams, each one responsible for a type of project goal, one of them being the analysis of the viability of formation and articulation of SEV in the cleaning production chain, through participatory processes and with the protagonism of ventures and individuals participating in ventures and initiatives within the Solidarity Economy in the territory and in the municipality, in the perspective of participatory action-research, social research methodological strategy used as a reference by the team of the Incubator. This research methodology, conducted in close association with an action or solving of a collective problem, in which researchers and representative participants of the situation or of the problem that they are involved in a cooperative or participatory way, includes both a project of knowledge production and social change. The action-research has the function of diagnose a situation, initiate an action, follow it, observe it, give it meaning, evaluating it and inciting it to initiate new actions (El Andaloussi, 2004).

To propose a cleaning production chain, from a existing cleaning venture was considered the need for inputs to this activity, complementary segments and specialized cleaning. However, the initial strategy which had the protagonism of a cleaning collective venture of buildings, with more than 250 members, residents in the territory and with insertion consolidated in the field of Solidarity Economy and perspectives of performance beyond the venture itself, to ensure the expansion of social benefits to the local community, needed to be revised when the cooperative had terminated its activities in 2011, as a result of the action of the Public Ministry of Labor (PML) that, in 2008, imposed on the venture and the City Hall, as the contractor services of the cooperative, the signing of a Conduct Adjustment Declaration (CAD). Because of this, the team redefined its strategy considering that, although the formation of production chains were desired as ideal for the territory, the actions of the Incubator should turn to networking able to collaborate in progressive overcoming of capitalist accumulation relations and expanding relations of solidarity production and consumption.

The difficulty and complexity to achieve the proposed goals did not result in the abandonment of the original goal of fostering the creation of production chains by Numi-ECOSOL. Indicated, however, the need to foster relationships between the various active and

existing actors in territory in order to promote the creation of networks, so that from these can be built also production chains.

This study aims to examine the process of advising the population to form not only specific ventures in the area of cleaning, but the relationships between them, in the direction of production chains and other forms of network that might increase the likelihood of territorial development in its multiple and desirable dimensions.

### **Evolution of the performance of INCOOP: from incubating ventures to territorial development**

Established in late 1990, in UFSCar the INCOOP is configured institutionally as an outreach program, multidisciplinary, structured as an instance specifically dedicated to the knowledge production simultaneously with the intervention activities, aimed at self-management SEV training as working and income generating opportunity for excluded populations and consolidation of solidary principles and cooperatives in the society.

The Incubator started from the efforts of a set of Outreach Cores of the Outreach Pro-Rectory of UFSCar (Syndicate, Municipality and Citizenship), inspired by the pioneering experience of the Incubator, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, the first Technology Incubator of Popular Cooperatives (TIPC) in the country. Since 1994, the Research and Documentation Core in Social Sciences of UFSCar had been undertaking research on the living conditions and poverty in the city, and that, from a survey of five variables (income, insertion in the labor market, housing, schooling and health), the result of research characterized the poorest neighborhoods of the city, which corresponded to pockets of poverty. Among these, the neighborhood in which INCOOP began his acting was considered one of the poorest. Besides the large number of people out of work, the low levels of schooling and high levels of violence, neighborhood residents suffered prejudice by contractors of labor that tended to generalize them, claiming that its residents were connected to a criminal life. These characteristics indicate the need for outreach projects, designed impoverished populations, could be held there (Gallo, 2003; Oliveira Filho, 2010).

In 1998, the community leadership of the neighborhood invited the Coordination of Municipality and Citizenship Outreach Cores (which foster Incubator of Popular Cooperatives in the following year) and other interested of the academic community to participate in meetings of the neighborhood association. As the discussions were taking place and more people from the neighborhood joined the initial group, the idea of forming economic ventures of associated work in order to improve the living conditions of the community was taking shape.

In parallel to the discussions around the formation of solidary economic ventures, debates happening on other issues, especially those focused on the reality of the people of the neighborhood, their needs and desires. According Valêncio et al (s / d), the found situation showed that the search of the elements that instrumentalized the recovery of citizenship constituted key object to the action, which why the group sought to structure courses in adult literacy, sustainable development together whit those who dealing with interpersonal relationships, motivation for the cooperation, self-management, autonomy to broaden the discussion of income for a broader discussion about dignity and citizenship, seeking thereby to elucidate the relationships that move politically, legally and economically the set of society.

After a large number of meetings between members of the University and people from the neighborhood, were then being discussed possibilities of generating income from activities such persons knew or liked to develop. Many ideas emerged, and this group of people, three subgroups were formed: one group opted cleaning activity, another activity for sewing and the last activity for cooking / baking. Since then the meetings were divided, understanding each group how a potential SEV.

The group that opted for cleaning activity then constituted in mid-1999, a cooperative to provide services in this segment. Formed initially by about 30 people, this group has grown over the years, and already in 2008, had more than two hundred coop members, mostly women, and including young people, older people, egress of the penal system and other representatives of populations at high social risk. The INCOOP, which was formally established as a university outreach program, constituted a team that accompanied this cooperative steadily and continuously (albeit with alternating of components), based on studies and systematized experience in his incubation method by dialogic and participatory processes, and aimed at the emancipation of the population in relation to multiple conditions, guided by the proposal of participatory action-research.

Although the performance of the Incubator has been initiated in a particular territory of the municipality, until 2007, the strategy had no territorial focus and did not cover the question of the formation of networks and production chains, including other locations to incubation of collective ventures in various economic activities. Until that moment the INCOOP accompanied, as responsible for incubation, cooperatives and groups of *São Carlos*, *Araras* and *Itapeva*, and meet occasionally demands of various kinds made by stakeholders in Solidarity Economic or by different claimants of the region (municipalities, non-governmental organizations - NGOs etc.).

The accumulation of experience and the corresponding discussion of these indicated the convenience of taking, as preferred form of action, attention to territories defined from the

economic ventures in incubation and which could have potential for expansion and consolidation of the Solidarity Economy jointed with other sectoral policies, such as health, education, housing and environmental sanitation, with emphasis on income generation through collective work and cooperation practices, in their area of insertion. Thus, from 2007, considering the examination of their own performance, the limits in achieving desired results and conceptual advance (in terms of knowledge accumulated and team composition) in Solidarity Economy and related issues, the INCOOP team initiated a project of territorial development from the perspective of the Solidarity Economy. As a reference, were chosen two territories, one rural and one urban, taking as a starting point the economic ventures already incubated in these regions, with the prospect of setting up production chains and other forms of articulation, in order to promote broader, multidimensional and sustainable local development in regions where such ventures were. So, were structured specific teams, consisting of teachers, graduated technical coordinators, undergraduates and volunteers researchers, each responsible for a type of project goal, one being the analysis of the feasibility of formation and articulation of SEV in the cleaning production chain.

### **Cleaning Chain: setting up strategies to respond to new realities**

The team was guided by his acting general concepts of the work done by the Incubator, being among the most important in the goal, the set up production chains and territorial development. The latter, taken as a general overview of the project, was treated from an understanding of development that understand the space as a key component in the economic and social sciences, as is the "place" that life unfolds in all of its dimensions; in this sense, the spatialization or territorialization of development presents, according Boisier (2001), centrality in the discussion. The idea of territorial development is related, although not explicitly, to the collective character of the "bottom up" development, by ability to generate a community power construction with the potential to extend the public sphere the effects of solidary economic initiatives, thus promote development allied to the needs and characteristics of a particular community.

A project aimed at defining guidelines for proposing and implementing public policies in Solidarity Economy dedicated territorial development was formulated by the team and, having been approved by a funding research agency (São Paulo State Foundation for Research Support - FAPESP ) created conditions for the development of activities characteristic of the initial stage of this type of financing, which includes the identification and initial training of partners and preparation with these partners, a project to be developed in the next project stage, which refers to the formulation of guidelines for public policies.

The process of identification, awareness and incorporation of partnerships brought, in its development, the need and the opportunity to get in contact with proposals and complementary concepts to those already adopted by the team, as was the case of production chains, guiding the actions of one partner achieved by the team effort of the Incubator, the Bank of Brazil and, in particular, responsible for Sustainable Regional Development program.

The adoption of the concept of production chains as an important way to promote networking between ventures and Solidarity Economy initiatives, on the part of team, was based on the proposal of Mance (2002), according to which they relate to all the steps taken to produce, distribute and market a good or service to the final consumer. The formation of production chains implies the formation of networks, that enable the generation of multiple connections and flows in areas that can meet the various needs of the people, so that your solidary organization expands social benefits of SEV due to the distribution of wealth operate in order to sustain their own consumption in the network (Mance, 2002). Thus, the networks create an income stream that feeds itself, producing a virtuous circle based on triad products-consumption-income, with the possibility of converting the Solidarity Economy in a predominant form of social relations in a certain territory, since the new society construction occurs through the gradual replacement of producers, suppliers and consumers of the hegemonic model to the other (Mance, 2002).

To propose a cleaning chain, from a cleaning existing service venture were considered as starting points for identifying opportunities, the need for inputs to this activity, and complementary and cleaning specialized segments. Each of these perspectives has contributed to the identification of new potential solidary economic ventures, articulated and protagonists by the local population of the territory of reference.

Considering the prospect of producing inputs to the cleaning cooperative, were identified as possibilities, and even initiate the venture incubation processes, production of homemade soap from waste cooking oil, and other cleaning products relevant to cleaning environments, which were necessary for the development of activities by the Cooperative. In the case of the production of homemade soap, the opportunity arose to demand of INCOOP support team by a group of women who had individual production, partially marketed directly and partially transferred to a religious group of assistance support that besides to market the product in his parish (transferring the money to producers), donated a monthly basic basket to each of these women. The establishment of a venture to manufacture cleaning products, in turn, arose from the decision of a group of people who attended a workshop organized by members of INCOOP aimed at job and income generating, and is intended priority to users of the mental health system of the municipality resident in territory of action of Incubator team and its surroundings, and to organize itself for this productive activity. This initiative, however,

did not come to fruition as a SEV, while having gone through an initial process of incubation which lasted a few months, although the productive activity has been resumed later by others.

Both in the case of the group of soap production, as in the manufacture of liquid line, the cleaning cooperative that took the protagonism in structuring the production chain played an important role in the establishment of networks, providing support such as: space assignment to the group in formation that decided to produce soap; product purchase to their internal needs and execution of cleaning services in contexts where the provision this kind of material was the responsibility of the cooperative; support for product marketing at the head office of the cooperative, conducting campaign for collection residual oil and turn members consumers of the economic venture. Also supported the manufacturing group of liquid line cleaning products through vehicle loan for household distribution of products and both groups through the stimulate of self-management collective work to, dissemination of the economic ventures and its products, exchange of experiences and approach to the Solidarity Economy movement. An examination of some of the relationships established between these ventures, in this process, carried out by a set of behavior analysts who formed an observatory designed to understand and support actions to promote the Solidarity Economy (Pompermaier, Prezenszky, Leugi, Cortegoso, 2012), placed evident gains that contribute to understand the potential in this process of networking, such as for cleaning cooperative, despite short-term costs related to the physical space assignment for the operation of an economic venture of homemade soap manufacturing, the potential gain medium and long term arising from access to an input of good quality and fair price for their activities, the strengthening of the local community, from the generation of income and access to products of this nature, with the improvement of care needs and local circulation of wealth; strengthening relationships with the fostering entity, when assume a partnership with commitment to continuity of advice of cooperative by Incubator; increased support base for cleaning cooperative in your confronting threats of the PML, which signaled to the mandatory closure of the cooperative activities, among others. For each of the ventures supported were created conditions that favor and facilitate the initial process of group organization and production, with immediate and potential customers, low manufacturing cost, possibility of dialogue, sharing and use of oldest experiences in dealing with older similar difficulties etc..

Other types of input, particularly considering the needs and characteristics of the cleaning cooperative, indicated as potential productive activities components of the production chain, were uniforms confection and production of brooms with PET bottles. In the first case were promoted approaches among cooperative leaders and members of two existing manufacturing ventures in the city, although not in the territory of reference, and in the case of one of them had already existed direct financial support of the cooperative for the purchase of raw materials (tissue), starting a historic partnership that failed to advance due to the crisis process that was established under the cooperative cleaning from the signing of the

CAD imposed by the Public Ministry of Labor, within a attack policy on service cooperatives, particularly those more accessible to the poor.

Considering demands and situations experienced earlier in the incubation process of the cleaning cooperative, as well the difficulties found by the cooperative action of the PML to curb service cooperatives (see Cortegoso, 2010; Cortegoso et al., 2010; Cortegoso, Shimbo and Moya 2012, Moya, 2013) and the risk that the cooperative had to close their activities, were also identified, as other opportunities for productive activities in this production chain, specialized or complementary to those performed by the cooperative: cleaning boxes of water in buildings, cleaning after construction and renovation of buildings, cleaning and floor care, cleaning of vehicles, washing clothes and washing glassware laboratory (identified as a need for these units in the university, given the increasing unavailability of technical personnel for these activities, as part of the permanent staff of these institutions in the country).

The effective closure of the activities of the cleaning cooperative, as a result of the action of the PML, led to the need to review the strategies proposed that considered the strong protagonism of the cooperative in structuring the production chain. The redefinition of strategies started from the assumption that, although the formation of production chains was desired as a ideal parameter for networks construction, this was not the only way and the actions of the advisory team should keep the prospect of forming networks of different types, and to collaborate in progressive overcoming of relations of capitalist accumulation and expansion of relations of solidarity production and consumption.

### **Main challenges for the advancement of the project**

The closure of the activities of the provider cooperative of cleaning services that was configured as the protagonist of the project culminated in a series of obstacles to the effective establishment of a cleaning chain in the territory, as well as for ventures formed to compose the production chain.

Among the difficulties generated as a result of this situation, the barriers to the marketing of cleaning products was one of the most important. Firstly because the own motivation for the creation of ventures, of manufacturing homemade soap and various cleaning products, was the possibility to supply inputs to the cleaning cooperative, so this tends to be its main buyer, especially in the initial phase of establishment of ventures, when the financial return is still uncertain. In addition, with the closure of the activities of the cooperative, more than two hundred people left to get fixed monthly income, people who use these cleaning products in their homes and that, were or could be potential consumers of these products. Besides the loss of fixed income, most of these people, when stop

participating in the cooperative, eventually moving away from the Solidarity Economy and the manufacturers ventures of cleaning products, a context very unfavorable, considering the existing prospect that the cooperative members would maintain greater proximity to ventures and could negotiate collective purchasing and other benefits for the purchase of cleaning products, for example, the installments payment or discounted of monthly withdrawal, with a mechanism similar to that already existed in relation to supermarket shopping.

The commercialization of the production is one of the most crucial challenges for ventures that working in Solidarity Economy, once it involves the own groups survival. According to Godoy (2009), it is essential that the product reverts into economic gain to the worker, because when this does not occur, it is often observed emptying of solidary economic ventures and prioritization by the workers themselves, activities that ensure reproduction, even degrading or precariously exercised. As pointed by national mapping of Solidarity Economy conducted between 2005 and 2007 (Atlas, 2009), with the support and fostering of the National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy (SENAES) and the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy, which identified 21.859 SEV in 2.933 Brazilian cities, the commercialization of production constitutes the largest difficulty of SEVs mapped, being mentioned by 72% of ventures, the second biggest difficulty was pointed access to credit, present in 56% of SEVs, and the third, with 28%, was the lack of access to monitoring, technical support or assistance.

With the end of the cleaning cooperative, the members of the SEV manufacturers of cleaning products and incubation members team of these ventures were forced to pay close attention to the issue of marketing, with the search for ways and places for the development of this activity. From the perspective of promoting territorial development, the partners of the SEV and the incubation team chose to fostering, preferably, marketing in households located in the vicinity of the headquarters of the SEV by selling "door to door" (ie, visits and sales in households), which allows greater proximity between producers and consumers and promotes the establishment of trusts and strengthening of community ties, very important aspects for the Solidarity Economy; in this sense, a large part of the sales in territory began being made through trips made on foot with the aid of a "shopping fair trolley." Later, the team responsible for accompaniment groups sought conditions for succeeded a car for ventures, so that now reach more distant places selling and transporting large quantities of products, with less effort.

However, as the marketing made only in the territory was still not enough to ensure the economic sustainability of the SEV, the advisory team fostering the establishment of other forms of marketing, among them a exchanges network with a solidary economic venture of the municipality, which operates in the cultural area, so that the manufactured products could be marketed at the headquarters of this venture. Thus, it was agreed between the SEVs that

the use of space for marketing, located in the central city, as well as for control of sales, SEV producers provide cleaning products in proportion to the amount of monthly sales, to answer the needs of the cultural venture.

The connection between producers and consumers in a system with a predominance of solidarity, responsible and ethical commercialization and consumption practices has great potential for the economic empowerment of the ventures. Thus, participation in solidary and fair trade networks is one of the possibilities to promote improvements in marketing. As highlights Lisboa (2003), the Solidarity Economy operates in markets increasingly segmented and with a huge potential for expansion, because are markets that value cultural reference products, green products and social label. According to the author:

*“Furthermore, the strengthening of local markets, the establishment of marketing networks and solidarity market between solidary economic ventures open and ensure market niches that, ensuring their own socioeconomic space, will give endogenous strength and greater autonomy to the sector on the cyclical movement of capitalist economy” (Lisboa, 2003, p.191).*

From the perspective of the traditional international trade has been developing based on exchange relations within a model that generates injustice, inequality and marginalization, fair trade and solidarity, responsible and ethical consumption are new concepts in terms of trade and consumption that can evolving business practices for sustainability and the incorporation of social and environmental costs, focus on the awareness of the people and the laws (FRETTELL; ROCA, 2003), in addition to consolidating the basis for the delineation of viable alternatives for the marketing of products arising from the Solidarity Economy. According to these authors:

*“Fair trade seeks to reduce the number of intermediaries between producers and consumers (that generate extra costs) and pay a certain and stable price for the products, with the goal of getting more income to producers, as well as developing socially responsible attitudes in participating entities the commercial circuit. The consumer must consent to pay a 'fair' price (relatively high) for a product manufactured according to criteria that tolerate respect to labor standards, the environment, local culture, democratic practices. The producer must comply with these standards and offer quality products.” (Fretell and Roca, 2003, p.36)*

Currently, fair trade is a world developed initiative, there are international initiatives involved in this trade, as the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), and national, as *Cirandas* project, which aims to "provide tools on the internet to promote the economic political and social joint who likes the Solidarity Economy or live it" ([www.cirandas.net](http://www.cirandas.net)). Therefore, the establishment of networks, both locally and in broader levels of coverage, has great potential in promoting the marketing of SEV.

Another issue that merit attention, with regard to the imposed difficulties by the implementation of the project with the closing of the protagonist cooperative, is the verification of a low degree of mobilization and even motivating people around the Solidarity Economy in the region. The closing of the cooperative by PML seems to have caused some form of disbelief or distrust by part of former member of this venture, once that over two hundred people who lost their jobs, only a small percentage expressed interest in forming another solidary economic venture, opting to rejoin the capitalist labor market, even if precariously. This finding, however, still needs to be investigated through research directed to the territory and former members of the cooperative, and such assessment is subject to team to continues working in the neighborhoods of reference, around production chains such as the cleaning one (both ventures constituted, despite the difficulties encountered to survive, continue producing and selling their products), a food production chain and a community bank and intensive insertion activity in the community, working with the support of local development agents, who receive financial support from projects maintained by the NuMI-EcoSol team.

### **Final Considerations - current situation and future prospects**

The difficulty and complexity of networking found in the development of the project did not imply, however, the abandonment of the original goal of fostering the creation of production chains by NuMI-EcoSol but implied seek conditions for the promotion of the various relationships between existing actors and active in the territory in order to promote the creation of networks, so that from these can be built also production chains.

In the period in which they occurred project activities of territorial development, despite the closure of the cleaning cooperative activities, two ventures were created, one for the production of soap from recycled cooking oil and another to make products for cleaning, formed by people from the cooperative cleaning. Both began share production and management space, conducting partial joint marketing and offering mutual support to cope with their needs. Prospective studies of possible new ventures continue being carried out, by the team that performs the direct advice of projects related to cleaning products, by the larger team that the other are inside and which accounts for project in the area in which these two ventures exist (including food production chains, solidarity finance, multiple uses of wood and construction, among others), and a newly formed team, responsible for a line of action in the framework of the current NuMI-EcoSol focused on fostering new ventures, increasing scope of operations beyond the region of reference for territorial development, seeking to strengthen relations guided by the principles of the Solidarity Economy.

Besides the fostering of the creation of networks into the territory, the team that advises the groups has encouraged the creation of networks among ventures and actors who

are not in the territory in order to expand, especially the possibilities of marketing products and strengthen Solidarity Economy movement in the city. The NuMI-EcoSol team understands that the expansion of the possibilities of exchange and cooperation between different ventures and other actors of the Solidarity Economy can further strengthen the work done daily by workers involved in these activities. The exchange of information, experiences and products, conducting collective purchases and various other possibilities that shape the network action, have the ability to strengthen the ventures, including financially, to build a differentiated production relations work and to think of a more just and egalitarian society.

Although they have obtained some achievements, such as partial mechanization of production, there are several obstacles and challenges to these groups be consolidated and can be articulated in an effective cleaning production chain. Recognizing the importance, to this, of the existence of economic ventures aimed at the provision of cleaning services, staff maintains both monitoring the consequences of the adoption of Law 12.690 (Brasil, 2012), which regulates work cooperatives (and the service ones between them) and can give support to confront the actions of PML, as the prospect of setting up specialized projects, such as those identified above, among others.

Thus, even with reference to networking - and a production chain among them - as key to promoting territorial development with SEV, the team remains in the groups accompaniment, the prospect of proposing new ventures and the joint between the existing and that may come into being in order to restore the favoring condition of a cleaning productive chain the existence of service providers in the production chain, potential consumers of these products.

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