

# “Cooperating with Mundukide is a unique and very enriching life experience”

ETOR ARREGI. ULMA volunteer on the Mundukide-Brazil programme (2018-2020)



Etor Arregi tells us about his experience as an ULMA volunteer on the Mundukide-Brazil programme in collaboration with the local partner Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, one of the largest social movements in the world that fights to transform the world to become more fair and supportive.



Frei Humberto Fair (Fortaleza). Fairs are important vehicles for presence, communication with society and the sale of products from cooperatives and family farmers >>

“ Tell us, what is Brazil like? How would you define the country where you have been doing charity work these years?

Brazil is a very diverse country, from all points of view. It is a huge country and it has different cultures, races, contrasting climates and landscapes, etc. But above all, there are huge socio-economic differences that cause some of the widest social inequalities in the world, so Brazil is among the countries where wealth is least equitably distributed. It is a country with an extraordinary natural heritage - the country with the greatest biodiversity of flora and fauna on the planet, home to the largest forest mass in the world and the two main freshwater aquifers in liquid state in the world. These facts, however, are in conflict with the uncontrolled activity that is harming the environment, the dizzying rate of deforestation, the self-interested burning of immense jungle territories and the contamination of important rivers by mining activity. Large areas of forest are being converted into monocultures with excessive use of agrochemicals, impoverishing the land, creating dependence on the large agrochemical multinationals focused on the production of commodities for external markets that generate little added value and concentration of profits.

“ How was the activity you were involved in done?

The first thing to say that the local partner with whom we work from Mundukide is the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST). The MST is one of the largest social movements in the world and undoubtedly the most powerful on the American continent. My first experience on the Mundukide-Brazil programme was in the south of the country, between January 2018 and June 2019. That region of the country has the most developed agro-industrial activities and the cooperatives themselves. The cooperatives are created around highly diverse agricultural activities such as rice, milk, beef, pork, horticulture, fruit growing, production of organic seeds and bakeries. Many face difficulties in making their business viable. My job was to continue work that had already been started 2 years earlier by another colleague.

I was supporting the cooperatives in improving their management, based on the management model for social enterprises. We support them in improving and systematizing processes, to create coordination dynamics, to plan the short and medium term, to design analysis and monitoring tools, etc. In this dynamic, we focus on people, on developing capacities so that the people themselves generate the improvement cycles, always from the perspective of valuing people. During this period, the “cooperative support group” was created, with qualified local people, so that they themselves could develop this work of inter-cooperation and support for cooperatives. Another of my roles was to help in the management of the Porto Alegre Agrarian Reform shop for the sale of products produced by cooperatives and other ecological products from family farming.

(Jan 2018- Jun 2019)	
Support for the management of existing cooperatives in Rio Grande do Sul	
<b>No. of cooperatives supported:</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>No. of workers in agro-industries:</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>No. of families that are members of producing cooperatives:</b>	<b>3.650</b>



<< On the left, Agroindustries Managers participating in training courses. Below, management meeting of the Cootap cooperative

## Personal vision



In the centre of the image Etor Arregi during Mundukide's visit to MST Settlement >>

**“ You were also in the north-western part of the country. What kind of activity took place there? ”**

Yes, after a short but intense period in Rio Grande do Sul, in June 2019, I moved to the state of Ceará, basically with the same approach (assisting cooperatives and training people) but facing a very different situation. In the entire Northeast of Brazil and in particular in the state of Ceará, there were practically no developed industries that process the raw material produced by the settlers. What did exist was an important project for the creation of 5 agro-industries financed by the World Bank and the Government of Ceará, for the processing of dairy products, fruit juice, cashew nuts, sheep-goats, honey and cassava. Mundukide was asked to help on this project, specifically by providing support and training. In this case we had to do a little of everything; helping to find legal solutions to make businesses viable,

establishing cooperatives, creating or modifying statutes, etc. Once the legal form was resolved, the work teams had to be created; who we were going to work with to start the new ventures. Starting from having the people and teams for each cooperative, we worked in the same way as in the South, but starting from scratch. We created the work dynamics and we built the processes in the different management areas: production-agroecology, industry (processing of raw materials), marketing and administrative-accounting. Some of the industries are already close to the start of activity. The challenge was great. They will need more support in the management in the first months (years) of operation. We face the challenge of continuing to train the people of the cooperatives and strengthening inter-cooperation, with a powerful support group for cooperatives.



**“This is a life experience, an intense and rewarding experience that I recommend to my colleagues from the ULMA Group cooperatives”**

ETOR ARREGI.

“It is always said that the experiences of living and working abroad are enriching experiences, right? The typical thing to say is that you learn to communicate in a different language, get to know different cultures, meet people who leave a mark on you; it is true that a country can't be known on a holiday but by living and working with local people ... All of that is true. But the life experience of an aid worker on an international development program with Mundukide brings you much more. You feel that you are contributing your grain of sand directly to a more just and caring world. You feel that - a grain of sand in the vastness for everything there is to do. You feel that you have to do it, that it is worth it. You meet people who do not give up and you admire them and they help you keep going when you're there. “This is a life experience, an intense and rewarding experience that I recommend to my colleagues from the ULMA Group in our cooperatives have gained a lot of experience in management in recent years. The transmission of that knowledge adapted to their situation is of great value. They give us that fighting spirit, which also existed here at the beginning of the cooperatives, where people fought side by side for decent conditions and a fair and supportive project. Things have changed a lot since those beginnings of the cooperative movement, we take many things for granted and do not value our achievements. You realize what it takes to achieve the successes that we have been able to achieve here. Experiencing those unique moments of transformation, that is living a unique experience. It has helped me to strengthen my convictions about cooperativism. This is the way. It helped me to question the competitive and less supportive attitude that we often adopt here in our cooperatives. You learn to live more simply and to become a better person.”

Mundukide Ambassadors tell about their experience in this video and encourage you to participate



(jun 2019 – mar 2020)	
New ventures and cooperatives of family farmers in the State of Ceará	
<b>No. of cooperatives supported:</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>No. of people assisted directly:</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>No. of families that are members of producing cooperatives:</b>	<b>1.290</b>