

Brazil: Vulnerability and Resilience

Location:	Minas Gerais (rural) & Rio de Janeiro (urban)
Date:	2006
Sector focus:	Multiple hazards
Spatial focus:	Rural community & households/peri-urban neighborhood & households

Organization

Commissioned and funded by ActionAid, implemented by ActionAid and Federal Fluminense University/Baptist Faculty of Rio de Janeiro project “Children, Spatial Segregation and Social Participation”.

Bibliographical details

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

Language availability

Case study in English (and by request to case study author, documents in Portuguese).

Abstract

A Brazilian female extensionist/researcher was commissioned to profile both rural and urban vulnerability and resilience with particular attention to additional stresses experienced by low income Afro-Brazilians, women, and the elderly. Results of a photo essay and life histories are used to highlight specific aspects of vulnerability that result from racism and economic marginality and exploitation as well as the role of social movements in providing some measure of resilience. The study also emphasizes the importance of women’s knowledge and practice and the fact that even well meaning civil society institutions may overlook this human resource.

Intended users

ActionAid staff in Brazil, civil society in Brazil, international NGOs.

Background and context of country, location and project

Brazil in the 21st Century is positioned delicately between the populist and social democratic national policies of the de Silva administration (including such social programs as “Zero Hunger” and attempts to control illegal corporate and large farmer/rancher appropriation of land) and a thorough integration into a booming world market. Thus rainforest destruction continues, driven by expansion of soy cultivation for export, and conflicts over land in other rural and urban settings. The rich are becoming richer and more bold; whilst the poor are being hounded by developers and narco-criminal elements into ever more precarious urban and rural sites.

- **Recent disasters**

Much of Brazil suffers drought (and increased frequency of forest fires) and flood (and flood induced urban landslides) during ENSO episodes (see Brazilian El Niño site <http://www.cptec.inpe.br/enos/>).

- **Other recent crises (economic, political)?**

Food prices have increased for basic commodities because of the rapidly growing market for bio-fuels, also booming in Brazil is soybean production for export and continuing beef cattle ranching for export. Recent (February 2008) temporary halt in EU imports of Brazilian beef because of foot and mouth disease highlights other economic uncertainties endemic in economies dependent of agro-exports.

- **Recent displacements and population movements?**

Within the greater Rio de Janeiro region (metro Rio) the poor, unemployed and semi-employed have been moving out to more and more distant peripheries of the urban system, forming what some call “clusters of exclusion.” They have increased the population of older peripheral settlements (*favelas*) established as early as the 1940s, as have many new rural in-migrants who came during the 1990s. Older, established residents have safer sites and more access to infrastructure. New comers live “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” (Quoting case study author, p. 19).

- **Recent conflict?**

Gang violence has driven some urban poor into more distant peripheral locations; while in rural Brazil the agro-export boom has intensified land grabbing by force of hired, armed men or forged land registry documents.

Technical description

- **Hazard type**

Multiple biogeophysical, social, and economic hazards including conflict over land tenure, unemployment, crime, poor sanitation, flood, landslide, and urban shack fire

- **Type of assessment**

Qualitative on the basis of life history narratives, key informant interviews with economic development project workers, and photography

CRA process

- **Analytical methods and Tools**

This study did not use the established ActionAid version of CRA (called Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) - see its PVA handbook:

http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/PVA_ActionAid2005_meth.pdf

elsewhere in this Tool Kit and examples of PVA in action at:

http://www.actionaid.org/docs/pva_in_action.pdf. Rather the study relies on background/secondary documents, life story narratives, and photography.

Notes on Methods and Tools

Purposive sampling via ActionAid and other civil society involvement with people in these rural and urban locations provides reasonable assurance that the key points uncovered are accurate. The advantage of life history narratives is deep understanding of the root causes of vulnerability along multiple dimensions. The disadvantage is that isolation is maintained, and the group solidarity provided by PVA is not forthcoming. Thus the basis for action planning is not provided. However, in common with PVA, life history interviews require trust to be established, so prior involvement of host civil society projects with the people interviewed is almost certainly necessary. These pre-existing projects may benefit from the results of such a study but project evaluation cannot be considered a direct purpose, nor this kind of method action-oriented *per se*.

Lessons learned

- Low income Afro-Brazilians, especially women and the elderly, may be additionally marginalized and hence socially vulnerable
- Income-generating micro projects such as agro-extraction of fruit juice are feasible and provide considerable stability to otherwise highly vulnerable groups
- Land tenure security remains a major obstacle to the resilience of vulnerable groups in both rural and urban areas of Brazil
- Women's knowledge and practice provides important options for coping with emergencies and could contribute more to community-wide resilience if civil society gave more attention to women as creative and innovative.

Key words

Life history, photo essays, land tenure, crime, sanitation, flood, urban landslide, urban shack fire, racial discrimination, alternative agricultural development

Cross references to other CRA Toolkit case studies (optional)

Other PAR case studies: Action Aid Participatory Vulnerability Assessment - A Collection of Case Studies from Africa and Asia:

Malawi – Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) in Chronic Food Insecurity:

http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/Actionaid_PVA_casestudies.pdf

India – Development & Risk Reduction in Hazard-Prone Communities of Andhra Pradesh:

<http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/India1.pdf>

India – Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction in the Indian State of Bihar:

<http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/India2.pdf>

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