

PROVENTION CONSORTIUM

Community Risk Assessment and Action Planning project

BRAZIL – Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro



Copyright 2002-2005, Maps-Of-The-World.com

The maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies or National Societies or the ProVention Consortium concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities

Vulnerability and Resilience

**CRA Toolkit
CASE STUDY**

This case study is part of a broader ProVention Consortium initiative aimed at collecting and analyzing community risk assessment cases. For more information on this project, see www.proventionconsortium.org.

Bibliographical reference: ActionAid 2007 “Brazil: Vulnerability and Resilience: Case studies and analysis in urban and rural areas,” ActionAid pdf.

Click-on reference to the **ReliefWeb country file for Brazil:**
<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc104?OpenForm&rc=2&cc=bra>

Note:

A Guidance Note has been developed for this case study. It contains an abstract, analyzes the main findings of the study, provides contextual and strategic notes and highlights the main lessons learned from the case. The guidance note has been developed by Dr. Ben Wisner in close collaboration with the author(s) of the case study and the organization(s) involved.

Brazil: Vulnerability and Resilience

*Case studies and analysis in urban
and rural areas.*

In search of lost rights

Text: Mariana Leal

Photos: André Telles

former slaves lived and freely exploited the region's lands, planting rice, beans, manioc and maize, and breeding free-range livestock. Close to his house in a small plot, Nicolau plants manioc and waits for the rains to arrive in order to start planting beans. The harvested manioc no longer finds its way to the family table. The small flour mill at the back of his house lies idle. "It's not worth it, I

have to pay someone to bring the manioc here to toast it. But at the end of the day, nobody wants to pay the fair price," he complains.

Family income derives from an agricultural pension of one minimum-wage, two family allowances received by his daughter and whatever he manages to

produce on his plot of land. "Before I retired I worked a lot more, it's a very difficult situation," he adds. Nicolau depends on the collaboration of other farmers to work his plantation. After harvesting, the manioc is ground in the pulverizer hired by the Quilombola Association with stalks, leaves and roots to make feed for the cattle and poultry. The product is shared among those who worked, an option for anyone who wishes to earn more than the four dollars paid for working all day with a hoe on the region's farms. He is one of the few who owns land for planting, one of thirty family farmers who received a plot during the agrarian reform process conducted by Incra in the 1970s.



Pai Pedro, MG – In the district of Taperinha, Nicolau Quaresma, 70 years old, lives with his daughter and five grandchildren in a smallholding. In the yard, a herd of pigs, chickens and a cow brave the relentless hot sun of the caatinga.

Likes his father, grandfather and great-grandfather before him, Nicolau was born there in the Gorutuba River valley, a region occupied centuries ago by escaped slaves who formed a quilombola community.

Around five thousand people live in 27 black communities scattered along the 50km of the Gorutuba River, a valley whose landscape is composed of the dry caatinga vegetation and stretches across seven municipalities in the North of Minas Gerais. The descendents of the



Human security



Land, which was once commonly owned, was taken violently at the end of the 1960s. "They took the land in the *grilação* [land-grabbing] in 69. They bought the land of the poor folk and fenced off the rest. Here there were no estate plantations, nothing. In the past, the documents weren't officially registered," Nicolau recounts.

The violence left marks in practically all the quilombola communities. In

Lagoa do Barro, in Jaíba municipality, a few kilometres from Nicolau's house, Paula de Oliveira, 45 years old, still remembers the day when she had to leave the house where she lived with her mother and grandparents. She was just nine years old and did not understand what was happening to her family and neighbours.

"These people arrived with some papers for us to sign, saying that it was to renew the



land deeds. At that time, the population here was fairly ignorant, they didn't know how to read, they didn't understand anything. They signed the papers. When these people came back, they took the lands and booted everyone out," she recalls.

The lands started to be fenced off, the families expelled and their houses demolished.

The expulsion from the land was just the first of the hardships endured by the community in the years ahead. The river began to be used to irrigate the fruit monocultures. The water that had once been used for domestic consumption and for watering the small crops became scarce and polluted by fertilizers. "Today the riverbed is covered with nothing but weeds," Paula says.

Paula is a single mother of sixteen children, nine of whom still live with her. For ten years now she has left home everyday to work as a cook in the Marechal Floriano school, the only one in the region offering secondary education. The lunch, a cup of milk and some crackers, is one of the most eagerly awaited moments for the school children.

As a single parent, she always had to fight alone to keep her family going. "I was never ashamed to ask for help. Raising my



Human security



children, sometimes I had to go from house to house asking for rice, a bit of cooking oil. I was always the woman and man of the household," she recalls.

Apart from the minimum wage she earns each month as a school cook, Paula receives a family allowance and a 20kg food basket distributed by the Ministry of Social Development to the Quilombola Association. She also helps with the upkeep of two of her children living in the town of Jaíba, the other five living in Belo Horizonte. "The girls work as domestic helps and the lad is a barber," she says.

Despite working in the school, Paula only knows how to write her own name, like most of the other people her own age or older. "Here there was no school and when one finally arrived, there was no money to buy the school equipment," she explains.

The water consumed by the family, like the community as a whole, comes from artesian wells and pumping it to the cisterns means having to pay the electricity bill.

Paula is often penniless by the end of the month, the pans empty and owing money to the grocer. "My children are almost left to starve, since I've an electricity bill to pay and no money to do so," she says.



Human security

In her small yard, the earth has been tilled, waiting for the rain in order to plant beans and maize. With her children's help, she breeds chickens and goats, and plants fruit trees, but only the umbu tree stays leafy: the sacred tree of the caatinga resist the long droughts, provides fruits and shade, and is also used to make remedies.

Territory and Identity

Paula and Nicolau are seen as leaders by the community and as guardians of the terço and the batuque, musical and dance traditions typical of the local black culture.



Nicolau took an active part in the research that led to the recognition of the Gorutuba populations as descendents of quilombolas. "In 2002, a bloke arrived and spent six months interviewing everyone, recorded a load of tapes," he recalls. The 'bloke' is Aderval Costa Filho, currently coordinator of the National Commission of Traditional Peoples of the Ministry of Social Development.

The recovery of the quilombola identity changed the community's organization. Leadership training and capacity-building courses resulted in the creation of a Gorutuba Consultative Committee and the Quilombola Association. Supported by the North of



Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre and by a mutual-support network, the quilombolas began to take part directly in the fight for access to basic rights and for reclaiming their territory.

The activism involved in affirming the quilombola identity allowed the 27 communities to escape their isolation and work together to demand more attention from their respective municipal governments. "We are descendents of the Africans, the land of the quilombo is not divided but shared, just like it was in the past," Nicolau explains.

Despite the changes, Nicolau does not think he will live to see the stolen lands returned to them. "I haven't much faith in this happening, the lands are in the hands of the farmers, the lawyers ate the money of the poor and we stopped fighting," he says.

In the Association's head office, the community is preparing to inaugurate a cultural centre. This is where festivals are held, such as the one celebrated on November 4th in anticipation of Black Awareness Day (20/11).

The presence of young people is notable. Doquinha, 27 years old, the association's president, recognizes that the process for reclaiming the lands is slow and uncertain, and that the illiteracy of most of the population is still a problem.

As well as representing the quilombolas in their dealings with government, providing advice on access to basic documents and social benefits, and demanding effective public policies, the Association owns a tractor and machines for use by the community through the payment of a maintenance fee at lower costs than those charged by the market.

"Our role is to help mobilize the community and make it aware of its quilombola identity," he says. For him, the land ownership of which they dream depends on the pressure the people bring to bear on the governments and the technical team sent by Incra. "The people will have to be the fuel, they'll have to demand action, this is what reclaiming our land rights involves. I'm hopeful that we'll get there. There are a lot of challenges,

especially the lack of information informing people about the right to claim their cultural identity and their rights as citizens and as quilombolas," he adds.

Meanwhile, Paula dreams that one day her trials will end. "We're waiting for our rights, which have been recognized, to reach us. Those who couldn't stand the wait have already left to live elsewhere," she laments.

The quilombola issue

The 1988 Brazilian constitution recognized that the remnant quilombo communities have the right to own their lands and maintain their culture. Helping preserve Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations is a responsibility of the State.

The process of identifying a quilombola community and its land rights involves the Ministry of Agrarian Development, through Incra (which identifies, delimits, demarcates and grants land ownership to the quilombolas) and the Palmares Foundation (which investigates, recognized and helps preserve the cultural identity of the quilombos).

The Brasil Quilombola program was created as a set of actions designed to promote the sustainable development of these communities. Access to public policies has been extended through projects run by the Ministry of Social Development and Combating Hunger (MDS). Around 7,000 quilombola families, distributed across seven Brazilian states, receive benefits from the Family Allowance program. The construction of cisterns to store rainwater in municipalities in the semi-arid region and the distribution of food baskets are just some of the actions realized by the program in the area of food security.



Land grabbing and the fight for rights in Gorutuba

In the mid 1960s, farmers began to fence off the lands and expel the families living along the shores of the Gorutuba river, backed by documents forged in registry offices. The lands of the caatinga and the river floodplains were enclosed by the new owners and the quilombolas lost the territory where they had planted their subsistence crops, a fact which transformed the livelihoods of family farmers for ever.

Today the population occupies the narrow strips of land along the Gorutuba and Pacuí rivers. The illiteracy rate in the region is 60%, while only 40% of the population have access to water close to home. The vast majority possess no kind of sewage system. The region's infant mortality rate is high, around 150 deaths per thousand live births, as well as the occurrence of endemic diseases.

Currently, river water is used to irrigate fruit monocultures – cashew, cajá, banana, watermelon – which contributes to reducing the floodplain and undermines the food security of the quilombola families. Even so, the irrigated fruit growing project is considered a success story in terms of the region's development by the Ministry of National Integration.

The community was recognized by the Palmares Foundation as a quilombo remnant and, like other traditional communities, has been demanding social and territorial recognition from Incra, the Ministry of Social Development and the State Government of

Minas Gerais. In response, Incra has been slowly registering the families in order to legalize the land ownership situation and reclaim the ancestral lands on the basis of Article 68 of the Transitory Constitutional Provisions. The process of reclaiming the territory is being assisted by a partnership of the North of Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre (CAA/NM) with the 'Rights Counter' project of the Minas Gerais Pastoral Commission and the Diocesan Caritas of Janaúba, which initiated the legal processes needed for land legalization.

ActionAid supports the CAA/NM's work towards the institutional strengthening of the Quilombola Association as a way of promoting the participation of quilombolas in the fight for access to basic rights such as food security, health, education, work, housing and territory. The leadership training and capacity-building courses have meant greater visibility and the increased participation of the quilombolas in developing specific policy proposals in spaces such as the National Commission of Quilombola Populations, the Quilombola Federation of the State of Minas Gerais, the National Quilombo Steering Committee and the African Biodiversity Network.

Human security



Fighting the green drought in Minas Gerais

Text: Mariana Leal

Photos: André Telles

Rio Pardo, MG

- In 1998, when the agriculturist Arcílio dos Santos, 45 years old, returned to his home in the Serra dos Gerais after a period working in the coffee harvest in the South of Minas, he encountered a tragic scene.



The event had been threatening to happen for some time. "My wife wrote to me saying that she had woken to find the river had dried up," he recounts. Clotilde dos Santos, 42 years old, looked after the house, the plantation and the couple's 5 children over the three months he was away, but despaired

uplands to companies specializing in monocultures of eucalyptus, with the aim of producing the charcoal used in the steel industry. The *geraiszeira* communities – family farmers who have produced food for the region's towns for centuries – watched the destruction of their production systems and the degradation of the local environment.

The arrival of eucalyptus plantations ('the green drought') was accompanied by promises of progress, development and jobs for the region. The workforce hired by the companies is small, though, a few employees who fell the

trees, load the trucks and feed the charcoal ovens. "It took a while for the community to stir in response, we could have blocked the invasion. The older people were more naive than we are today," Arcílio suggests.

While the eucalyptus penetrated the soil with



when the soil began to scorch in April, a full five months before the rains were due to arrive.

At the start of the 80s, the Minas Gerais government had leased lands on the plateau



its deep roots, sequestering the water that supplied the upland springs, many farming families lost their own roots. Some migrated to other regions to work in sugarcane cutting or coffee harvesting. Few

Human security



families have been left intact. It was at the start of the 1990s, after many years of monoculture and the destruction of



the lifestyle of the region's family farmers, that the negative effects of the activity became visible to the naked eye, such as the soil loss and water shortages.

Wide tracks are left clear between the eucalyptus trees for use by the trucks and workers; when the rains arrive, all the eroded soil flows down these access roads and into the headwaters, filling them with silt. In the Vereda Funda community, only three of the 50 water wells once in operation still remain. Local family farming was dealt another harsh blow.

Those who managed to survive watched the second act of the tragedy. "Wherever we looked there were signs of death," tells Elisa Freitas, 50 years old, a farmer and voluntary worker for the Pastoral da Criança. "The only water was from a well at the house of one of our neighbours and I had to carry it in a can on my head; half of it spilled on the way back and there was barely enough to cook, let alone clean the dishes. I dreamed of being to wash my clothes in the river, but had to sleep without taking a bath," she recalls.

Currently, 700 families live squeezed between the monoculture plantations in the Vereda Funda region, occupying the lowlands, where they can no longer rely on the generosity of the cerrado. "There used to be lots of birds, game animals, creatures of the woods, remedies and food. People bred free-range cattle, there was a lot of water and the land was fertile. Even the lake had fish, wolf-fish, it was really beautiful," Elisa remembers.

Only three of Dona Elisa's six children still live in the community. In Arcílio's family, the oldest son of 24 years lives in Franca, São Paulo, where he is taking a course for motorcycle mechanics.

When she moved to her mother's old property in Vereda Funda, she was surprised by the lack of collective spaces in the community. "The people here didn't meet to pray or reflect. There was no school either and few knew how to read. I had the idea of setting up a classroom at a home to teach others what I knew," says Dona Elisa, who was taught to read and write by her father.

And it was out of these prayers and discussions that Vereda Funda became the first community to take action against the eucalyptus plantations and reclaim the



Human security



cerrado. The Rio Pardo rural workers union discovered that the leasing contract was due to expire. This encouraged the community to petition the Minas Gerais State Land Institute for devolution of 5,000 hectares for conversion into an Agroextractivist Settlement Project, an action supported by the Minas Gerais State Public Prosecutor's Office. The campaign led by the Rio Pardo rural workers union received support from the North of Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre (CAA/NM) and organizations such as the Pastoral Land Commission, Via Campesina, the Green Desert Watch Network and the Cerrado Network. The rights of the region's traditional peoples began to be claimed in the courts.

In 2004, frustrated by the slow progress over their claim which had been dragging on for several years, the farmers decided to take more radical action to force an agreement. An area of eucalyptus plantations was invaded. Dozens of families settled there for more than six months. Their daring provoked a strong reaction from other communities, but sped up the process, resulting in the devolution of 500 hectares. "The people from Entroncamento, for example, threatened us, called us 'MST,' there was even an attempted raid during the night and threats from the police. People from our own community were against the idea when we invaded the area," Elisa recalls.

Even today, the leaders of the farmers who were at the forefront of the process remain in the firing line. Some have been threatened by representatives of the 'reforesters' with potential 'accidents' on the dirt roads.

The area of cerrado reclaimed was just a tenth of the amount agreed in the courts, but even so, the difference is already noticeable

in Vereda Funda. "It's already seven months since it rained and we've still yet to suffer from a shortage in water. In other places nearby, for example, the rivers are all dry," emphasizes Arcílio. The small plantations and yards provide the families' daily food. Beans, maize, manioc, beetroot, carrots, kale, lettuce and chicory grow near the house. But it was not always like this.

For many years, Arcílio went to work for long periods in the coffee and sugar plantations in the South of Minas and São Paulo. At the time he lived and worked on his father-in-law's land where he built his family's house. To buy a small plot of land he had to pool everything he had. "We even sold a set of dishes and ate beans with gherkins for a fair while," he recalls.



Arcílio was one of the first farmers to learn about and transmit agroecology with the guidance of CAA/NM. Currently he is responsible for a pioneering project in partnership with the Ministry of the Environment, which involves 23 families in shaded coffee planting underneath native trees and next to other species that contribute to fertilizing the soil. "It wasn't me who invented this way of planting. My father-in-law planted like this, it was traditional here in the region," he acknowledges.

Although the return of the cerrado in the 500 hectares protecting the headwaters of Vereda Funda has already shown positive results, the long tract of eucalyptus monoculture in the region is a challenge that is far from resolved. "We've spent 10 years fighting this problem, but people are still not organized enough. The world we have fought for and won is very small for such a large region," he argues.

What is agroecology and agroextractivism?

Agroecology is an alternative agricultural production system that aims to ensure the sustainability of family farming, rescuing practices that allow the poor farmer to produce without depending on industrial inputs such as pesticides and **chemical fertilizers**, for example. It goes beyond organic cultivation techniques, since it includes environmental and human elements. In effect, it is a lifestyle that looks to rescue and valorize the traditional knowledge of family-based farming, **developed in the local environment and passed down from generation to generation**.

It is a **practice that involves the entire family** and that encompasses basic ecological principles for planning and managing agricultural systems that are simultaneously productive, economically viable, environmentally friendly and socially just.

In comparison to **conventional** agriculture, agroecology is distinguished by its **optimization of the use** of natural resources, **avoiding predatory exploitation**, allowing natural soil renewal and the conservation of biodiversity.

Agroecological systems are also developed in **partnership with** forestry systems, where extractivist activities are combined with sustainable family farming. In this modality, agroextractivism, knowledge of **ecosystems** and the cultural practices of traditional peoples are all of great importance.

Building agroecology involves the development of **new values** that guide the relations between family farmers and the market, demanding the creation of different strategies for organizing and marketing based on solidarity and ethics **in processes known as solidarity economics**.

Sustainability of the Cerrado: from monoculture to agroextractivism

The Agroextractivist Reconversion program in the Alto Rio Pardo microregion, where the community of Vereda Funda is located, proposes the reappropriation of 270,000 hectares of public areas across the region degraded by eucalyptus monocultures.

The extractivist populations are organized into cooperatives and rural workers unions. One such example is the Grande Sertão Cooperative, which processes and sells honey and native fruit pulps – cagaita, mangaba, araçá, araticum (paná), guava, cashew, cajá, umbu, tamarind, sirigüela, sugar-apple, pineapple and passionfruit – produced by the family farmers living in the valley



of the Gorutuba river and the upper Pardo river. The main client is the Food Purchase Program, a mechanism that allows the purchase of family farming's produce by governments. The pesticide-free and preservative-free fruit juices are consumed in schools, care homes, crèches and hospitals run by the state.

"All this joint work has provided sustainability to family farmers from the region, since it allows them a source of income beyond livestock breeding and subsistence farming. It's like a savings account that doesn't take up too much of the farmer's time," argues Elton Mendes Barbosa, 42 years old, a cooperative member and coordinator of the rural workers union in Porteirinha, a medium-sized town in the region which is home to one of the cooperative's plants.

ActionAid supports the North of Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre, an organization formed of technicians and family farmers, in the struggle of the region's traditional populations to gain recognition of their land rights and social inclusion, with an emphasis on claiming economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. CAA/NM works to strengthen local networks, such as the rural workers union movement and the Pastoral Land Commission, in order to encourage dialogue and the dissemination of processes, methods and technologies, as well as help develop public policies by working alongside municipal, state and federal authorities.



São João de Meriti, RJ

– A storm broke out over the city in the last week of October after a lengthy dry spell. The rains left three dead and 1,476 homeless, 90% of whom live in the Baixada Fluminense, in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro.

Losing everything she owns is no novelty for Vó Baiana, 60 years old, a sweet vendor and resident of Rua São Marcos, a community making up part of the Favela do Dique and bordering the Sarapuí river, in São João de Meriti. The first time was in a fire in the small room where she lived in a favela in Botafogo, in the wealthy area of Rio de Janeiro. Eighteen years ago, she moved to the house by the river where she lives under constant threat of the water polluted by open sewage. On the day of the storm, the pans normally used to make coconut candy and peanut brittle gained another use: protecting the furniture and clothing from the roof leaks. This time the water only reached the door of the house.

She is the head of the family made up of three granddaughters and five great-grandchildren. Vó Baiana has been a widow for 32 years and raised her children alone selling confectionary on the city's streets, an activity that earns her on average one minimum wage per month (around US\$ 211). Today her grandchildren help sell the sweets in the neighbourhood and she helps raise her great-grandchildren.

A few blocks away, Sidnéia, 45 years old, her husband and stepson carry the furniture and household appliances bought on credit that they managed to salvage from the rains. She too has lost everything a number of times. Her house is located in front of a canal and when it rains, the water often rises by more than a metre. To hold on to its belongings, the family has already developed a strategy in case of heavy rains: the children are sent to their aunt's house and the furniture and appliances are suspended on a metal platform. "This happened four years ago and I've just finished paying off the debt and the water destroys everything again," she says.

A housewife, she does occasional domestic jobs to help boost the income of the family, made up of herself, her husband, who is employed by the local council, three daughters and her 20 year old stepson. She receives family allowances for two of her daughters, worth around US\$52 a month.

Recently on an evening course close to home, she finished the fourth year of primary education. "My parents weren't bothered about sending the children to school and today the only job I can get is as a domestic help," she says. After the course close to home was closed down, Sidnéia was unable to attend school since residents feel more insecure in the streets at night. "There have been gunfights and even raids on homes," she adds.

Married for 19 years, Sidnéia dreams in moving away and owning her own house. The five-bedroom house where she lives was built bit by bit, combining the couple's savings, on her mother-in-law's land. "We lived crammed into one room in her house. It was a real struggle to get my house and I run the risk of my stepchildren taking it from me if my husband dies," she worries.

A domestic help since she was eight years old, she finds it difficult to accept the unemployment of her stepchildren who are aged between 18 and 24. "People have to fight for what they want. Jobs don't come knocking on your door. I was raised in other people's houses and know how to do a little of everything," she says.

In her first job, where she helped an elderly couple, she had to use a chair to reach the kitchen sink. "My mother only turned up to fetch my pay, until one day the old woman told her that the money was for me too, for some new clothes at least. My mother lost her temper and took me away," she recalls.

Although she does not shy from work – she wakes every day at six in the morning to do her odd-jobs, such as washing neighbours' clothes, and to get the children ready for school – Sidnéia has already given up hope of having a paid job one day with an official employment card. “They say I’m already too old and that I’m only going to get sick from here on,” she says.

The children from the families of Vó Baiana and Sidnéia take part in the activities run by the Baixada Fluminense Culture House held nearby – ranging from classes with the ‘explainers,’ adults who guide the studies of children with learning difficulties at school, to cultural and sports practices. In the area, attending a class costs about R\$ 30 a month.

It was while explaining homework that Cristiane de Souza, 31 years old, began to realize that if the residents themselves failed to unite, the situation would simply get worse. A resident of Rua São Marcos, she admits she had little patience with the pupils at the start, but ended up discovering a talent as a teacher and decided to take a course at the faculty of education. Along with other residents, she formed the Rua São Marcos Community centre, where school reinforcement classes and leisure activities are offered to children. The association helped to bring residents together and acquired an important role in mediating their interests in dealings with public authorities. Waste collection, street lighting and sanitation have been some of the main demands presented to the local council.

For three years now, Cristiane has worked in the Baixada Fluminense Culture House and a member of the Community Centre’s board of directors. “The role of the Culture House is to express the community’s demands in relation to the offered services, emphasizing government responsibilities and monitoring the actions of public authorities,” summarizes Leila Soares from the Culture House’s Race and Gender management team. Like the São Marcos Community Centre, the Culture House forges partnerships with other residents associations to defend the community’s interests.

After decades of campaigning by its organized residents – led in large part by the Council of Grassroots Organizations of São João de Meriti (ABM), a partner institution of the Culture House – the Baixada Fluminense is set to receive large-scale urban infrastructure projects. The Growth Acceleration Program (PAC in Portuguese)¹ includes initiatives such as recuperating the region’s hydrographic network, which means removing people living on the shores of the Sarapuí river,² such as Vó Baiana’s family, and landfilling some of its affluents.

The families have been registered and will live in a housing development that has still to get off the drawing board. “If they carry out the plans they presented to us, it’s possible the changes will be for the best,” says Cristiane. Council of Grassroots Organizations has held weekly meetings with leaders, residents and representatives of the public authorities responsible for executing the project. This monitoring by the population is a way of ensuring that the project is not just another unfulfilled promise, like so many others in the past.

The works that have already begun on the Sarapuí river and those set to be implemented may generate new risks for the population, making them even more vulnerable. It has been years since the floods were so intense as recently. “We suspect that the work being carried out on the Sarapuí river, in another municipality, may be the primary cause,” claims Leila Soares.

¹ The PAC is a set of logistical, energy, social and urban infrastructural projects run by the federal government. Investments of US\$ 95 billion in social and urban infrastructure are planned across the country by 2010.

² The project for recuperating the Iguaçu River Basin will receive US\$ 445 million in funding. The first stage anticipates the use of US\$ 150 million to relocate families from São João de Meriti, Duque de Caxias, Nova Iguaçu, Mesquita and Belford Roxo.



Those living near the river's affluents are worried about the landfill being undertaken, which could compromise the stability of the terrain and consequently the local housing.

Vó Baiana is optimistic about the chance of moving. "We're going to live in an apartment with two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen!" she enthuses.

While waiting for the apartment keys to arrive, she dreams of a better future for her great-granddaughters and strives for better living conditions for the granddaughters who live with her. Aged between 16 and 20 years old, only one, who had already suffered two miscarriages, managed to stay at school. "Adolescents can be trouble, but kicking them out just makes things worse. We need to look after our own, give advice," she explains. "I want to give them the chance to go to school so they can be someone: a doctor, an engineer, an artist, even a sweet maker, so they don't lose their way! São João de Meriti is the municipality with the highest demographic density³ in Latin America. Located in the Baixada Fluminense, in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, the municipality faces problems such as a precarious urban infrastructure and services, an enormous housing shortage and a degraded environment, as well as the growing violence involving armed groups and drug gangs.

Since 1999, the Culture House (Baixada Fluminense Artistic and Cultural Training Centre) and ActionAid have undertaken joint actions to increase people's access to basic social services, especially in the education of youths and children, a significant part of the municipality's population and encourages the development of active citizenship.

The activities with children end up stimulating the involvement of adults, raising local public awareness of many issues. The strategy is based on strengthening the representation of the region's inhabitants implemented by the Culture House through the formation of networks and extension of the bases for political support. Among the groups and spaces focused on social networking and alliances are the Fêmea Group, which allows women to meet and debate forms of combating and overcoming domestic violence, the Child and Youth Rights Watch and the Council of Grassroots Organizations of São João de Meriti (ABM). The latter is prominent in the fight for the right to urban infrastructure and housing, especially in relation to basic sanitation in the region.

As well as organizing grassroots participation, the Culture Houses has a permanent seat on the Women's Council, the Child and Youth Rights Council, the Social Welfare Council and the Environment Council, and take an active part in the State Council for the Defence of Child Rights and works closely with CEDIM – State Council for Women's Rights.

³According to IBGE's 2000 census, the demographic density is 12,897.81 inhabitants per km², higher than that of Singapore (5,460 inhabitants per km²).

VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE: manifestations in urban and rural space

Lourdes Brazil⁴

PRESENTATION

This work provides an analysis of forms of vulnerability and resilience in Brazil, focusing specifically on the municipality of São João de Meriti, located in the Baixada Fluminense, in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro and the Gorutuba Valley in the north of Minas Gerais. The text is organized into two chapters. In the first, we present a summary of the political, economic and social factors that determine the adversities in urban and rural spaces, as well as the materialization of these in the places in focus. In São João de Meriti, as well as insufficient family income, violence is prominent in the community's environment, perpetrated by the drug trafficking networks. In the Gorutuba Valley, the lack of access to land and water, environmental degradation and regional drought produce together a highly adverse setting, expressed most directly in the high rates of infant mortality.

In the second chapter we present the strategies for facing these adversities used by grassroots organizations, individuals, families and communities. At an individual level, this comprises day-to-day actions undertaken primarily by women. In the case of São João de Meriti, they are primarily assisted by the existence of an extensive informal job market that allows the inclusion of an entire family group, including children. In the Gorutuba Valley, the actions confronting these adversities receive support of family members living in other municipalities and states.

The text is based on readings, photographs and life histories. The readings provided the theoretical grounding needed for our comprehension to penetrate beyond the immediate layer of the photos and dialogue, allowing us to identify some of the most important aspects of the situations, as well as some of the weaknesses in strategies adopted to deal with them. The most important dimension is the individual skills of women in developing emergency solutions, and the biggest weakness is the low level of involvement of these same women in the grassroots organizations.

We hope that this text may help deepen and widen the debates surrounding these themes of vulnerability and resilience.

1-VULNERABILITIES: A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The objective of this chapter is to present a political and social analysis of the vulnerabilities experienced by a significant part of the Brazilian population, in both urban and rural spaces, highlighting some of the key factors in terms of understanding and contextualizing these situations. We begin with a review of the Brazilian economy, starting in the 1930s in the case of the urban analysis. The first section runs until the end of the 1970s and the second from the 1980s to today. In relation to rural space, the starting point is the 1970s. Our aim is to show how adversities are materialized in a state of poverty, which affects not only individuals and their families, but also networks of friendships, neighbours and the professional and institutional relations found in the local

⁴ Extension coordinator of the Baptist Faculty of Rio de Janeiro. Coordinator of the research and extension project 'Children Spatial Segregation and Social Participation' of the Federal Fluminense University – UFF. Coordinator of the Community Pre-Entrance Exam of UFF's School of Engineering.

vicinity. In this setting of poverty, whether in urban space or rural space, children, teenagers, youths, men and women are continually involved in actions of individual and collective resistance. Despite this resistance, most people continue to live in an adverse situation since overcoming this hardship demands the use of capacities related to exercising citizenship, itself obtained through the possession of material and immaterial wealth.

The theme of 'vulnerability has been approached from three different angles. The first focuses on income and relates poverty to the absence or scarcity of family or individual income due to their non-insertion or precarious insertion in the work market. The second is the focus on urban services and facilities. As well as income, it considers the lack of access, or precarious access, of families and/or individuals, to housing, healthcare, education, basic sanitation and electricity. The third approach focuses on skills: here poverty is taken as a lack of the basic skills needed to attain certain minimally acceptable levels. Poverty is not a question of the scarcity of welfare support, but the incapacity to obtain welfare support, precisely due to a lack of the necessary means (Dupas1999:31).

This state of poverty is manifested in psychological damage, loss of self-esteem, a reduction in the motivation to work, the disintegration of family ties and social life, an accentuation of gender asymmetries and racial tensions, an increase in illnesses and mortality rates – all of which result not only from the dominant patterns of production, accumulation and appropriation of wealth in the country, especially from the 1990s onwards, but also “the combination and condensation of other forms of subalternization and social division, such as the mode of inclusion in the job sector, the locale of residence, gender relations, the forms of sociopolitical inclusion or rejection, inter-racial relations, and forms of intergenerational conviviality,” (Silva 2004:106).

This combination means that black people, women, children and elderly people are the most vulnerable among the vulnerable and demands measures for democratizing the power relations and the claiming of citizenship.

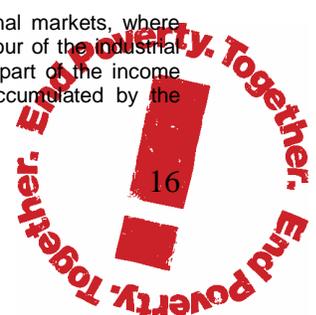
Vulnerabilities in urban space

“The social conditions of existence remove from people the right to choose, to have preferences and to seek what gives them greater satisfaction”

THE 1930s: the city is transformed into the best place to live

During the first decades of the 20th century, the mode of capital accumulation dominant in the Brazilian economy was based on an agroexport model with specialized production of some primary products. The spatial base was the countryside. From the 1930s onwards, a new model based on industrialization and the urban space started to be implemented,⁵ transforming into a development project for the country as a whole from 1937 onwards, under the control of the State. This reordering of the economy took place in a political setting involving the centralization of the State apparatus, the repression of the political manifestations of civil society and the growth of an authoritarian political regime, a reduction in the power of the oligarchies representing landed

⁵ This new model of accumulation had three main features: monopolization, based on isolated regional markets, where supply was concentrated in a few companies; State monetary policy, determining price changes in favour of the industrial sector – designed to supply the domestic market – through tax breaks and loans and meaning that part of the income generated in farming was transferred to industry; and capital investments based on the profits accumulated by the companies, independent of a capital market.



interests, an increase in the power of the industrial bourgeoisie and the political subjection of the working class, in particular factory workers.

Making this new development project viable demanded the implementation of infrastructure, especially in relation to energy supplies and the transportation network. It also demanded the training of a readily available urban workforce. This would provide the conditions for the reproduction of the industrial capital. Towards this end, the State made investments and created mechanisms to attract manual labour for the industrial sector. The most important of these mechanisms was the construction of labour legislation, enshrined in the CLT (Consolidation of Labour Laws).

The destructuring of agricultural activities and the promise of employment in the cities contributed to the formation of a pool of manual labour in the urban environment. The movement became known as the rural exodus. These migrants included many from the Northeast, the interior of Rio de Janeiro state and Minas Gerais.

In contrast to the capitalist interests, the workers failed to have their reproduction needs met, either by private enterprise or by the State. This failure to meet basic needs, particularly housing, led to the growth in the favelas, which already housed part of the population evicted from the centre of Rio by the Pereira Passos reform.

The housing shortage became more intense as the flow of people towards the city increased and those arriving were unable to join the work market or did so only at the margins. These economic and social conditions led the poor population to 'choose' the favelas and later the Baixada Fluminense and West Zone as places to live.

In the 1930s, the space of the favelas was extremely precarious: steep-sided areas, difficult to access, without water supplies or any other service. In addition, the favela and its residents were subject to a series of stigmatizing stereotypes.⁶ These included being labelled as vagrant, drunk, promiscuous and dishonest. These and other negative images were projected onto the favela dwellers, leading them to be treated as people who posed a threat to society. In turn, this meant they became subject to violent persecution, such as beatings, arbitrary imprisonments and the torching of their shacks. In the 1940s, these persecutions intensified, which led to many favela occupants 'choosing' to live in the Baixada Fluminense.⁷ In the 1970s, this reached a peak with the removal of many favelas, especially those located in the high-value spaces in the South Zone of Rio.

Expelled from the favelas,⁸ the poor population occupied the Baixada Fluminense, a region composed of the municipalities of Nova Iguaçu, Duque de Caxias and São João de Meriti. With the decline of farming activities, the area was transformed into a place for housing through the actions of real estate companies, which divided immense into clandestine and unregistered lots without any sanitary infrastructure. These municipalities became known as dormitory towns.

⁶ A stereotype can be defined as an image that emerges spontaneously in the case of a thing or person, more or less disconnected from its objective reality and shared by members of a social group with a certain stability. It corresponds to an evaluation and economy in the perception of reality, based on a pre-existing – and generally highly concrete and image-based – semantic composition, organized around symbolic elements.

⁷ Perlman (1977), Valadares (1977) and Kovarick (1979) show that the labels were used as an instrument for repressing part of the population that the elite considered dangerous and threatening to the established order. For these authors, the danger of the favela dwellers came from their 'improper' localization in urban space. The fact that they occupied lands that they did not legally own transformed these people into a danger, since they were effectively going against the principle of private property. Authors such as Faissol (1994) also cite the racial issue, since many of the residents of favelas are black.

⁸ In the second half of the 1960s, intense rains fell on the city of Rio de Janeiro, destroying a large number of favela dwellings. Many people made homeless moved to the Baixada Fluminense.



THE 1980s: in search of anywhere to survive

“The fight for survival in the city is far from the access, appropriation and generation of certain material and material goods, a condition for exercising citizenship.” (Silva 2004:107)

From the 1970s onwards, the Brazilian State began to intensify the process, begun in the 1950s, of making investments to ensure the conditions for the reproduction of monopolist capital, constituted by state companies, multinational companies and national companies. In this context, it became essential to create conditions that enabled the development of the reproductive dynamic of capital and the infrastructure needed for its realization (Jaacobi 1989:8). To this end, federal government expenditure was reorganized in favour of capital.⁹

As well as the new composition of the federal budget, there was also an overexploitation of the workforce, accompanied by an intense concentration of income,¹⁰ which resulted in an increase in the size of the population living in poverty in the city and the large metropolises. Of the around 33 million living in poverty,¹¹ 35% were living in towns and cities, and 41% in the metropolises. (Rocha 1994; Ribeiro 1994). The impoverishment of the population was reflected in urban space through the growth in the city peripheries.¹²

Scenes of urban poverty: São João de Meriti

This expansion in the peripheries derived from the process of occupying “*the outskirts of the urban fabric*,” forming what Cassab (2001) calls “*clusters of exclusion*.” The author applies this concept to certain points of the urban fabric where poor sectors of the population live in virtual segregation, failing to receive from the State the investments needed to create infrastructure and install urban facilities.

These clusters are made up of various districts, favelas with a mid to low density and housing districts. They may be located on the geographic peripheries or in the central areas of the urban landscape. Risk situations are materialized in different forms in these locations. In this work, we highlight the geographic space of the peripheries of the Baixada Fluminense, more specifically in the municipality of São João de Meriti.

São João de Meriti possesses a population of around 500,000 inhabitants, presenting the highest demographic density in Latin America. There are around 12,000 inhabitants per km². 58% of the population is Afrodescendent, 5% of whom live below the poverty line, making up the different pockets of poverty. Around 18,000 families receive the family allowance benefit. In 1998, the indices of poverty in the city were alarming, higher than world poverty indices. This prompted campaigning from various sectors of society, especially in relation to children, who presented a profile of malnutrition and nutritional risk.

⁹ Capital expenditure rose from 54% between 1950 and 1954 to 83% of the budget in the first years of the Geisel government. Expenditure on social welfare, on the other hand, fell from 7% to 2% over the same period.

¹⁰ In 1981, the wealthiest 1% of the population received 13% of total revenue, while the poorest 10% received 0.9%. In 1990, these numbers had widened further to 14.6% and 0.8%. The mass of the poor were pushed to the city peripheries. These peripheries – not necessarily located in the geographic peripheries – are the “materialization of exclusion/segregation mechanisms.” Paviani (1998) and Rocha (1994) discuss this topic.

¹¹ People living in poverty are considered to be those whose family income corresponds at most to the amount needed to purchase a basic food basket meeting the entire family’s nutritional requirements, as recommended by the FAO/WHO/UN.

¹² The phenomenon of peripheralization took place in both large and medium cities.

In relation to the installation of sanitation services, the municipality presents significant shortfalls. Only the central areas are covered. In addition, there is inadequate provision of educational services, healthcare services and transportation. There has also been an increase in violence due to the spread of drug trafficking in various areas.

Two types of resident can be identified in the municipality: the older residents, descending from immigrants from the 1940s and other immigrants from the 1960s and 1970s; and a more recent influx who arrived in the second half of the 1990s, escaping the violence endemic to the favelas in the centre of Rio, related to drug trafficking, and from unemployment.

The first group, despite living in precarious conditions in terms of income due to their marginalization from the work market, possess a number of factors that help ameliorate slightly the situation of poverty: they live in areas that have undergone infrastructural improvements. They possess a network of friends and relatives produced by the family relations established with people from the community. This community kinship network helps in terms of acquiring space for new families to build housing. It helps both men and women in accessing the work market. It also helps in terms of support in situations of increased vulnerability such as illnesses, the loss of family members and prolonged unemployment. Furthermore, some of these families possess members who have entered higher education in recent years.

The second group, on the other hand, composed of poorer older residents, the majority black, and of people expelled from the favelas in the centre of Rio by drug trafficking or by unemployment, live in favelas built in extremely precarious locations such as river shores, strips of land next to highways and railways, close to municipal waste dumps or clandestine deposits of toxic industrial waste.



(Zélia's residence in front of the canal in Minas Gerais street)

These dwellings are permanently under threat of destruction from floods, landslides and fires. The residents tell of repeated losses of furniture and belongings.

I went through this four years ago. I'd just paid of the last loan instalment and the water destroys everything. The only thing left to do is build a boat.
(Zélia, 45 years old, 4 children, born and raised in SJM)

Aside from the material losses, there is also the risk to health, especially children's. During heavy rains, many are sent to the house of relatives.

The families from this group are large and mostly headed by women. These are older women who look after grandchildren and sometimes even great-grandchildren, all living in the same residence. An example of this situation is given by the family of Vó Baiana: a widow, she lives with her five great-grandchildren and three granddaughters.



Vó Baiana, granddaughters and great-granddaughters

Vó Baiana's family lives off the sale of homemade sweets and a basic food basket provided by a local Evangelical church.

"I make it last a fortnight. I always separate five reais from the sweet sales to buy what's needed at home. I buy bit by bit. It was a squeeze when milk rose to R\$3. I have some chickens which lay a few eggs and which I kill when I want to make a pie..."

(Vó Baiana, 60 years old, 8 children, 18 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren)

The family diet is normally composed of rice, beans, spaghetti, eggs and mince-meat at weekends, which results in the children being malnourished or at nutritional risk.

Exclusion from the formal work market is permanent. Income is generated through precarious street vending – practiced by everyone, especially small children – and odd-jobs such as cleaning, clothes washing and ironing, or looking after neighbours' children. In this survival strategy, the family allowance plays a vital role.

Although they attend school, the children from these families present high rates of repeat years and school year/age disparities. Most family members have low levels of school education.

These residential clusters are also dominated by an atmosphere of violence, provoked by the small networks of drug trafficking in their midst. The existence of these networks contributes to the absorption of teenagers and youths in (dis)organized crime. Many of them move from the informal job market to crime in a trajectory that almost always ends up in brutal death.

Violence is also present within families: women and children are targets, which is indeed one of the reasons for children and teenagers leaving home to live in the streets.

The higher level of poverty in this group is manifested through the strategy of living in the streets during the week in order to join the informal work market existing in the urban centres: car minders, deliverers and collectors of waste packaging for recycling. In this strategy, many people lose the ties with their families and begin to live in groups on the streets.

This state of poverty, which heavily affects the second group of residents as has been shown earlier, provokes psychological damage, a loss of self-esteem, a reduction in the motivation to work, disintegration of family ties and social life, an accentuating of gender asymmetries and racial tensions, an increase in illnesses and in the mortality rate. These effects are not only present in São João de Meriti, but also in other localities, and hit the black population more intensely.

The vulnerability experienced by them confirms the need to focus on capacities, understanding poverty not as a question of a lack of welfare, but as the incapacity to obtain welfare support due precisely to a lack of the necessary means. Overturning this situation requires strengthening the capacities of individuals and communities.

Vulnerabilities in rural space

Until the 1970s, farming in Brazil was predominantly organized around medium and large properties, most of them located in the South and Southeast. The main characteristics were the beginnings of mechanization, low productivity and a low level of employment opportunities with rural jobs being omitted from labour legislation.¹³ In addition, there was a large number of small properties in which families used their own manual labour to produce subsistence goods.

Both sides of the modernization of agriculture

From the 1970s, the focus of development in Brazil, which until then had been industry, switched to farming. This sector became considered a priority for the economy, not only capable of generating sufficient food to supply Brazil's large urban centres, but also new products for the external market. Agriculture came to be seen as a strategic element in the process of combating inflation and in equilibrating the trade balance. It was in this new setting that the project for modernizing farming was developed: its aims was to transform the technical base of production through the introduction of new technologies that would provide increased productivity to capital and labour.

This modernization project was implemented by the State, which funded agricultural research and set up a national loan system with heavily subsidized rates, which lasted until the 1980s. As well as the loans, a technical assistance system was introduced, which comprised one of the main instruments for spreading new technologies, translated into the utilization of machines and equipment, and the use of chemical products. Funds were directed towards medium and large companies located in the South/Southeast as these were conceived to be able respond more quickly to the stimuli, as well as the fact that they exerted a high degree of influence on the government's decision makers. The latter factor was fundamental in obtaining favours from the state bureaucracy, enabling the implantation and maintenance of agribusinesses.

The growth in farming which until then had been enabled by the introduction of new arable lands thereby changed, leading to deep transformations in the social relations of production. Apart from its mercantile character, visible in the 1950s and 60s still within a extensive pattern of growth, agriculture began to depend increasingly on industrial purchases, along with technical and financial services, in order to produce its commodities. Farming ceased to be a market of consumer goods and became a market of means of industrial production, as a purchaser of inputs and a seller of raw materials to be processed by other industrial branches. Even when its products are not processed by industry, they are distributed within new industrialized patterns.

The new form of organizing production depended on the use of large tracts of land. This condition was enabled through mechanisms that exacerbated, to a large extent, the vulnerability of the rural population over the following decades.

The first mechanism was the expansion of frontier areas, which took place towards¹⁴ the cerrado in the Central West, and towards Amazonia and the semi-arid region of the Minas Gerais north.

¹³ Brazilian farming can be divided into three phases: traditional, which lasted until the 1960s with a prevalence of manual labour over mechanization; modernization, which covers the 1970s; and post-modernization, from the 1980s onwards, with the weakening of agricultural policy instruments.

¹⁴ The concept of 'frontier' is used here to refer to specific processes through which capital appropriates space in moments and places where land circulates under conditions outside its logic of accumulation. The frontier, in other words, is the transition in time and space of use-value land to exchange-value land measured by capital. It amounts to the social transformation of the material and symbolic meaning of the land.



In the cerrado, large soya plantations were formed, supplanting other crops such as dry-land rice, the most prominent crop at the time. Soya also supplanted the subsistence crops and extensive cattle farming.

In Amazonia, large areas were transformed into pasture. This change meant the deforestation of large areas previously used for extractivist activities that guaranteed the survival of local populations. It also implied the occupation of indigenous reserves with the destruction not only of subsistence forms but also traditional forms of life. These disputes over land unfolded in a climate of extreme violence between tenant farmers, indigenous populations, rubber tappers and invaders.

In the semi-arid region of Minas Gerais, the implemented activities restricted the use and management of areas of extractivism with the small farmers becoming pushed into narrow strips of land with growing restrictions on the access to water resources. This process involved the occupation of fragile ecologically environments, intensifying environmental degradation, which was compensated with the use of chemical products, further worsening the spiral of degradation. This in turn lead to the destructuring of some traditional forms of farming in the sertão.

The second mechanism was the incorporation of small and medium properties through violent processes such as the destruction of plantations, threats and murders. As a result, the lands cultivated by settlers, tenant and partner farmers were reconverted to produce export crops or, as in the case of the forest used by rubber tappers in Acre, transformed into cattle pastures.

The third mechanism was the production of new lands through irrigation, fertilizers and the use of machines, producing what came to be known as the control of nature by capital. This process was extremely damaging, involving the diversion of river courses, contamination of water sources and, in the long term, soil exhaustion, making the land unusable for cultivation.

The combination of these mechanisms explain in part the poverty experienced by a large portion of the rural population.

Scenes of rural poverty: Gorutuba Valley

The farming modernization project produced a setting in which we can perceive, on one hand, the formation of a rural elite with high patterns of consumption and, on the other, a poor and excluded population, as shown in the following quote:

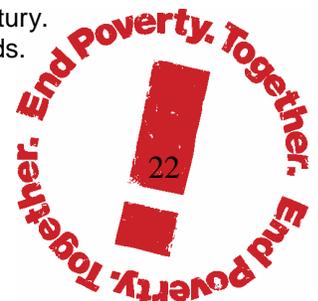
“The small producers transform into the poor and excluded who no longer produce, except as a workforce that lives in poverty, waiting for ways to become included in a more stable and promising way in economic development, and for whom land ownership or the access to land no longer guarantee a level of survival above the minimum and force other forms of earning a living.”

(Lavinás & Ribeiro 1991:74)

This is a situation affecting a significant number of people in diverse regions of Brazil. In this work we highlight the semi-arid region of Minas Gerais and more specifically the remnant quilombo population living in the middle-lower Gorutuba Valley, located on the shores of the Gorutuba river. They comprise 27 settlements spread across seven municipalities. Around 600 families live in an area of 50,000 hectares. Illiteracy rates are high, but have been falling due to initiative launched by the Banco do Brasil, the Bbeducar project. Around 500 people learned to read and write in 2005.

The Gorutuba people have lived in the Gorutuba River Valley since the 18th century. Traditionally they combined agriculture, fishing and cattle ranching on shared lands. This way of life, which provided their livelihood, was slowly being destroyed by the invasion and appropriation of lands, a process that began in the 1940s and

Human security



intensified in the 1970s. According to reports, at that time people planted cotton, beans, maize and manioc, rice in the floodplain, in the lands that today “belong to the farmer on the other side of the river.”

“They took the land in the *grilação* [land-grabbing] in 69. They bought the land of the poor folk and fenced off the rest, they bought the rights of the poor folk.”

(Nicolau, 67 years old)

The process of expropriation was brutal with the farmers being cheated:

“They took what was fenced off and other land that wasn’t theirs too. The courts supported the farmers. They took the land off us, our right, and gave it to them.

The poor folk didn’t know, they said it was to sell a small piece of land and when they signed, they handed over everything. And the lawyers ate up the money of the poor and we stopped fighting. If we haven’t the right to it, we have to measure the land, what size is it anyhow? A hundred *alqueires*? Ten? The document will show us. It’s the same way they work.”

(Nicolau)

The fencing off and expropriation of lands, the privatization ‘of the waters’ upriver and the substitution of biodiversity for the fields of pasture limited the Gorutuba people to small portions of land in the woods or floodplains. In addition, the access to the Gorutuba river became limited, making fishing impossible during most of the year. Currently the people occupy small areas of land in between large farms of extensive cattle ranching.

In this setting, the population lives in a situation of poverty due primarily to the lack of access to land and water. There is one group that possesses lots, distributed during the agrarian reform carried out in the region in the 1970s; others, however, only have access to a larger area of land for cultivation through borrowing and leasing, while still others have only their yards. In this micro-scale family farming, they plant maize, beans and fruit trees such as tamarind, banana, mango, guava, curcuma, sugar apple and papaya.



(Nicolau Quaresma Franco, 70 years old, 10 children)



(Goat breeding, Izabel, 45 years old)

The difficulty in accessing water arises from the contamination of the Gorutuba river by fertilizers. Artesian wells exist, but the population lacks the financial resources to pay for the electricity to pump the water.

“The river has no strength any more, just weeds, and the worse thing of all is that today the community is without water,” says Isabel (45 years old, with 16 children between 7 and 27 years old). The water from the artesian wells is drawn using electric pumps and the local council decided that it will only send water if the population pays its electricity bill, which means an expenditure of around R\$7 per family.



Gorutuba river

The lack of access to land and water limits the possibilities for developing family farming, compromising nutritional and food security, especially in the larger families headed by women. The situation is worsened by the fact that the possibilities for inclusion in the region’s labour market are small and badly paid, deepening the vulnerability and meaning it extends to other generations. Moreover the population is currently having to deal with new risk situations arising from the economic revitalization projects conceived for the region, including: expansion of eucalyptus monocultures, or plantations of soya or coffee in the extensive areas abandoned by eucalyptus monocultures; revitalization of cotton cropping on previously fertile lands of the Serra Geral region and implementation of the Biodiesel Production and Use Program of the Ministry of Mines and Energy.

In this chapter, we presented the political, economic and social conditioning factors that engender the population’s vulnerability in time and space. We also presented the various forms assumed by this vulnerability through a state of poverty that affects people, families and communities, focusing on the municipality of São João de Meriti in Rio de Janeiro and the Gorutuba valley in Minas Gerais. In these settings, children, teenagers, youths, men and women permanently build and rebuild, individually and collectively, mechanisms for confronting adversities, demonstrating a capacity to respond to them, make themselves stronger and acquire more resources.

Identifying these individual and collective mechanisms is extremely important insofar as they can then be potentialized, thereby contributing more effectively to overcoming poverty. This is the topic of the next chapter.

2- RESILIENCE: AN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

The objective of this chapter is to present a social and political analysis of the capacity of resilience in Brazil (rural/urban), examining both the individual and community dimensions. This analysis is important given that a significant portion of the Brazilian population currently lives in adverse conditions and risk situations in clusters of exclusion and pockets of poverty.

The concept of resilience¹⁵ has been used to comprehend and understand at a theoretical level human behaviour in the face of adversities and risk situations. Research studies in this area look for answers to the fact that some individuals, groups and institutions, despite passing through adverse situations, present a stable and healthy development; in other words, why are some people resilient? This and other questions are present in the research developed by psychology, education and social services.

The precursors of the term resilience are the terms invincibility or invulnerability, used in 1974 by E.J. Anthony, a child psychiatrist, to describe children who, despite being submitted to long periods of deprivation and emotional stress, presented emotional health and high levels of competence. In the 1980s and 90s, these terms were questioned by various researchers because, according to them, they gave the idea of an absolute resistance to stress and implied an immutable nature, as if these people were untouchable and had limitless means to support suffering. They also gave the idea of a characteristic present in all the individuals concerned, regardless of circumstances.

In this analysis, we take resilience to mean a “universal capacity that allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the harmful effects of adversities.” Given that the situation of poverty and its physical and psychosocial implications comprise the main adversity faced by a significant part of today’s Brazilian population, we consider an analysis of resilience to mean an analysis of the conditions for overcoming poverty.

The development of resilience depends both on individual characteristics and on factors existing within the family and community groups, and consists of an equilibrium between the risk factors and the protection factors (Rutter 1993; Werner 1989). These factors are: a) individual characteristics, such as self-esteem, intelligence, problem-solving capacity and social skills; b) the affective support transmitted by family members through an affective bond with carers; c) the external social support provided by people in the surrounding community and institutions.

When the risk factors become greater than the protection factors, or endure over time, even if individuals present the skills to become resilient, they tend to become negatively affected, often leading to state of resignation in relation to the situation. This pattern can be observed in individuals who experience long-term adversities, such as unemployment.

This can also be observed in relation to families that live through continuous painful processes, such as families who inhabit spaces dominated by violence and lose children to drug gangs, or who live in rural areas subject to disappropriation. It can also be observed in those communities that experience continual problems such as floods, landslides, loss of rights and individual guarantees. In these cases, the individuals, families and communities may be crushed and subjugated (Garmezy 1993). Many Brazilians, families and communities find themselves in this situation.

The existence of the Brazilian population is marked by a history of resilience, whether at an individual, family or community level. However, the deepening and extending of the range of adversities found in the city and the countryside over the last few decades – insufficient income, precarious housing, absence of urban services and facilities, exposure to drug gang violence, lack

¹⁵ The concept has been used in various countries: in the United States, European countries and Canada it is used by specialists in the social and human sciences, by media professionals, who use the concept in relation to people, places, actions and objects in general, and by those responsible for formulating policy programs for social and educational action including governmental and non-governmental organizations. In Brazil, the use is more recent and confined to an academic group in the areas of psychology, education and social services.



of access to land and water, climate changes and food shortages – have produced risk situations and provoked physical and emotional suffering, demanding a greater capacity for confronting these problems. This has led to a disequilibrium in the risk factors and protection factors. Moreover, these imbalances are not sporadic but permanent, meaning that the population, especially women, remains most of the time entirely occupied with reducing the impacts of this situation on their lives. This scenario demands actions that potentialize the characteristics of individuals and families, and above all requires that support is given to the organizations and institutions from these localities.

Confronting vulnerabilities in Brazil: social movements

The presentation of forms of community resilience in Brazil, whether in urban or rural space, takes us back to the 1970s, since this period was defined by the crisis in the military regime's legitimacy. The outcome of this crisis was the change in the attitude of liberal sectors, the return of the Rule of Law and the beginning of the debate concerning the issue of human rights, simultaneously accompanied by an increasing deterioration in living conditions in the large urban centres (Minayo 1989).

In this context of transition, the displays of resistance from the church and civil society in defence of human rights became more intense, along with the upsurge in urban social movements, which can be understood "as a system of contradictory social practices that throw into question again the established order on the basis of the specific contradictions of the urban problematic" (Castells 1973). These movements focus on various problems existing in urban space, which can be summarized as: the population's housing conditions, access to collective facilities (schools, hospitals, crèches, nurseries, sports areas, cultural centres) within a range of problems spanning from the safety conditions of buildings to the content of cultural activities at youth centres that reproduce the dominant ideology (Castells 1978).

Urban social movements

In Brazil, urban social movements initially focused on the precariousness of basic sanitation services in the peripheries, especially the lack of water supplies, sewage networks and health services. The social base of these movements was a proletariat or proletarianized population concerned with demanding improvements in living conditions. We present three moments:

The first covers the period from 1970 to 1980. It was in this decade that the population's living conditions deteriorated. Among other problems, the return of infant mortality rates to the levels of the 1960s and the occurrence of various epidemics forced the population to become organized. In this phase, the mobilizations of the population living on the peripheries of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro came to the fore. At first, the demands were related to the districts themselves; however, they quickly began to include the city as a whole, evolving into the National Movement for Urban Reform. Participants included political parties, the church, non-governmental organizations, unions, professional associations and residents associations, universities and so on.

The second refers to the 1990s when the dismantling of national urban policies intensified. Local initiatives then began to fill the vacuums left by the federal government's withdrawal, generating a new field of action for social movements. These fields were the councils and other instances involving civil society's participation in formal or informal structures of cooperation with government bodies. In this setting, non-governmental organizations grew in strength as social actors, acquiring an important role in advancing various issues, especially those related to environmental concerns.

The third moment covers the end of the 1990s when the new challenges of redemocratization became visible: proposals for formulating and implementing policies in participative frameworks became widespread. The notion of co-responsibility was consolidated.

Rural social movements

The movement of resistance in the countryside can be identified from the 1970s onwards through two agents: the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag) and sectors of the Catholic Church linked to Liberation Theology. Contag's primary work involved the creation of unions which, although unable to halt the eviction of peasants from the land, managed to translate the conflicts in the rural world into a language of agrarian reform.

The church had a fundamental role in making denunciations and strengthening symbolic and material resources for the process of organizing rural works, a process consolidated over the following decades.

From the 1970s, new actors emerged in the process of resisting the adversities provoked by the modernization of agriculture. These included rubber tappers in Acre, those affected by dams in various parts of the country, the landless in the South. Despite suffering both material and human losses, the campaigns intensified, making the land and the problems related to it a central issue. This enabled the creation of solid institutions such as the National Rubber Tappers Council, the Regional Commission of Dam-Affected People, the National Movement of Dam-Affected People, the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), the Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers, the Indigenous Nations Union and so on. These institutions multiplied throughout the country and helped create others, such as the North of Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre – CAA/NM.

Through their actions, the members of these social movements have shown a capacity to confront risks. In the history of these movements, the sense of resilience comes to the fore as a capacity for confronting adversity and becoming stronger, acquiring more resources in the process.

Confronting vulnerabilities in São João de Meriti

The life histories of people from São João de Meriti show daily lives marked by a range of adversities, but also a capacity for resilience, which allows these problems to be confronted and minimized day by day. It is worth highlighting that even when a male presence is evident, it is women who most of the time construct the strategies for overcoming adversity. In the case of these women, this is much more connected to individual characteristics and to the fact that they are responsible for the family group, than to outside forms of support. The main risk situations identified are: insufficient family income, housing located in risk areas, precarious access to urban services and equipment, and violence.

Insufficient family income – The income of these families tends to be equivalent to about one minimum wage. These low levels of revenue arise from exclusion from the formal labour market or precarious inclusion in the formal and informal markets. Given that families typically possess around seven members, this income is evidently insufficient to purchase food to meet the family's needs as a whole according to the nutritional intake recommended by the FAO/WHO/UN. The situation becomes more serious still when these families have a large number of children. Some are children of teenagers who have no source of income and receive no support from the father. These problems are faced by the inclusion of all family members, including children, in the informal market and the undertaking of odd-jobs – cleaning, clothes washing, looking after children and so on. Younger children (0 to 3 years) are given priority in terms of food, while the 'bigger' children fail to receive the food they need and the pattern of malnutrition becomes worse around five years old.

Housing located in risk areas – Houses are located on the shores of the Sarapuí river. This river receives untreated sewage, garbage and industrial waste, turning it into a nursery for vectors capable of transmitting various diseases.

The lack of drainage and the large quantity of waste lead to floods in the rainy season, causing deaths, loss of furniture and even the loss of residences. This

Human security



situation generates a climate of permanent insecurity among the families. The only solution is to send the children to the house of relatives and save whatever is possible.

Precarious access to urban services and facilities – The locale lacks a sewage network, waste collection or street lighting, which incurs health risks, particularly for children; health services are inadequate; there are no leisure facilities and the education services show problems in terms of infrastructure and the supply of teaching staff. In addition, the schools are permeated by a climate of violence. This situation is confronted through the Community Centre.

Violence – Since the end of the 1990s, peripheral areas have become a refuge for drug gang members fleeing from police action and competing gangs. This has led to the installation of a parallel power, maintained through intimidation. Gang members are present in the residents association, gas distribution and alternative transportation; they organize *bailes* (music parties) and above all threaten, harass and kill. This climate strikes fear in residents and for many mothers turns into an enormous nightmare since teenagers of both sexes are lured by the traffickers. The families find themselves prisoners of the gangs and impotent to act given the scale of the problem.

The community has been confronting these vulnerabilities through the mediation of two entities: the Rua São Marcos Community Centre and the Baixada Fluminense Culture House. The Community Centre helps in the process of integrating residents and, as a result, has acquired an important role in mediating between the community's interests and the public authorities. Garbage collection, street lighting and sanitation are the main demands presented to the local council. The Centre also offers school reinforcement classes and recreation, helping overcome the educational shortfalls of the children.

The Culture House develops initiatives aimed towards the effective implementation of rights and the strengthening of citizenship. The fight for rights also includes the development of political strategies for public child and youth policies; the promotion of food security, the promotion of the rights of women and Afrodescendants, and the promotion of culture. Through its actions, the entity has contributed to construction a citizen network along with various institutions from the region.

These entities are turning into instruments for social mobilization towards creating and promoting rights, pressing for public policies and access to socio-economic and cultural resources, and expanding the spaces for grassroots participation and citizen power. Unfortunately the percentage of women taking part is small.

Confronting vulnerabilities in Gorutuba Valley

The accounts of people from the Gorutuba quilombo show a day-to-day life marked by risk situations, more intense than those existing in São João de Meriti, and the capacity to construct forms of overcoming this situation on a quotidian basis. The actions for confronting these problems receive the support of family members, plus residents in other municipalities and states.

The principle adverse situations are the lack of access to land and water, environmental degradation and droughts, insufficient family incomes and inadequate access to sanitation services.

Lack of access to land and water, environmental degradation and droughts – These factors contribute to the population lacking the conditions to undertake agricultural activities, which in turn leads to the scarcity of foods in sufficient quantity, quality and frequency, provoking nutritional and food insecurity. Even those with access to land or who possess a small amount of livestock face difficulties due to the lack of rains. Many prepare the land and then wait for the rains. Confrontation of these problems has been precarious, a fact which can be seen in the high rates of infant mortality in the region, double the rates reported in the Northeast, which is around 70 per thousand liveborn babies.

Insufficient family income – Typical family income is around one minimum wage, a situation compounded by the presence of many children. This situation is confronted through the remittance of funds from members of the family group living in other municipalities and even other states.

Human security



Inadequate access to sanitation services – Only 40% of the population has access to drinking water close to the house and most have no kind of sanitary facilities. This problem is confronted through artesian wells, which implies extra expenses on electricity for this impoverished population.

The community's confrontation of vulnerabilities has more recently been channelled through projects for the sertão population. Developed by social networks, these projects look to recover popular knowledge concerning the use and management of natural resources. These networks are made up of non-governmental organizations, companies, bodies and principally rural, indigenous, black, river-dwelling communities and agrarian reform settlements.

The projects look to combine preservation of the biome through sustainable practices in their economic use, with social objectives, and the generation of jobs, income and solidarity among the region's poorest populations.¹⁶

Among these activities we can highlight the nutrition and food security program, supported by the Italian embassy, the Ministry of Social Development and Combating Hunger, in partnership with the Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre and other entities. The program develops emergency actions in healthcare and food access, and negotiates with municipal, state and federal governments to guarantee access to water and land, as well as other initiatives in education, culture and housing.

Some conclusions

Although the concentration of income, land and power has not altered in Brazil, the number of poor people has been falling. Over the last five years between 15 and 20 million Brazilians have risen above the poverty line, while between 2005 and 2006, 5,841,000 people became less poor. This has been due to welfare programs such as the family allowance, and to readjustments in the minimum wage which produced an increase in wage payments (9.8% in 2006 alone).

However, the vulnerabilities persist in both the urban and rural spaces, as shown in the analysis of São João de Meriti and the Gortuba Valley. In the urban case, this can be perceived in more intense form in the spaces of segregation, the insufficient family income, the localization of dwellings in risk areas, inadequate access to urban services and facilities, and the violence. In the rural case, it is evident in the lack of access to land and water, environmental degradation and droughts, insufficient family income, and inadequate access to sanitation services. The new farming modernization projects have been a key factor in the worsening of this contemporary situation.

These vulnerabilities provoke stress, insecurity and suffering, and force the population to confront these problems on a continual and permanent basis. This is not always the best response. Here the inclusion of children and teenagers in the informal job market is worrying, since it harms their development in school, almost always culminating in their abandonment of education, feeding the spiral of poverty among these sectors of the population.

The analysis of resilience has shown a capacity to confront problems, especially within families and with the active involvement of women. This confirms that empowerment and the creation of conditions for women is fundamental in the process of overcoming poverty. It has also shown the actions of grassroots organizations as instruments of social mobilization towards creating and promoting rights and pressing for public policies. This points to the need to strengthen these entities and widen the participation of the population, principally women and young people.

¹⁶ Detailed information on the projects can found in the report of the North of Minas Alternative Agriculture Centre – CAA/NM.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACSELRAD, Henri. Tecnologias Sociais e sistemas locais de poluição. Revista Horizontes antropológicos. Porto Alegre. Year 12 n.25 p.117-138, Jan/Jun 2006.

BRAZIL, Lourdes. Áreas urbanas segregadas e cidadania da criança: uma proposta de empoderamento. Thesis presented to the program EICOS – Estudos Interdisciplinares de Comunidade e Ecologia Social. UFRJ 2003.

CASSAB, Maria Aparecida Tardin. Jovens pobres e o futuro: a construção da subjetividade na instabilidade e incerteza. Niterói. Intertext. 2001.

CASTRO, Iná Elias, GOMES, Paulo César da Costa & CORREA, Roberto Correa. Brasil, questões atuais da organização do território. Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand Brasil. 1996.

CASTELLS, Manuel. A questão urbana. Rio de Janeiro. Paz e Terra. 1983.

CAMPO, Regina Helena de Freitas. Psicologia social comunitária da solidariedade à autonomia. Petrópolis. Vozes.1996.

CECCONELLO, Alessandra Marques & KOLLER, Silvia Helena. Competência social e empatia: um estudo sobre resiliência com crianças em situação de pobreza. Revista de Psicologia. Rio Grande do Sul 5(1) p.71-93. 2000.

DUPAS, Gilberto. Economia global e exclusão social. Pobreza, emprego, estado e o futuro do capitalismo. São Paulo. Paz e Terra. 1999.

MARTINE, Jorge. População, meio ambiente e desenvolvimento: verdades e contradições.. São Paulo, Editora da UNICAMP.1993.

MEDEIROS, Leonilda Servolo. Luta pela terra e política fundiária; caminho percorridos nas últimas décadas.

MARINHO. Movimentos urbanos de luta pela moradia.

POCHMANN, Márcio. Reestruturação produtiva. Perspectiva de desenvolvimento local com inclusão social. Petrópolis.Vozes. 2004.

POCHMANN, Marcio & AMOORIM, Ricardo. Atlas da exclusão social no Brasil. São Paulo. Cortez. 2003.

PIQUET, Rosalia & RIBEIRO, Ana Clara Torres. Brasil, território da desigualdade. Descaminhos da modernização. Rio de Janeiro. Zaar. 2003.

PINHEIRO, Débora Patrícia Nemar. A resiliência em questão. Revista Psicologia em Estudo. Maringá v.9 n.1 p.67-75.2004.

RIBEIRO, Luiz César de Queiroz & SANTOS Jr Orlando Alves. Globalização, fragmentação e reforma urbana: o futuro das cidades na crise. Rio de Janeiro. Civilização Brasileira. 1994.

RIZZINI, Irene & BARKER, Gary. Crianças, adolescentes e suas bases de apoio. Fortalecendo as bases de apoio familiares e comunitárias para crianças e adolescentes do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro.Cespi/USU. 2002.

SILVA, Ademir Alves da. A gestão da seguridade social brasileira. Entre a política pública e o mercado. São Paulo. Cortez. 2004.

VALLADARS, Lícia & PRETECEILLE, Edmond. Reestruturação urbana: desafios e tendências. São Paulo. Nobel: Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Pesquisas Universitárias do Rio de Janeiro. 1990.

ZALUAR, Alba. Condomínio do diabo. Rio de Janeiro: Revan: editora UFRJ.1994.

YUNES, Maria Ângela Mattar. Psicologia positiva e resiliência: o foco no indivíduo e na família. Revista Psicologia em Estudo. Maringá, v.8, special issue. p.75-84.2003.