

## Conference report: CASM Annual General Meeting and Regional Learning Event in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, September 18-24, 2005

By Heledd Jenkins

Heledd Jenkins, Gavin Hilson and Natalia Yakovleva attended this small-scale mining conference in Salvador de Bahia in the North East of Brazil (see map). The conference aim was to further develop short and long term strategies for dealing constructively with the social, environmental and technical challenges posed by artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and for maximizing the development potential of these activities where they are being practiced. The theme of the conference was "Building Sustainable Communities." The conference was run by an organisation called CASM (Communities and Small-Scale Mining), whose mission is "To reduce poverty by supporting integrated sustainable development of communities affected by or involved in artisanal and small-scale mining in developing countries". CASM is funded by a number of sponsors including the World Bank, Conservation International and the ILO.

The conference brought together delegates from 40 different countries from a diverse range of occupations such as small-scale miners, presidents of mining associations, anthropologists, economists, social scientists, environmentalists, geologists, ministers and NGO representatives.



Map of the Bahia region with areas visited marked in red

The conference was divided into plenary sessions with key note speakers and breakout workshops where issues were discussed in more depth. Delegates were introduced to the numerous social, environmental and economic issues and problems associated with ASM, such as:

- Gender equality
- Transport
- Laws and regulations
- Environmental degradation

- Access to Credit
- Marketing
- Resource Management
- Working conditions and health
- Child Labour
- Equipment, training and technical assistance
- Social dysfunction such as substance abuse, HIV AIDS and prostitution

The first day of the conference was dedicated to an overview of small-scale mining in Brazil and included presentations from Brazilian ministers discussing the government's response to illegal small-scale mining, from small-scale miners themselves and from communities affected by small-scale mining. There was also an opportunity for small-scale miners to showcase their work.

On the second day there were a range of presentations, including:

- Managing Natural Resources for Sustainability in ASM Communities
- Combating Child Labour in ASM and
- Large-scale/small-scale mining conflicts.

Gavin Hilson presented BRASS's work in the latter workshop- his presentation, titled "Strained Relations: A Critical Analysis of the Impasse in Prestea, Ghana", gave an initial overview of the fieldwork recently carried out by Gavin, Natalia Yakovleva and Louise Obara on large-scale/small-scale mining conflicts in the gold mining regions of Ghana, West Africa.



Gavin Hilson presenting

The last day of the conference had workshops on infectious disease and ASM, fair-trade and certification for ASM, simple guides to exploration, production and processing and the feasibility of Environmental Licensing.

The second part of the learning event involved field visits to small-scale mines in Brazil. Delegates stayed in a famous gold mining region called Jacobina whose

mountains hold rich gold deposits. We visited a small-scale gold mine that was operated by a local co-operative (Cooperativa Mista De Extracao de Minerios e Garimpeiros de Jacobina e Regiao Ltda) consisting of some 200 miners altogether. The site we visited was mined by 20 illegal miners or 'Garimpeiro' and was located on the concession of a Canadian large-scale mining company called Desert Sun who tolerated the presence of the miners. The nature of the mining here was very basic and the miners get very poor returns for their very hard work as their process is so inefficient. The first photograph shows the shaft into the mountainside where the ore is mined, the second shows a garimpeiro panning for gold once it has been crushed.



Opening to the gold mine, Jacobina



Garimpeiro panning for gold, Jacobina

On the second day we visited a town called Campo Formoso (see map) that is famous for its emerald commerce where we attended a reception hosted by the mayor. We then visited the emerald market where rough emeralds are selected and traded, before being taken to a local artisanal workshop for cutting and polishing. There were all

sorts of gems on sale here and many of the conference delegates made some good purchases! That evening we were treated to a folk show of music and dance in the centre of Jacobina.



Emerald specimen



Selecting rough emeralds for cutting



Folk music and dance, Jacobina

On our final day in the Jacobina area we visited the emerald mines in a village called Carnaiba where small-scale emerald mining is taking place. The village was up in the mountains and a bit of a bone shaking journey as the roads are so bad (most people use donkeys as transport here). Upper Carnaiba (where the emerald mining takes place) stands on the tailings (waste) of the mining process with a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. Those with the means mine in deep shafts in the upper part of the village, the shaft pictured is 350m deep and there were 15 men mining the shaft at the time of our visit. The equipment used was antiquated and health and safety measures were non-existent. The emerald bearing ore is winched to the surface in large leather bags (see picture) and is taken outside in wheelbarrows where women and children shovel it into trays and wash the stone, separating emeralds from rubbish and adding constantly to the tailings on which they stand.



Mine shaft- 350m deep, Carnaiba



Hauling up the emeralds, Carnaiba



Equipment used by women to wash and separate the emeralds, Carnaiba

In the lower part of the village people were searching the tailings of the mining process for any emeralds that have been missed (see picture). There's quite a good chance that they will find some as the washing process is so inefficient. Other people were opening up shafts into the side of the mountain by blasting with dynamite. Despite the obvious environmental destruction the view was still spectacular.



Picking over the tailings, Carnaiba



The view from Carnaiba

We thoroughly enjoyed our time in Brazil and learnt so much about small-scale mining, particularly through the field visits. Seeing life being led in such a different way to how we lead ours really highlights the true challenge posed by sustainable development.