

TRIP REPORT

Community Assessment Visit for Determining Alternative Livelihood Activities

Três Marias and Pirapora, Brazil, September 19th – 20th, 2003

Erika de Castro

University of British Columbia, Centre for Human Settlements

This report outlines the activities undertaken by Erika de Castro, Research Associate at the Centre for Human Settlements - University of British Columbia (CHS-UBC) for the **Brazil Inland Fisheries: Sustainable Livelihoods and Conservation** project in the period from September 18th to 19th, 2003. During this period, Erika de Castro accompanied the project' team, lead by Inês Mancuso (UFSCar), Barbara Johnsen (Secretária do Meio Ambiente de Três Marias) and Raimundo Marques (Federation of Artesanal Fishers MG), in their fieldwork in two locations: Três Marias and Pirapora, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

The project focuses on the northeast and central-west portions of the country in the basin of the São Francisco River, and has the overall aim to create and implement a model for sustainable socio-environmental river management. The project intends to balance the transfer of "hard" fisheries technologies with an equal social component. As this project places greater emphasis on the social side of Brazilian inland fisheries, it shall incorporate participatory planning processes both in the discussion and in the implementation of activities, which will increase the communities and municipal capacity to enhance the involvement of youth and women in decision-making processes.

To this end, activities were developed according to the project's agenda to assess the potential for initiatives related to community economic development, particularly those involving youth and women's participation, at the municipal and community level. These activities included meetings with several stakeholders and members of the communities involved in the project, as well as the municipal Secretariat for Environment and the staff responsible for women and youth issues in the municipality.

The meetings and visits showed that specific activities should be developed to increase the involvement of municipality staff (in both municipalities) and other stakeholders (Federação de Pescadores, ComLago) in a clear agenda to assess the potential for creating opportunities for youth and women, not only in community economic development but also in terms of increasing their effective participation in the project. One example could be the stimulation, through events and training, for micro enterprises that could capture the existing social capital and enhance the potential for local economic activities amenable to the river (co-ops for craftsmanship, sewing, cooking, childcare, vegetable gardens, herbs, etc). A municipal "co-op incubator" could be set off to organize all the necessary actions and prepare the staff to help and foster the local economic activities. Another initial step could be the survey of local "talents", for example, carrying out a "Talents' Fair" in the municipalities and/or neighborhoods.

There is a strong commitment of all involved, and undoubtedly the potential exists in the participants to carry out an ambitious agenda for the next stages of the project. However, the focus should be clearer towards the "creation" of an identity for the project regarding community participation, especially for the involvement of women and youth. Activities aimed at the municipalities' staff would help to foster the trust necessary between them and the communities, and should enhance their capacity to sustain the project's actions focus. The existing facilities of the Federação are a powerful asset to be further explored for this "identity" and have the potential to become a "core" for these project's activities.

Ultimately, the project should foster processes of learning involving new institutional knowledge where, in collaborating with communities' members and by promoting community participation, the municipalities and other institutional partners as public organisations will commit themselves to the long-term goal of the project.

In order to maximize the project's participatory dimension and effectiveness in involving the communities, activities, such as gender analysis workshops, youth participation activities, and other participatory planning tools (like biomapping, for example), should be added to the project's agenda. Youth and women (specially wives of fishermen, but not exclusively since other women who are part of the communities could be engaged in activities that act as support for the fishing activities - for example, tourism, craftsmanship, etc) should be directly involved in these activities.

Another aspect that should be addressed more vigorously is the involvement of regional stakeholders (other surrounding municipalities, regional agencies, educational institutions, NGOs, etc), as they represent a crucial aspect to guaranteeing the sustainability of project results and their dissemination throughout other riverine communities. A diversity of mandates will provide different approaches and learning processes for similar goals, therefore enriching the project's approaches.