



MOVIMENTO DOS ATINGIDOS POR BARRAGENS

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Solidarity and actions with populations affected by floods and dam ruptures in Brazil, and the organization's challenges to mitigate damage, repair rights and rebuild the future.

1. Context

The rainy season in some Brazilian regions has, in the last few years, caused increasingly serious socio-environmental consequences. Climate change and environmental imbalance are increasingly causing phenomena such as excessive rainfall in some regions and drought in others. These phenomena are aggravated by the action of large companies in the energy, mining and agribusiness sector, by the way they exploit natural assets facilitated by the lack of planning and government measures, worsened with the Bolsonaro government.

At the end of December 2021 and at the beginning of January 2022, the rainy season in Southeast Brazil, and in parts of the Northeast, have caused major floods, dam ruptures, and aggravation of the risks of rupture, causing a situation of extreme vulnerability for the affected populations. In the second week of January, the Amazon region, northern Brazil, also began to feel the consequences, with rivers high in the region and flooding in the states of Maranhão, Goiás, Tocantins and Pará¹.

For some experts in meteorology and climate, several factors contributed to the excess of rainfall in the region, including the *La Niña* phenomenon, subtropical depression and global warming, which directly influenced the South Atlantic Convergence Zone (SACZ), which occurs naturally all over the world every year, described by Inmet as “one of the main meteorological systems responsible for water replacement in part of Brazil in the rainy season”. The SACZ is a band of clouds that travel in a corridor of humidity from the Amazon to the south of the Atlantic².

Specialists warned that climate change is also caused by the production model and unbridled actions from business interests. It is very likely that deforestation in the Amazon and Cerrado may have considerably altered this balance of the Convergence Zone. As disclosed by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), deforestation in the Legal Amazon grew by 21.97% in the period from August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021, compared to the previous period. According to the same release, the state of Pará had the highest absolute amount of deforestation, with 5,257 square kilometers, corresponding to more than 39% of

¹ Agência Brasil – EBC. Flood of the Tocantins River affects the population of four Brazilian states. Available at < <https://agenciabrasil.etc.com.br/geral/noticia/2022-01/cheia-do-rio-tocantins-afeta-populacao-de-quatro-estados-brasileiros>>;

²Brasil de Fato newspaper. Understand what is causing the rains that left the south of Bahia under water. Available at < <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/12/28/entenda-o-que-esta-causando-as-chuvas-que-deixaram-o-sul-da-bahia-embaixo-d-agua>>; ; BBC Brasil. Rains in Bahia: the extreme phenomena that caused the tragedy in the state. Available at < [Chuvas na Bahia: os fenômenos extremos que causam a tragédia no Estado](#)>;



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the total deforestation in the Amazon in that period³. From 2019 onwards, year the Bolsonaro government began, deforestation grew significantly, according to data released by the INPE⁴.

In the Cerrado biome, the scenario is no different, according to PRODES Cerrado, linked to the INPE, deforestation grew 13.21% in the period from August 2019 to July 2020, compared to the previous period. A deforested area of 7.3 thousand square kilometers. Deforestation was higher in the states of Maranhão, Tocantins and Bahia, which are part of the Matopiba territory, current frontier of agribusiness in the region that also includes Piauí⁵.

The whole problem of climate change is aggravated in the Brazilian context in regions where there are dams built, be they of mining tailings, electricity production, or water containment. This is because the legislation regarding the safety of dams and the safety of the affected populations is quite fragile or non-existent, most dams are not registered in the National Information System on Dam Safety (SNISB), so there is isn't any kind of control and inspection. And in the registered dams, there is no effective inspection in which society can trust. Dams like the one at Vallourec, which burst on January 8, 2022, had gone through the inspection process by the responsible public officials, who attested to their safety.

Another aggravating factor is that the dam structures built over several years are aged and without proper maintenance and safety, since the companies' priority is to ensure the maximization of profits and reduction of expenses. Therefore, these structures are vulnerable in scenarios such as what is currently happening with excessive rainfall and overflow in several regions. According to the National Water Agency, responsible for the safety management of dams in the country, in the last Report (2020), there were 122 dams with some important structural compromise⁶. In Minas Gerais, 31 dams are in emergency situation, according to data from January 12, released by the state government. Of these, three owned by Vale SA company are at imminent risk of collapse⁷.

Situation in Bahia

The excessive rain in Bahia caused rivers to overflow, dams to burst and opening of floodgates to prevent ruptures, which also caused flooding and inundations. At the end of November and begin December 2021, the state suffered with heavy rains. It started to rain

³ Agência Brasil EBC. Deforestation in the Legal Amazon has increased by 21.97% in 2021. Available at: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2021-11/desmatamento-na-amazonia-legal-tem-aumento-de-2197-em-2021>>

⁴ INPE. Analyses – Legal Amazon. Monthly variation of DETER project area. Available at < <http://terrabrasilis.dpi.inpe.br/app/dashboard/alerts/legal/amazon/aggregated/#> >

⁵ WWF Brasil. Deforestation in the Cerrado increases by 13% and the biome loses 7300 km² of native vegetation. Available at < <https://www.wwf.org.br/?77608/cerrado-prodes-desmatamento-aumenta-123-perde-73-il-km2> >

⁶ Agência Nacional de Águas – ANA. (National Waters Agency) 2020 Dam Safety Report. Available at < <https://www.snisb.gov.br/relatorio-anual-de-seguranca-de-barragem/2020/rsb-2020.pdf>>

⁷ Portal IG. Minas Gerais has three dams with imminent risk of rupture. Available at < <https://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/brasil/2022-01-12/minas-gerais-tres-barragens-risco-iminente-rompimento.html>>



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heavily again on Christmas Eve, on December 24th and 25th in the entire region of the Extreme South, South, Recôncavo and part of Chapada Diamantina.

In the data released by the Civil Defense and Protection Superintendence (Sudec), on January 4, there were **154 municipalities in “state of emergency”, 93,645 homeless or displaced people. The total number of people affected so far is 715,634, and 26 deaths**⁸.

According to the National Institute of Meteorology (Inmet), the rainfall accumulated in December 2021 is the highest in at least 15 years in some regions of Bahia, and in certain municipalities the volume of rainfall was 50% above the historical average for the month.

In Bahia, **there have been four (4) dam ruptures so far**, two located in the municipality of Apuarema, one in Itambé, and another in the municipality of Jussiape. According to the Fire Department, about 10 dams in the state are at a critical water level and are still being monitored. Most of these dams are privately owned and do not have any type of supervision. There are also dams that are releasing a lot of water in their floodgates, such as the Pedra Dam, in Jequié, HPP Pedra do Cavalo in São Félix, and HPP Itapebi in Salto da Divisa. Several roads that connect Bahian cities were compromised by the high level of precipitation, some are partially and others are totally closed.

While the Bahian population suffers from floods and inundations, President Jair Bolsonaro denied authorization for humanitarian aid from Argentina to Bahia and said he wouldn't leave his vacation early because of the flood situation. The posture expresses the Government's conduct which employs a policy of privileging the richest and total abandonment of those most in need⁹.

Situation in Minas Gerais

In Minas Gerais, the northern region of the state, which borders Bahia (Rio Jequitinhonha and Rio Pardo Basin), the metropolitan region (Rio Paraopeba Basin) and the Rio Doce Basin face flooding, inundations, risks of bursts and dam ruptures. The latter are the same regions where Vale's crimes took place, with the dam ruptures in Mariana 6 years ago and Brumadinho 3 years ago. Up to January 11, 145 municipalities have declared state of emergency¹⁰.

⁸More information: < <https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2022/01/03/sobe-para-26-o-no-de-mortos-por-cao-das-chuvas-na-ba-mais-de-93-mil-estao-desabrigados-ou-desalojadas-e-715-mil-afetados.ghtml> >; < <https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2022/01/03/apos-chuvas-em-minas-cheia-do-rio-pardo-cao-alagamentos-em-cidades-da-ba-nivel-da-agua-subiu-oito-metros-em-alguns-pontos.ghtml> >;

⁹ MAB. While President Bolsonaro enjoys vacations in Santa Catarina, Bahia faces state of calamity. Available at < <https://mab.org.br/2021/12/29/enquanto-o-presidente-bolsonaro-curte-ferias-em-santa-catarina-bahia-enfrenta-estado-de-calamidade/> >; G1. Federal government denies authorization for humanitarian aid from Argentina to Bahia. Available at < <https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2021/12/29/governo-federal-nega-autorizacao-para-ajuda-humanitaria-da-argentina-a-bahia.ghtml> >;

¹⁰G1. [Increased to 145 municipalities in Minas Gerais in emergency situation because of the floods](https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2022/01/11/increm-to-145-municipalidades-em-minas-gerais-em-situacao-de-emergencia-devido-aos-inundacoes.ghtml)



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According to a report released on January 10 by the state's Civil Defense, since the beginning of the rainy season, on October 1, 2021, the occurrences have left **3,481 people homeless and another 13,756 displaced**. There were also **19 deaths caused by the rains**. The Civil Defense reported that the 10 deaths that occurred in the Capitólio tragedy are not included in this balance, until the investigations are concluded.

The regions affected by the Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019) ruptures are also suffering from floods, and the excess water turns the tailings that remain in the river beds, causing new contamination towards where the water inundates¹¹. In the Paraopeba Basin, there are about 700 people dislodged¹². There are risks of collapses and landslides in several places, and thousands of houses were destroyed, in addition to the loss of furniture, businesses, etc¹³.

On January 8, there was an overflow of a tailings dam belonging to French company Vallourec, which caused several material damages and interrupted the BR 040 highway for two days. After the overflow, the dam entered emergency grade 3, according to the classification of the National Mining Agency (ANM)¹⁴.

Situation in the Amazon

In the south-eastern region of Pará, heavy rains in late December and early January have caused flood in the Tocantins River and its tributaries, reaching 12 meters above the average water level. The city of Marabá is going through the biggest flood in the last 20 years for the period, and around 2 thousand families have already been affected¹⁵. In the state of Tocantins, the rise of the river also caused damage to roads, houses and rural properties. About 480 people are homeless. In Maranhão, 12 cities are in emergency situation, and 1,178 families are homeless or displaced.

In these regions, the MAB has been working with the communities, and at the same time pressuring the public authorities for there to be agility in serving those affected.

2. MAB's actions

¹¹ MAB. The Paraopeba Basin is flooded with water contaminated by ore tailings and around 700 people are homeless. Available at < <https://www.mab.org.br/2022/01/11/bacia-do-paraopeba-tem-alagamentos-com-agua-contaminada-por-rejeitos-de-minerio-e-cerca-de-700-desabrigados/> >

¹² MAB. The Paraopeba Basin is flooded with water contaminated by ore tailings and around 700 people are homeless. Available at < <https://mab.org.br/2022/01/11/bacia-do-paraopeba-tem-alagamentos-com-agua-contaminada-por-rejeitos-de-minerio-e-cerca-de-700-desabrigados/> >

¹³ Band Jornalismo. Video. Floods force 17,000 to leave their homes in Minas Gerais. Available at < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omjl4Jq6yKM>>.

¹⁴ MAB. VALLOUREC DAM OVERFLOWS IN NOVA LIMA (MG) AND BLOCKS BR 040. Available at < <https://mab.org.br/2022/01/08/vallourec-dam-overflows-in-nova-lima-mg-and-blocks-br-040/> >

¹⁵ Rede Brasil Atual. Flood in Marabá is already the biggest in 20 years and affects 2 thousand families. Available at < <https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/ambiente/2022/01/inundacao-em-maraba-ja-e-a-maior-em-20-anos-e-atinge-2-mil-familias/> >



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The insecurity of populations living around dams is a violation of rights in itself, seen as they are on constant alert, not knowing when the announced risk could become a rupture. This reality extends throughout the Brazilian territory.

The historical experience of MAB, in its 30 years of organizing populations affected by dams in Brazil, has shown that the organization of affected people, their education and effective participation in decision-making processes is what makes greater chances of mitigating damages in the short term possible, as well as reparation at medium and long term. The Movement has also acted in situations of dam ruptures, such as Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019) in Minas Gerais, Aurizona in Maranhão (2021), Casan in Santa Catarina (2021), among others, in which immediate humanitarian aid and psychosocial support to affected communities is needed. With this, the MAB has accumulated important experiences in the sense of carrying out emergency actions, but at the same time, organizing the populations in the search for reparation of their rights and the resumption of their lives.

At the moment, there are many solidarity initiatives and actions being carried out by different entities and institutions for immediate humanitarian aid. We know from other experiences that as water levels drop and people start to return to their homes (those that still exist), the situation “falls into oblivion” by the media and society. However, for the affected families, the longest period comes, as they need to organize the conditions for restructuring life.

In view of these facts and having solidarity as one of the MAB's guiding principles, the Movement organized, from the beginning, the following actions:

- (a) Follow-up with the communities that are being affected, with the displacement of leaderships to these places. In Bahia, the MAB is working together with social movements, entities, and the public power, organized in a Solidarity Brigade. Initially, the developed activities were organized in 3 municipalities: Salvador (capital), São Félix and Jequié. Immediate actions are distributing food, drinking water, cleaning houses and streets, and starting organizational activities to map damages and losses¹⁶. In Minas Gerais, operations are being carried out in the entire region of Brumadinho, Rio Doce Basin from Minas Gerais to Espírito Santo, and in the Amazon in the regions of Pará and Tocantins.
- (b) Solidarity campaign with those affected from all over Brazil and national and international partner entities to raise funds to pay for the organization of affected families and help in emergencies;
- (c) Dissemination of news and materials based on information from local leaders to denounce the situation in which the communities find themselves;

¹⁶ MAB. MAB joins the Solidarity Brigade for families affected by floods in Jequié (Bahia). Available at < <https://mab.org.br/2022/01/13/mab-se-soma-a-brigada-de-solidariedade-as-familias-atingidas-por-inundacoes-em-jequie-na-bahia/> >



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- (d) Support with the affected associations (ANAB and Aba-Leste), which filed a request with the state Court of Minas Gerais, with a request for the blocking of assets of the company Vallourec as a way of guaranteeing resources for the reparation of the damages caused by the dam's overflow¹⁷.

The MAB actions are being carried out to help with immediate humanitarian demands at this first moment, while at the same time, initiating action in favor of the organization of families, carrying out a survey of concrete and structural demands and proposals that contribute to the environmental, social, economic restructuring and cultural impact of the families and municipalities impacted. Initially, the MAB's activities were focused on those affected in Bahia, later it expanded to the states of Minas Gerais and Pará due to the expansion of the affected regions, and various risks of dam ruptures.

3. Goals of the Action

- Carry out solidarity activity, contributing to the basic needs of people affected by floods and dam ruptures;
- Organize a mapping of information on the damage caused and structure a collective claims agenda, with the participation of the affected communities;
- Contribute to the organization of the communities so that they are able to participate and pressure Governments and responsible companies for conditions to restructure their lives.

4. Methodology

Following the MAB's historical experience, at the moment actions are being held to help in several orders of emergency, through the organizational form involving the affected families. The perspective will be to structure and continue in a permanent work to help in the construction of solutions, mitigation of damages and reparation of rights. This will be done through the solidarity brigades, the action of local leaders, the organization of affected groups and extensive articulation with partner entities.

A general agenda of claims will be organized considering the needs of each territory and an activities and work plan to be developed in the next period, in the medium and long term.

5. Courses of action and activity planning

- Meetings in affected communities for psychosocial support to families;
- Actions for the distribution of essential materials, such as water, food, mattresses;

¹⁷ MAB. The MAB and associations of the affected file a lawsuit to ask for the blocking of Vallourec's assets and accounts. Available at < <https://mab.org.br/2022/01/13/mab-e-aba-leste-acionam-a-justica-para-pedir-bloqueio-de-bens-e-contas-da-vallourec/> >



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- Meetings in communities to discuss impacts, organization of families and advocacy with local governments in search of actions to repair and mitigate impacts;
- Formation of committees of those affected to discuss the demands and organize the claims agenda and strengthen the organization of the affected populations;
- Assemblies and negotiation meetings with state governments, public authorities, companies responsible for dams, the Prosecutor's Office and other relevant actors;
- Organization and participation in public acts in solidarity with families, and denouncing the situation;
- Advocacy activities/meetings at the National Congress, Legislative Assemblies of Bahia, Minas Gerais and Pará, and at the National Human Rights Council to denounce the case;
- Organize and develop environmental implementation programs with the population involved;
- Train groups of leaderships to act in emergencies, an increasingly necessary situation.

Waters for life, not for death!

MAB's National Coordination

January 18, 2022