

## Latin America Regional workshop, São Luis Maranhão Brazil, 15-17 July



### Preparation

We worked together, the group in Porto Alegre and the one in São Luis. Sister Ani Whibey and her team were in charge of organizing the local logistics, whereas the group of Porto Alegre was in charge of organizing the program, which was sent by e-mail one month prior to the meeting, to be revised and modified by everyone who was meant to participate. Ani contributed with a sum of money from other projects and donations, with which she paid for T-shirts, working kits, souvenirs for participants, and technical support for the computer.

### Venue and attendance

The workshop took place in São Luis, Maranhão, in a simple and very pleasant place called Oasis. This place is more frequently used as a religious retreat, but also for other kinds of meetings and events. The staff is extremely friendly. Everything happened at the same place: accommodation, work, and catering. This was definitely a good thing. We had three full days of work: 15th to 17th July. Attendance was as follows: 8 from Porto Alegre, 1 from São Paulo, 1 from Rio de Janeiro, 1 from Brasília, 1 from Belem, 2 from Nina Rodrigues (rural zone of Maranhão) and approximately 13 people from São Luis or other close localities. And, from



outside Brazil, we were happy to have Maria Zuniga (from Nicaragua) and Gabriel Garcia (from Chiapas, Mexico) amongst us. Some of the 13 people from Sao Luis participated for the whole time, but the majority came and went, contributing to some of the activities. Most of the local people were not accommodated at Oasis, so they were more prone to be late or absent for some part of the program. Unfortunately, Silvana, from São Paulo, could not come, as mentioned above. This was a pity, because she was meant to share about her work with black women's health throughout Brazil.

Ani brought her personal computer and printer to the venue, to be used by anyone who needed. They were installed in a side room.

## Program development

The program was fully developed and ran smoothly, which was a very pleasant experience for the organizers. People from Sao Luis were late most of the time, and came and went, this could have been better. Everyone contributed, and even the organizers were not overcharged. Ani was still recovering from a long time of illness, so the tasks she had as local organizer were a little bit heavy for her, but she was nicely supported by the local group. Ani and her group prepared T-shirts and a working kit, including mugs for water and coffee, it was lovely.

### *First day*

We started with a mystical presentation by the group of Maranhao, with a scene showing the suffering of local people who resist exploitation and end up falling dead.



**Figure 1. Mystical presentation prepared by the group of Maranhão**

Presentations followed, presented very creatively with mini drama pieces in small groups. We then went through the program, to make sure everyone was aware of the final version.

After the morning coffee break, Camila spoke about the global research (CSE4H4A). Many people, especially from Maranhão, didn't know the broader context well, so there was a lot of participation, questions and discussion.

In the afternoon, the group of Porto Alegre presented its research (results for phase 1). In Porto Alegre, the research was entitled Users and Health Workers Together to Strengthen Social Participation in the Health System. The group chose to work with social participation (or social control, as it is called in the

Brazilian health system), as there is a generalized understanding that this participation is getting weaker and more fragile, and needs strengthening. Each one in the group shared a little bit of the experience and results, ending with a final summary. For details, see the whole report, available elsewhere in Portuguese and English. Marta Giane, from Belem, talked a little bit about the context there, and about her experience in performing some interviews, which were not yet included in the report.

Everyone was sensitized by the difficulties to realize social participation in the South of Brazil, because the idea is that the South is a lot better structured and richer than the Northern part of the country.

People from the North had no idea that in the South there is also major problems with the health system.

After the afternoon coffee break, Mariana spoke about her research piece on the WHO Watch. Her work is also available elsewhere in a report in Portuguese and English.

In the evening, the whole group went to the historical center of Sao Luis, and had a pleasant taste of the local culture.

### *Second day*

We started with the presentation by ACT (Alliance against Tobacco) – a case study on Civil Society Engagement for Tobacco Control in Brazil. Paula and Monica talked dynamically about their project, it was very stimulant. They are mainly working with theme 1 (campaign and advocacy), and are in the process of broadening their field to also work with healthy diets, alcohol regulation, and healthy contexts as a whole. All the details are present in their report, available, elsewhere, in Portuguese and English.

After the morning break, the group of Maranhão spoke about their experience, first the group living in the rural zone called Nina Rodrigues, distant 180 km from São Luis, with 14 thousand inhabitants. Jesus and Marcelo, with Ani's support, conducted a very dynamic activity, where, in small groups, we had the opportunity to feel the kind of work they do in the communities. They worked with building the movement (the PHM local group) in their community based on methods of popular education. For their report, we had to search for the help of an "external" person, who was not so involved with the work on the field (but travelled to the places, to be familiar with the context), but who had academic background and was able to systematize the work. This person (Raimundo) is involved with the PHM group that is being built in São Luis. So this one was mainly about theme 2 (building the movement). The report is available only in Portuguese for now, but will be translated to English soon.



**Figure 3.**The group of Nina Rodrigues presenting its experience with movement building based on popular education.

trails where the "Vale iron train" passes by.

In the afternoon, we shared with Maria and Gabriel, about their lives and activism, and involvement with the PHM. This was a very inspiring session.

Then we learned about the experience of Sao Luis, which is very incipient, the group is just starting, so this experience is not formally part of the research. The group presented a drama scene, exposing the main problems they are facing and organizing themselves to struggle for. The main problem, in general, is the exploitation by big industries, like the huge mining company Vale, and the impacts for local populations living nearby, shocking. There was also a photograph exhibition showing scenes of families living next to the



**Figure 2.** The group of São Luis presenting their struggles

We ended the day working in groups. Each group (Porto Alegre, ACT and Maranhão) worked together in the planning of phase 2.

### *Third day*

We started up with the presentation of the work done by each group.

### Porto Alegre

Plan is to share results of phase 1 with all the participants (users, health workers and managers) in a workshop in September, then analyze the results of this participatory event, and together conceive an intervention meant to strengthen social participation (until December), to be implemented from March 2017.

### Maranhão (Nina Rodrigues – rural group)

Plan is to expand the work to other communities in the area and build stronger interaction with the group in São Luis.

### Maranhão (São Luis – urban group)

Plan is to have regular meetings (have a calendar), create a WhatsApp group only for Maranhão. Aim to strengthen the presence of the Movement (PHM) in all the movements.

### ACT (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro)

Plan is to implement a training process in advocacy on healthy diets, using the example of the tobacco case they have worked on before. This training will gather organizations from around the whole country (between 15 and 30) in 3 workshops to be held in a period of 9 months, with tasks and activities to be completed between them. Tools to be used in advocacy and networking to face the big industry will be the main focus. This experience will be documented in the research, including process evaluation.

In the afternoon, there was a field visit to see part of Vale's industrial plants. We visited the community of Cajueiro, a beautiful place whose people are resisting to be displaced due to the big industry's (Vale) interest in building a new port. We were guided by a group from the university working in environmental health that supports this community. We had the opportunity to meet with community leaders and understand their struggle.



**Figure 4. Field visit to the community of Cajueiros, meeting with community leaders.**

It was a very dynamic meeting, the powerpoint wasn't used at all during the 3 days of work. In the evening, we closed with dinner and evaluation. A PHM letter of Maranhão was written collectively stating some of the principles and main claims and struggles of the PHM Brazil circle.

On the next 2 days, Katia (from Porto Alegre) went with Jesus and Marcelo to meet the rural communities at Nina Rodrigues. This was an awaited and really important connection.



Figure 5. Katia's visit to Nina Rodrigues, a remote place only reached by boat and motorcycle. The children were delighted to meet Cristalina at the puppet show in the local church.

## Conclusions/Opportunities

- The face to face meeting was essential, because communication is a big problem and many people had not yet understood the context of the CSE4HFA research, despite the countless e- mails.
- A WhatsApp group was created, and is being very active and useful until now.
- The meeting strengthened the group. ACT and Maranhão felt part of the PHM Brazil. The group in Sao Luis is visibly empowered. Connections were made and strengthened with people and organizations.
- We met with many organizations in São Luis and Maranhão, like “Justiça nos Trilhos” (Justice on Trails), MST (Landless Movement), groups from the university working with environmental health and indigenous and quilombola (slave reminiscent) populations. There were very rich exchanges.
- The presence of Maria and Gabriel gave an idea of the international nature of PHM and this was stimulant for those who were not so familiar. Their comments about the research, as “external eyes”, were very interesting.
- The PHM Brazil, especially “beginners”, had an opportunity to know people and their stories of activism, many of them said “now I understand what the PHM is”. Despite e-mails, website, conversations, only this face to face meeting gave a feel of what it really is.

## Difficulties

- People from São Luis were not present for the whole meeting (came and went).
- Silvana was prevented from boarding because of problem with credit card (this is a vulnerability when one person is in charge for buying so many tickets).

## Challenges

- To fit the deadlines. There has to be time to respect the own time and processes of communities we are working with. This was reminded especially by the people from Maranhão. Their report took a long time to be finished, not only because of the timeline itself, but because an “external” person had to be searched to do the systematizing and writing.

- Working across difference. Our country is full of diversity. Cultural difference is markedly present, including this issue about time mentioned above. The face to face meeting was valuable to understand this context.
- Language. Documents and reports in the IDRC global research are shared in English, generating double work (or costs) to translate the documents. That's a reality we have to learn to deal with, as very few people are able to communicate in English.



Figure 6. Celebrating Sister Ani's 92nd Birthday.