

Engagement of the Civil Society

Towards a society for all

2nd Phase Report - Nina Rodrigues PHM - Maranhão/Brazil

1. Introduction

This document describes the insertion of Nina Rodrigues PHM (NR/PHM) in the 2nd phase of the Participatory Action Research. The study was produced from and with what was recorded in the first phase of this same research with the expressive participation of:

- **Organization and guidance:** Sister Anne Caroline Wihbey (Namur Notre Dame Congregation and PHM)
- **Collaborators:** Claudenir Gomes da Silva, Marcelo Silva Almeida and Maria de Jesus Farias Santos (all members of NR/PHM)
- **Rapporteur:** Marta Giane Machado Torres (PHM/Belém-Pará)¹

2. Introduction

In continuation to phase I, the goal of this report is to document the PHM training process in Nina Rodrigues municipality, Maranhão state, an area that congregates several communities in the rural region of Brazil's Northeast region. This study aimed, above all, to articulate the process of fight for people's health to advocate for the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS). This study intends to present activities that followed the findings and reflections resulting from the first phase.

The NR/PHM group was formed in 2012 and its respective activists are Claudenir Gomes da Silva (PHM), Marcelo Silva Almeida (PHM) and Maria de Jesus Farias Santos, who are its main facilitators and live in Nina Rodrigues's settlements. It also counts on Sister Anne Caroline Wihbey (Namur Notre Dame Congregation and PHM) who, since the beginning, keeps strong bonds with the construction of the mentioned movement and has been responsible for its

¹ A PHM activist, she lives in Belém and has contributed with the record of this report.

animation, training and theoretical knowledge. She lives in the state capital, São Luís, and travels regularly to Nina Rodrigues for meetings, encounters and studies.

We emphasize that this narrative was constructed from and with the previously mentioned members and with observations made in the last meeting, on July 28 and 29, 2017, with trips to and from another state, city and municipalities converging to NR rural area. Besides participating of the meetings in two communities, we have met with PHM to discuss the points that were developed and should be developed in the second phase of the research and the preparation of the report.

Leaving Belém in the evening of July 27, after meeting with Sister Anne in São Luís, we travelled together to Nina Rodrigues, where Marcelo was waiting for us to cross a small river and travel by motorcycle to São Domingos. In this same evening, we attended the participatory community meeting, where the movie "Dona Caroba: não troque seu voto por água" [Dona Caroba: do not exchange your vote for water] was exhibited. We spent the night there and, in the morning, the group used a small car to go to Palmares along an unpaved, dusty road to arrive to this distant place. Our activity in that day was developed by the wetland, under the shade of several trees. At night, we participated in the meeting with the Palmares community.

3. Plans for phase II

The planning of phase 2 started from the results of phase 1, which was documented in the first report. It is pertinent to say that, in this following stage, the NR group already progressed with more organizational independence, quite strengthened by the studies and training developed in the previous year. This process gained force since its constitution thanks to the links with the Catholic Parish and in the consequent dynamics, joining the People's Health Movement.

The same methodology continued to be used by the group to work like a health team, in agreement with Paulo Freire's ideas, having integrated the acts "seeing, judging, acting" used by the Catholic Church Fraternity Campaign at that moment, when the creation of this group was enabled. Internally, the process of its own training followed the methodology based on the next steps: pedagogy of transformation - reflection, planning, preparation, presentation, action and evaluation. It was anchored in the following guiding questions: "As a community, what can you do to improve the poor health situation here in Nina Rodrigues?", as well as in the fostering

questioning aimed specifically to the NR group: “What do you want to achieve by means of the training workshops”?

In the regular meetings, NR/PHM planned to continue meeting with the communities and jointly evaluating ways to be closer to the municipal management, aiming to demand improvements in the public infrastructure for the population. Above all, aiming to mobilize and to create strategies for the engagement of the civil society in relation to the access, the health care, the action on the social determination of health and the collective participation within the spaces that debate public policies in the local and municipal scope.

4. Results of the meetings and the NR/PHM organic mobilization

- The NR group participated of events in the capital, São Luís, in 2016, such as:
 - A seminary promoted by the public administration on education and environment.
 - A PHM Brazil meeting in São Luís/MA (with the presence of activists from Nina Rodrigues, Porto Alegre, São Luís, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Brasília and Belém/Pará). This event was held with the partnership of several social movements: *Justiça nos Trilhos*, *NuRuNi*, *Via Campesina/MST*, *GEDDMA*, *Jornal Alternativo Vias de Fato*.
- It also participated of health and education policies conferences organized in the local and municipal scope.
- Because of this participation, it was established the appointment for a place as municipal health counselor within Nina Rodrigues scope. Claudenir took over a representation for the following up of the users appointed by the local Catholic Church in the current year. In a later meeting, activist Marcelo also was appointed to occupy a place as his deputy (see Box I).

Box I - Representation in Nina Rodrigues Municipal Health Council (CMS)

Representation in the CMS	Phase of the Research	
	Phase I	Phase II
Number of council members	0	2

5. Overcome challenges

In the analyzed period, amidst what was planned, NR/PHM faced some obstacles to develop its mobilization work next to the communities. However, these obstacles did not hinder them, to facilitate and stimulate the local collectivity. All of them work 8 hours a day, plus family issues and other aspects related to living in a rural area, where the trips are costly.

There were difficulties to meet with their communities in the desired frequency. They also lost two PHM effective members who, due to their successive absences, decided to leave the group. They are two members who represented distinct communities, thus the efforts to cover these two communities were doubled (see Box II).

With the reduced group, the expansion of PHM to other communities and the neighboring municipality, Vargem Grande, for instance, was suspended for the moment because the group has little mobilization potential due to the number of facilitators. Although this point has affected a wider mobilization, they asked for help of other people to supply the needs related to the communication flow. Just like other regions of Maranhão state, both internet signal and mobile telephone connection are quite unstable to reach the indigenous areas, the *quilombolas* and the settlements.

Nina Rodrigues makes the mediation concerning the information that needs to reach these places by those means. Mrs. Leonilda and her husband Benedito (who live downtown), and their daughter Mariana (who lives in the Balaiada community) were invited to assist in this specific demand. Thus, São Luís and NR rural communities have contact thanks to the important support of this solidary family. Besides completing the communication connections, they also host PHM members when they need to spend the night or wait for the trips and access to transportation (see Box II).

Box II - Dynamics of members and collaborators in NR/PHM

Condition of participation	Research phase	
	Phase I	Phase II
Effective members	5	3
Collaborators	0	3

Another initiative that continues being fruitful is the family garden in Palmares, which is cared by the PHM activist Jesus and her sisters. Without pesticides, vegetables, legumes, greens and medicinal plants are lush. The produce is consumed in the community itself. These

women are also responsible for assembling the whole irrigation system. In order to water the plants, they collect water pumped by the electric mechanism from the *igarapé*, catching and distributing the water through hoses with small holes, which guarantees that no water will be wasted when supplying it by dripping. They also built a wooden bridge made with sticks collected in the outskirts of the land where the garden is located) to cross existing flooded areas in the plantation area.

NR/PHM progresses, making valid the teachings firmed in the People's Charter for Health:

This Charter calls on people of the world to: (...) ensure that governments implement agricultural policies attuned to people's needs and not to the demands of the market, thereby guaranteeing food security and equitable access to food (CHARTER, 2000, p. 6)².



The next step in the planning is to expand this initiative to the other inhabitants of Palmares, exchanging knowledge on soil preparation, planting and handling of the seedlings. They also aim to have the children, the youth and their respective family members in action by the schools in the outskirts of this community. Added to this project, the process of recycling reusable materials is in progress.



² People's Health Charter - Peoples Health Movement. Facing the great factors that determine health. Economic challenges. On December 8, 2000.



Unused containers like soccer balls and plastic bottles serve to keep the plants (the vegetable that is in the black and white ball was a seedling brought by Jesus from Oásis, the place where the National PHM meeting happened in São Luís). Plastic bags, when prepared, provide a type of string or rope that can be used to weave hammocks and to cover seats. Other materials conceived for recycling are used in the manufacturing of utensils and other ornaments that sometimes are aimed to collect money, sold in the small street market organized by the community.



The training workshops of the NR team have strengthened and underpinned all the activities developed there. The village is close to traditional populations, coexisting in an environment of extreme social inequality and significant environmental deforestation, mainly because of the harmful presence of *Vale do Rio Doce*, added to the economic and political crisis in overt increase in Brazil, which is markedly cruel in the North and Northeast regions. In this scene, NR/PHM fights for *Buen Vivir*.

Environmental challenges (...). Water and air pollution, rapid climate change, ozone layer depletion, nuclear energy and waste, toxic chemicals and pesticides, loss of biodiversity, deforestation and soil erosion have far-reaching effects on people's health (CHARTER, 2000, p. 8)³.

6. Meetings developed by NR/PHM

Between 2016 and 2017, NR/PHM developed several meetings in the villages where it is present. Claudenir, Jesus and Marcelo kept their autonomy and mobilized and lived up their communities, encouraged by their own fight minds, acquired from and shared with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), as well as armed with the qualifications and studies obtained by means of the coordinated training workshops, to a large extent offered by Sister Anne during the process of creation and foundation of NR/PHM. It must also be added the meeting with the national/international PHM, that happened in São Luís in 2016.

Amongst the topics approached in their training, the content comprised, above all, self-knowledge and the reality of the social-political-cultural context related to health as a universal right, passing by mastering and preparation to work in the community and the significance of popular education to make this path possible. The training fostered ways to raise awareness in relation to the advocacy of public policies. From 2013 to 2015, time use was centered on the exploration of contents that subsidized NR/PHM to place itself in the local context, as well as its connection with the more comprehensive conjuncture concerning the structures that support the society.

In the second phase, corresponding to the research period, NR/PHM continued confident, interacting and livening up its people through participatory actions. In this period, the group was more strengthened, despite the lack of the two activists who had asked to leave. It travels, overcoming the difficulties inherent to the rural environment, where time is distinct,

³ People's Health Charter - Peoples Health Movement. Tackling the broader determinants of health. Environmental challenges (...). On December 8, 2000.

quite different of what occurs in the urban environment, concerning the logistic, financial and staff support. They continue to be aware that the problems related to health extrapolate the sector linked to the health field only (see Box III).

Box III - Distinct phases between training/study and mobilization of the community

Activities	Research phase	
	Phase I	Phase II
Training of NR/PHM members	18 training workshops were developed	3 training workshops were developed
Mobilization of the communities through NR/PHM	Home visits as part of the studies	Several studies and mobilization meetings and encounters with the communities

7. Brief report of some of the meetings with the communities

Box IV - Meeting in the Chapel of Vila Esperança community /NR – July 2017

Participation	Children, youth, adults, elderly people, leaderships, catechists and PHM activists
Mobilization	Everybody mobilized from house to house through the articulation provided by the NR/PHM team
Subject approached	The history of fight for land and for the good quality of public policies was recovered, showing that the water system only exists there because it was implemented and kept by its inhabitants. It was also mentioned the creation of the team and the arrival of PHM in the municipality, as well as its commitment with the people. The debate and rhythm of the meeting was provided by interactive dynamics and reflections
Reflective questions	What is health? What was built in a collective way in the community? Is what the community already have enough to live with dignity? What needs to be improved?



Source: Jesus's photo collection

Picture 5: Street market with recycled products - Palmares/NR



Source: Jesus's photo collection

Pictures 6 and 7: Chairs and hammocks manufactured with recycled plastic bags - Palmares/NR



Source: Jesus's photo collection

Picture 8: Meeting in Vila Esperança community/NR

In these meetings, people from other villages were also present, besides those from Vila Esperança (representatives of Vila Guar, Balaiada and Campinho).

Box V - Meeting in the School of Palmares community/NR – August 2017

Participation	19 people gathered. They were teachers, unionists, local leaders of the Catholic Church, youth ministry, MST militants, a councilwoman who lives in the community, housewives and PHM activists.
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Mobilization	Everybody mobilized from house to house through the articulation provided by the NR/PHM team
Subject approached	Amongst the explanations, it was said that the only health care center that exists in Palmares was built by the community itself in partnership with the children ministry and UNICEF; that the presence of the public power is quite distant from the real needs of these towns; that all the conquests happened with the collective fight, a fact occurred with the ownership of their lands in the settlements where they live. They mentioned the importance and valuation that they assign to home remedies, healers and midwives, quite present in the community.
Reflective questions	To conduct meetings to keep the people mobilized and organized. To strengthen the point of unity between NR/PHM and the other social movements that are partners in the fight for the advocacy and dignity of <i>Buen Vivir</i> .

The NR/PHM activists Jesus, Marcelo and Claudenir coordinated the meeting in Palmares jointly. Sister Anne and Marta Giane were also present. The event also had the participation of representatives of Morada and Vila Esperança.



Source: Jesus's photo collection

Picture 9: Meeting - Palmares/NR

Box VI - Meeting in São Domingos village/NR – August 2017

Participation	30 people gathered. Children, youth (large majority), some parents and PHM activists.
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Mobilization	Mobilization from house to house and contacts through WhatsApp, articulation provided by the NR/PHM team.
Subject approached	With a piece of brown paper on the ground representing the society that we have and another one representing the society that we want, both separate by a rectangle symbolizing the path to be covered to reach the society of the dreams. Using cards, it was written how to surpass the distance, the challenges, to identify and to reflect on the difficulties, weaknesses, potentialities, what helps and what hinders, as well as searching solutions, pointing ways.
Reflective questions	It was established the need of renewal of the community leaders, as well as the more effective participation of the youth in the collectivity. To demand for the conclusion of the multisport court of the town, that was interrupted a long time ago. That the community needs to occupy more the school space, to fight for a health center, since there is none there. To fight also for the environmental preservation, as there is an increasing deforestation of the edges of the river, besides too much garbage in the community.



Source: Sister Anne's photo collection
Pictures 10, 11 and 12: Meeting – Domingos/NR

In this meeting, everybody expressed themselves, with projections on what they want for their community. They wrote in the cards the negative points that intervene with the community, and next they pointed aggregating elements to construct unity and to strengthen the fight, thus contributing to increase the number of mobilized and acting people.

8. Questions that intervene with the mobilization and organization action

According to the evaluation of NR/PHM activists:

- The existence of misunderstandings between Catholics and Evangelicals has caused a lack of unity, which consequently hinders the organization of the people, who have no force to demand the fulfillment of the demands already claimed. They had already demanded for the expansion of the health center, expansion of the funds supply and higher covering of medication, but the claims did not advance to actual acts. They recognize the need to build points of convergence between the religious groups and to start a joint planning.

- They also point that the antidemocratic acts in Brazil influence directly on the existing issues in their communities. They claim that the amount of the financial transfer is increasingly reduced and that the municipal power argues that the problems were aggravated due to the national crisis, resulting in cuts in its budget. With this, the services lack equipment, with few providers and installations needing repairs.

9. NR/PHM finances

The development and organization of NR/PHM is totally voluntary, they do not receive any remuneration. For funding the trips and meals (for the activities inside and outside their villages), they contribute with R\$5.00 each per month. Adding to this amount, there is the double contribution of Sister Anne for each amount that is received. Her contribution, certifies Sister Anne, proceeds from projects coming from the articulation of her Notre Dame Congregation.

The transportation in the rural area, between *quilombolas* and settlements, is made by bicycle, motorcycle and car for the daily travel. On average, transportation is the most expensive cost amongst all the other expenses. With this monthly collection, NR/PHM guarantees its trips for the exclusive work of organization and mobilization in its areas of action.

10. Other remarks

In this period between January 2016 and September 2017, the PHM in Nina Rodrigues studied and planned what to do to mobilize the population in front of the claims for social rights. They continue lively to keep their cohesion and, with the people, to continue the reflection meetings in preparation to organize a strong movement to face the politicians to advocate for SUS, as they understand that life and environment are not commodities.



Source: NR/PHM photo collection

Pictures 13, 14, 15 and 16: Meetings in NP villages /Maranhão-Brazil