CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter presents working definitions of the concepts of representativeness, accountability, autonomy and effectiveness used throughout this study. The chapter will also describe the different methods of data gathering, and procedures utilized to analyze the information obtained. This study relied on three methods of data gathering due to the diversity of actors and the wealth of secondary sources regarding NGO participation in the implementation of PLANAFLORE: structured key informant interviews, questionnaire-based surveys, and gathering of information from secondary sources.

Operational Definitions of Representativeness, Accountability, Autonomy, and Effectiveness

As established in the last chapter the prevailing assumption in contemporary development theory is that sustainable development requires citizen participation in the development process and that NGOs are widely thought to represent civil society best. How, then, should we measure the effects of NGO participation on development and civil society? Four issues were selected to examine the impacts of NGO participation in PLANAFLORE: representativeness,
accountability, political autonomy, and effectiveness. A review of the relevant literature concerning organization, democratic and development theory showed that these issues have multiple definitions and may be hard to operationalize (Arellano-López and Petras 1994, Edwards and Hulme 1996, Fox and Hernández 1989). Below, nonetheless, is my attempt to define these terms as analytical variables in the programmatic context of PLANAFLORO.

Representativeness

The representativeness of a given organization has been associated with the capacity to permit its members to pursue their economic and political interests collectively (Arellano-López and Petras 1994). A factor that complicates examination of the representativeness of MSO and GSO participation in regional economic development program is their intrinsically distinct political purposes. While MSOs can claim to represent the interests of their membership, GSOs have no clear mandate to act as representatives of the social groups being affected by their intervention in the policy-making process. Nevertheless, representativeness was examined by examining the specific claims made by MSOs and GSOs to justify their roles as representatives of PLANAFLORO’s beneficiaries. For the purpose of this study,
representativeness is defined by the existence of clear organizational mechanisms to allow the membership or target clientele to participate substantively in the process of definition of policies and goals of the organization.

**Accountability**

Accountability, as used in this study, refers specifically to the capacity of the members of a given organization to hold leaders accountable for their actions while conducting the affairs of that organization and, to some degree, is derivative of representativeness. Moreover, accountability refers to the existence of a clear flow of responsibility and distribution of power within the organization (Fox and Hernández 1989, Smith-Sreen 1995). In this study, for MSOs, the degree of accountability evident in each specific organization is derived from study of the formal mechanisms of interaction between the leadership and the membership. This was done for GSOs by examining whether there were any formal mechanisms of interaction between the organization and its clientele. In both cases, accountability as an analytical variable is defined as the existence of formal mechanisms that extend the decision-making process to the entire membership or clientele of a given organization.
**Autonomy**

Organizational autonomy has been referred to as a group’s control over setting its own goals and making its own decisions without external domination, whether by governments, political parties, religious groups, or development agencies (Fox and Hernández 1989, p.9). Another important component of organizational autonomy is economic autonomy (Smith and Lipsky 1993). In this case, dependence on external sources of funding can undermine the operating autonomy of a given organization. Therefore, in this study, institutional autonomy as an analytical variable is defined in financial terms by the sources of funding and the institutional capacity of local NGOs to raise their own budget from membership/clientele sources rather than from external sources.

**Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of NGO performance is commonly associated with poverty reduction, cost-effectiveness, sustainability, popular participation, flexibility and innovation (Edwards and Hulme 1996, p.5). In this study, effectiveness was defined in a twofold manner: a) the capacity of NGOs to effectuate policy reform within the
PLANAFLORO’s governing organs, and b) the degree of popular participation obtained within the process as a result of NGO integration in PLANAFLORO.

**Summary**

The issues of representativeness, accountability, autonomy and effectiveness are central to examining major questions about the role of NGOs in economic development programs. Analysis of these variables required the gathering of both factual and perceptual data. Factual data was important to elucidate some of the empirical elements regarding the issues of autonomy (e.g., sources of funding) and accountability (e.g., internal mechanisms of accountability in the NGOs). Perceptual data was important to gain insight into the difficulties surrounding the dynamics of the partnership between the local State, World Bank, and local and transnational NGOs, especially as their relationship affected local MSO and GSO representativeness and effectiveness.

**Data Gathering and Analytical Procedures**

Data gathering from primary sources was based on two principal methods: structured interviews and questionnaires. In addition, documents related to the entire process of
PLANAFLORO planning and implementation were obtained and analyzed. The following sections describe these methods of data gathering and the analytical procedures related to them.

**Interviews of Key Informants Working with NGOs**

The successful conduct of interviews is highly dependent on establishing a good degree of trustworthiness with key informants (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Therefore, prior to starting the interviews, I visited the headquarters of the FORUM of NGOs. During this initial visit, I introduced myself and the objectives of this dissertation to the FORUM’s leadership. At the end of this initial visit, Luiz Rodrigues de Oliveira (the FORUM’s executive secretary) voluntarily prepared a memorandum to circulate among all NGOs directly involved in PLANAFLORO’s governing organs. In this memorandum, Oliveira encouraged NGO leaders to allocate time to be interviewed. I also received a list of telephone numbers of NGO representatives actively participating in PLANAFLORO. In a period of two weeks all NGOs were contacted and I received their own indications of who my key informants would be. A slate of interviewees was then selected and interviews were begun.
In terms of format, NGO leaders were interviewed through a focused interview approach (Yin 1990, p.89). Following this approach, NGO representatives participating in PLANAFLORO’s governing organs were interviewed twice. Interviewees usually were either the most prominent representative of a given NGO, or the most actively involved in the daily affairs of PLANAFLORO. The first set of interviews was carried out in the period July-August/1995 and a second set of follow-up interviews occurred in March 1996 (Appendix A contains a complete list of key informants). During the interviews, key informants were presented with a set of open-ended questions (Appendix B). However, the conduct of interviews was flexible enough to allow the introduction of issues that were not fully covered by the pre-established questions. In the first cycle of interviews, questions focused on gathering information on: NGO leaders perceptions of their roles in the political process, internal characteristics of each of the NGOs, and leader perceptions of the purport and participation of NGOs in PLANAFLORO (Table 3.1).

The questions asked of NGO leaders during the second round of interviews focused on: a) sources of funding, b) possible changes in organizational structure, c) NGO
participation in PLANAFLORO’s governing organs, d) perceptions of the results brought by the implementation of

Table 3.1 Major Components of NGO Leader Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Major Elements of Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGOs and democracy</td>
<td>Role of NGOs in the political process, representativeness and legitimacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Profile</td>
<td>Organizational goals, internal structure, methods of action, sources of funding, institutional affiliation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in PLANAFLORO</td>
<td>Justification for NGO participation, NGO’s practical intervention in the program’s governing organs, NGO effectiveness in PLANAFLORO, views on the State and World Bank’s actions in PLANAFLORO.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PLANAFLORO for their named constituencies, e) their views of the results of the NGO partnership with the State and the World Bank, and f) their evaluation of the effectiveness of NGO participation in PLANAFLORO’s governing organs.

**Interviews of Key Informants Associated with the State and the World Bank**

A group of State and World Bank officials were also interviewed using a focused interview approach (Appendix C). Consistent with recognized standard practice, the procedure
adopted in these interviews also included a small set of questions with enough flexibility to allow new issues to be discussed during the conversation. In all cases, interviewees were asked to allow the tape-recording of the interviews. However, differently from the NGO leaders, some interviewees refused to have their interviews tape-recorded which created the need to record their answers in a notebook. Questions for State and World Bank officials focused on their views of: 1) the representativeness of NGOs participating in PLANAFLORO, 2) the strengths and weaknesses of NGO participation in PLANAFLORO, and 3) the institutional and political factors affecting the effectiveness of NGOs in the process of policy-making within the program’s governing organs.

**Survey of Transnational NGOs**

A questionnaire was also prepared to gather information from transnational NGOs actively involved in funding or providing policy-guidance to local NGOs participating in PLANAFLORO (Appendix D). The list of transnational NGOs was based on information provided by local NGOs. Before the survey instrument was sent to each organization, telephone and e-mail contacts were made to alert NGO representatives to the goals of the research and on the contents of the
questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the following issues: 1) the type of work characterizing their presence in Rondônia, 2) means and periodicity of contact with local Brazilian NGOs, 3) their involvement in shaping the policy-making process of PLANAFLORO, and 4) their views on the major lessons learned by the participation of local NGOs in PLANAFLORO.

Data Collection at the Grassroots Level

Information gathering at the grassroots level focused basically on two issues: 1) the degree of contact between the local organization and the regional organization, 2) the level of dissemination of information about PLANAFLORO to the grassroots level. Data collection was carried out in three basic forms. First, leaders of grassroots organizations (i.e., rubber tapper local associations, Indian associations, and rural labor unions) were interviewed following the same structure shown in Appendix A. Second, individual members of rubber tapper and Indian communities were interviewed following a less structured model of interviews.

Finally, a questionnaire was designed to collect data concerning the PLANAFLORO process among individual small farmers (Appendix E). This questionnaire was aimed at: a)
evaluating the effects of farmer affiliations with local NGOs on knowledge about PLANAFLORO, b) depicting farmers’ perceptions of the program, and c) obtaining small farmers’ specific requests of services to be provided by PLANAFLORO. For the members of the rural labor union, a specific set of questions was designed to establish whether its mechanisms of internal democracy (accountability) were working or not. A total of 114 small farmers living in the region around the municipality of Ouro Preto do Oeste were surveyed between June and July of 1995. Membership in different types of grassroots organizations was used as a parameter to stratify the sample (Table 3.2). This stratification was aimed at establishing whether farmers’ level of information about PLANAFLORO was associated with their organization affiliation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Affiliation</th>
<th>Number of Farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor union and cooperatives</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only cooperatives</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Information from Secondary Sources

Various documents were obtained from the different institutional actors participating in the process (i.e., NGOs, State agencies, and the World Bank) between May 1995 and January 1997. Materials gathered included: a) internal reports produced by the World Bank management regarding the implementation of PLANAFLORO, b) different documents prepared by the NGOs since 1989 to display their own views on PLANAFLORO (e.g., the FORUM’s newspaper, letters to the World Bank and governmental agencies), and c) documents prepared by Federal and State agencies regarding the implementation of PLANAFLORO. The gathering of documents was aimed at exploring two specific issues: a) obtaining data on the status of implementation of PLANAFLORO, and b) establishing the views of the State and the World Bank on the representativeness, accountability, and effectiveness of NGO participation in the program’s governing organs.

Given the poor institutional documentation standards faced by most NGOs, the archives of PLANAFLORO provided most of the documents regarding the relationship between State agencies and local NGOs. In some cases, documents were also obtained at the archives of both the FORUM of NGOs and the "Instituto de Pré-História, Agricultura e Ecologia" (IPHAE),
the Institute of Pre-History, Agriculture and Ecology. Meanwhile, some documents produced by the World Bank were provided confidentially by State and World Bank officials. In the cases of official documents, their citation followed standard procedures. However, in order to maintain the anonymity of confidential sources, the identity of those who made documents available is withheld.

**Analysis of Interviews and Questionnaires**

All taped interviews were reviewed at least twice. The first time was simply to transcribe the tapes from Portuguese to English. The second round was to verify if the contents (i.e., facts and perceptions provided by the interviewees) had been correctly represented in the English version. In cases where there was doubt, the tape was run as many times as necessary to portray the interviewee’s views correctly. After all tapes were transcribed, a process of pattern matching was utilized to analyze the contents of the interviews (Campbell 1975)\(^1\).

In the next stage, the interview texts were initially examined to identify factual and perceptual data provided by each individual key informant. After the reading of the interviews contents was completed, the analysis was geared
towards gleaning items of information that indicate patterns in the representativeness, political legitimacy, internal structure, and perceptions of the process of NGO participation in PLANAFILO. In order to carry out this process systematically, transitional tables were built to assemble the information in its rough stage. The content of these tables was analyzed to establish whether common patterns of answers were present or not. Considering the results of this analysis, analytical tables were then constructed. The transcripts and transitional tables were also used to guide the presentation of information in the text (Appendix F).

In the cases in which interviewees refused to have their interviews recorded, the notes taken were transcribed and analyzed following the same procedures\(^2\). Data provided by the questionnaires applied to transnational NGOs and small farmers were entered into two databases and received the same analytical treatment.

**Content Analysis of Documents**

Documents produced by the Rondônia state government, World Bank and NGOs were analyzed to obtain factual data

---

\(^1\)Pattern-matching consists of establishing linkages between several pieces of information to some theoretical concept.
about PLANAFLORO, from its design to its implementation. Meanwhile, specific analysis of documents prepared by the World Bank regarding the participation of NGOs in PLANAFLORO was undertaken. The analysis focused on the Bank’s views on NGO participation in PLANAFLORO; specifically on its manager’s perceptions of NGO roles in representativeness and institutional capability.

**Conclusion**

The issues of representativeness, accountability, autonomy, and effectiveness are central to the debate surrounding the participation of NGOs in regional economic development. In this case study, the adoption of specific operational definitions was aimed at rigorously examining: a) the reliability of NGOs to represent the political and economic interests of their named constituencies (i.e., civil society), b) the potential impacts of NGO interaction with the State and the World Bank, and transnational NGOs on their organizational autonomy, and c) their institutional capacity to influence the organization and implementation of development programs.

---

2 State government and World Bank officials were the only respondents who declined to have their interviews recorded.