Gritando Alto: Women and decision making in the MST

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Abstract

The MST is one of the largest and most important social movements in Latin America not least for the leading role it has taken in the fight for agrarian reform not only in Brazil but also across the continent as a whole. Women have maintained a significant and long-standing contribution to the movement since its inception in the 1980s and are highly visible in the regional and national structures of decision-making. This paper will consider the experience of women at the local level particularly with respect to equity both in their representation and participation in the decision making process in the rural settlements. Here the study will focus on women in a settlement in Itapeva, Sao Paulo, their incorporation into the fight for land, the establishment of the rural settlement and the difficulties they faced in gaining and equal voice in the decision making process. Of specific interest will be the nuances of rural gender relations, which shaped the early organization, and administration of one of the settlements in this district. Most especially, the paper will focus on the struggle by women not only to gain recognition for their contribution to the productive processes but also the different pathways taken by them to empower themselves within a new rural context and change their role within it in highly innovative and gender specific ways.