

Appendix F-21d

January Report of Activities of the PPA environmental education project Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Project Background

The following is an account of the activities performed as part of the World Fisheries Trust (WFT) project based in Minas Gerais, Brazil, called Peixes, Pessoas e Água (PPA). The project's main objective is to "contribute to the equitable use of the Brazilian freshwater fisheries resource in a fashion that provides sustainability for the resource and the livelihoods that rely on it" as can be found in the WFT proposal to CIDA "Brazil Inland Fisheries: Sustainable livelihoods and conservation". Specifically, this report deals with the PPA environmental education activities going on in the area known as the High/Medium São Francisco Watershed in the localities of Barra de Guaicui, Buritizeiro, Ibiaí and Pirapora. Most of these activities involve work with youth environmental initiatives as well as projects alongside Fisher colonies from the same municipalities.

Summary of January's work

Primarily, the month of January was used by the facilitating team based in Pirapora to evaluate, among the two PPA facilitators, the development of the youth environmental activities that were created and that were finishing at the time, this was different from the evaluating activities performed in the month of December which involved the group participants as well as the program leaders.

The main priority of our work was to contribute in a positive way to the educational and organizational formation of youth with regards to their environment and culture while at the same time enhancing the value of their reality. For instance, not only scientific information was sought for the workshop activities but local traditional knowledge was used as well. Because of this, January was set as a time to meet with the program leaders of each region where the program took place to make them participant of our results, to receive their input on the work done and particularly to analyze the possibility of integrating part or all of the environmental curriculum we worked with into their own educational strategies.

Other activities such as the Community Development initiatives and the Community Reporter project in Pirapora had yet to stand on their own. This happened in part because of our own timing constraints, very real obligations from most of the group members regarding employment insurance benefits for non-working fishers and an initiative from the government to regulate fishing activities by issuing a fisher card, and partly from other problems regarding compromise within the groups.

It is important to highlight that January was also a time when the PPA overall coordinators joined the Pirapora facilitating team in order to plan the next months of work and to hear ideas about how best to finish the work among all the groups. The PPA project in general has entered a concluding stage of work, in which longer lasting

initiatives are being sought and put into action so that once the project is over; the communities have a real contribution from the project at their disposal.

An account of the projects comes next divided by type of project and further subdivided by towns. At the end of the report a personal reflection on the skills and experience gained by the EYA Intern has been added in order to compare and contrast the initial reactions back in October when the project started with the closing activities going on in January and February of 2006.

Youth Projects by Community

Because the Barra de Guaicuí and Ibiaí's (Candeia and Amigos da Natureza) groups are not run by the municipality (as is the case with the Pirapora groups), therefore not under a direct control with regards to participation and continuity of the project, the proposals for continual implementation of some of the methodological strategies from the project were approached differently.

Barra de Guaicuí and Ibiaí each have their own continuing proposal while the Agente Jovem group, the Renascer and Pingo de Luz projects will have a similar outcome among themselves. The Pirapora groups will have the support of the municipalities.

Barra de Guaicuí

Candeia

Because of the difficulties scheduling meetings in the month of December, formal meetings did not actually start happening until the month of January. The first meeting was scheduled on January 10th in order to assess the group's interest in continuing the project and to analyze the difficulties in meeting the project objectives. In general and particularly lead by Luza, the community leader acting as a resource for the group, the group listed lack of compromise from the group members, a lack of a physical space to go ahead with the activities and a lack of initiative from all the members in order to make the group function properly. Among the current issues to solve this year, the group highlighted, again, the need for a physical space and the need to do more practical activities.

This lack of interest and compromise was over on the next meeting when fewer members of the group appeared and meetings started happening more often and with better results. The facilitating team heard several comments in which the group members felt good that finally the group was working more and talking less. My particular assessment of this was that some of the group members that were participating in the past, the ones that were leading the group and making their voices heard more than the other members, were either overworked in their particular jobs (outside of the group itself) or they did not know how to leave the group, due to peer pressure. Both of these opinions are debatable and subjective, In other words I may be wrong, but once these members left the group in the second meeting of the year activities and participation from other members who did not voice opinions before became more common.

This is not to say, however, that the departure of a few members of the group solved all the issues prescribed before. In fact, organizational and participation issues are still happening and they are being analyzed with the group in the meetings and in their actions.

Collection of plastic bottles began this month in order to recycle them into seedling cups. Two meeting times were scheduled for this, one to go around the community and inform Barra's inhabitants about the Candeia project and to ask them to participate by collecting some of these bottles for the group. Plastic bags were handed to people who agreed to help us and a later date was used to perform the collection. A radio text as well as a logotype and brochure text were going to be created in order to inform the community of our actions on the week of our first action, but the texts and the logotype were not ready for that time so it was decided that they will be used further within the development of the project.

In order to secure a place to keep the collected bottles several strategies were formulated. For now the bottles are being kept at the police post in Barra de Guaicuí and at the house of a Candiea member, but they are only temporary solutions to the problem. The municipality had *promised* a place for the group to commence their project, but nothing has come of this promise yet. It has been difficult to find the mayor of the town, arguably because he is always traveling, and so that solution is still on hold. On the last meeting of January, one of the members of the group mentioned the possibility of doing part of the project on a lot that a relative of hers owns. This alternative is being studied as well.

With all of this said, it is important to note that, in terms of PPA facilitation, the projects end at the end of February; this is the case for all the youth groups. In order to leave something more valuable and lasting in the community, a new project is being proposed by the facilitating team to, both the community and the PPA coordinators in 3 Marias. Consultation on this project is due to happen in February and if the project goes through one of the facilitators already working in the former project, Ze de Andrade, will stay in the community to coordinate these activities.

Next month's report will have a more detailed plan of the new projects for the communities of Barra de Guaicuí and Ibiaí.

Ibiaí

Amigos da Natureza

Because most of the group members were not in Ibiaí at the time, meetings were postponed for the coming month. The timing and relevance of the meetings for the month of January were discussed at the last December meetings, it is important to understand though, that the project has been underway for only a few months and that several of the group members either go to their farms to work in January in order to secure a more diverse food stock or go to spend time with relatives at this time. Cultural and traditional reasons may have a higher priority sometimes for the groups we work with and that point should not be dismissed when planning activities of a limited time frame like the one discussed here.

It is this facilitator's point of view that the group will not stand on their own once the facilitators leave the project. In order to deal with this, a new project, just as in Barra de Guaicuí is being proposed to the youth group, the municipality and the PPA coordinators. Both projects are different because of the different moments in which the groups are right now.

Pirapora- AJ and RPL

As stated before, the main concern for the PPA facilitating team for the month of January was how to incorporate the positive aspects of our projects into the curriculum of the social programs in the region. In the case of Pirapora and its social programs, a joined planning strategy was proposed by us to the municipality coordinators. Because the municipality is in the process of planning their activities for the next 6 months, we were invited to participate in their February meetings to provide our input on their strategies and on how to introduce some of our ideas.

Aside from this, there was also talk of creating a publication for two reasons. One for anyone interested in the activities and the strategies performed and a second one more for reflection on the part of the participants of the project, them being the PPA facilitators, the social program leaders and the PPA coordinators in 3 Marias.

Agente Jovem (AJ)

Even though most activities were over at the end of 2005, the facilitating team scheduled a closing meeting with all of the AJ groups in order to hand remembrances of the work done to the youth and to complete an evaluation form made for this particular group. Even though the meeting had problems regarding the location, the event was deemed successful by the facilitators as many youth came and the participation of the municipal program leaders was a sign of strength and interest in our project. Youth were not part of the AJ program officially at this encounter and so their participation was of great value to us.

Projeto Renascer and Pingo de Luz- Salvando a Natureza (RPL)

At the beginning of January a meeting was scheduled with the team that organized the activities for these projects; the team consisted of a partnership between the PPA team and the program leaders as can be seen in previous reports. The meeting allowed the team to plan a presentation to the entire body of educators that work in the municipality projects. This presentation gave way to more participation in the municipality's pedagogic planning meetings for their social programs and this will give continuity to some of the activities and strategies used in the fulfillment of this project. The planning meetings will happen on the first weeks of February and a closing activity; similar to the one scheduled with the AJ program, will be prepared.

Community Reporters

There were no meetings scheduled with the Community Reporters for the month of January. However, planning and a new proposal was discussed and prepared for the interested stakeholders for February. This proposal would involve the culmination of the first community journal and the possibility of creating a video journal. This consultation process will be done on February as we await for some of the Community Reporters to come back from holidays.

Community Development

There were no meetings scheduled with Community Development groups for January, but the PPA coordinators in 3 Marias met with the facilitating team based in Pirapora to discuss all the activities with youth and the fisher colonies. Of particular interest was the Community Development discussion which gave interesting results.

The PPA coordinators are working with Community Development groups in their region, 3 Marias and Beira Rio, with a different strategy; providing support and formative tools to members of the municipalities in a similar fashion to some of the initiatives that happened in Santo André (SP) with the GEPAM project (more information about this project can be acquired through Erika de Castro at UBC). Our own strategies involve a more 'to the base' approach as we work directly with the fisher colonies and members of groups that may or may not be a part of a municipality. The difference here lies in that our support is directed to creating multiplication agents of knowledge and abilities from the bottom up and that we stress importance on the idea of the groups learning how to 'face' a municipality in order for them to get recognition and empowerment. The differences between the approaches do not necessarily mean that one of the strategies is wrong but rather that it was the approach the facilitators living in the locality saw as fit for the reality of the region. Even in this small area, realities can be different depending on many variables that we are not always able to understand, but living and being part of a community is, to the maximum of our abilities, perhaps the best way to decide on which action to take with regards to our initiatives.

In essence on this meeting we agreed to work together, comparing and contrasting experiences between the stakeholders of the projects. As well we agreed to a time extension of the Community Development part of the project up until the month of June, time in which more facilitation activities will be done on our part. Basically, the meeting participants agreed to diagnose the problems and difficulties found in the groups. Once that is done and the continuity on behalf of the groups is secure, the PPA facilitators will center on organizational and skill building strategies for the group members. A set of participation criteria was also discussed for our groups as it was felt by us that there needed to exist demands from our part in order to guarantee participation of the group members. As mentioned before for the youth groups, project planning and reality do not always meet in the middle of the implementation of a project. The idea of establishing a set of participation criteria does not obligate anyone to participate but it does make them compromise that once they decide to be a part of the group they will have to follow certain guidelines that ensure participation and group work completion.

Skills and Experience

My original idea with regards to the work that was to be performed in Brazil was somewhat vague at the beginning. Whatever the reason for it, this fact made it difficult to analyze exactly what kind of skills I wanted to learn from this experience. Looking back now, I feel that I have enhanced and learned a wide set of skills that will help me in my professional and social life.

Basically the type of work I had to do here in Brazil has dealt with the dynamics of group work, formation and organization. Added to that and entirely new to me, were the difficulties of groups of people (not necessarily youth alone) to organize themselves and participate in a democratic manner of their own groups. These difficulties that come from external and uncontrollable sources do make the group formation stages of work on these conditions challenging and I found myself more than once hanging dangerously between assistentialism and lack of proper support for the groups mentioned. Comparing this situation with my previous experiences in Canada, I have further developed my observational skills, in order to understand when a group needs a specific type of assistance or actually when they do not need my help.

The Brazilian staff that I am working with here and particularly my facilitation partner, Ze de Andrade, are very knowledgeable in popular education strategies based on ideas of 'problematizing' difficulties with a group (or community) in order to advance together and not individually. The challenge lies in providing adequate facilitation for the groups at their own rhythm and at the same time following up with results that are demanded from the hosting organization I am working with.

It is hard to talk about one specific set of tools or events because there have been so many things that have served as educational experiences. Skills that I believe to have developed range among the following: a new language, the ability to speak to people from different backgrounds which can sometimes be compared with speaking a different language, listening skills, mobilizing and sensitizing strategies, team building strategies, planning and interdisciplinary skills.