

# BRUMADINHO

70 days later:  
Endless realities  
of the same crime

## BRUMADINHO – 70 days later: Endless realities of the same crime

Two months have passed since January 25th. Two months ago, the lives of people in the region of Brumadinho (MG) were interrupted in the crime committed by the mining company Vale do Rio Doce, with the disruption of the dam of Córrego do Feijão. Two months after the buzz of the traditional press and its quantitative coverage. Number of dead, missing, survivors, investments that have fallen.

According to the report of SOS Mata Atlântica, released on March 22nd, the breakup poured almost 13 million cubic meters of mining tailings on the Paraopeba River, leaving the local ecosystem devastated, dead.

[The concentration of iron, manganese, chromium and copper was detected, in addition to the water turbidity level](#) exceeding the legal limits established by the National Environmental Council (Conama).

Alzira de Fátima, who lived in the region, reports that in the first days after the breakup, it was possible to see pieces of human bodies and many animals passing through the river course. Now she asks herself what will become of her, who used to cook for the fishermen and now has no income. When showing the cultivation of cassava in the backyard, she asks: “Do you think I can eat this? I don’t have courage... It’s so close to this contaminated river. It must be contaminated too”.

A few kilometres down the Paraopeba River, there are many people whose livelihood depended on the river. Fishermen, residents by the riverbed who earned the living from the local economy generated by fishing or planted their own food, now await the developments.



Photo: Rodrigo Zaim R.U.A/Christian Aid

“Vale has stolen my peace of mind. I lost my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law was found, we suffered, but we managed to close that chapter. But now I live on hold, every day, for news of my sister. I can no longer do what was my greatest joy, go walking in the middle of the bush, because at any moment I think they will call me to say that they found her body.” -Atamaio Ferreira, resident of Córrego do Feijão.



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Through the Quick Response Fund of the ACT Alliance<sup>1</sup>, the Ecumenical Forum ACT Brazil (FEACT) is acting in the region until the end of April, coordinated by KOINONIA. In partnership with the Movement of People Affected By Dams (MAB), the actions deliver psychosocial support and water and food distribution for affected families.

In addition, the work also took place in partnerships with the Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF), the local section of Minas Gerais of the Public Defender's offices (DPU), the Catholic Church and the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC-MG).

Débora Matte is a training psychologist and has acted as advisor and monitor of the psychosocial care teams of the joint MAB/FEACT – KOINONIA.

A lover of nature, Débora tells how her mouth filled with water when she saw guava trees in the backyard of one of the houses she was visiting during the work of psychosocial support. "Will people not end up eating this guava at some point? There's a garden full of lettuce in the backyard. Won't they ever be able to get a leaf to put on their plate?"

MAB monitors, denounces and assists people affected by the crime in Brumadinho [since January 25th](#), through the groups of volunteers who moved to the entire basin of the Paraopeba river and along the

<sup>1</sup> - ACT Alliance is a coalition based in Geneva (Switzerland), which brings together 151 faith-based organizations and churches, working together in more than 125 countries.

São Francisco river, where the mud and contamination began to arrive, two months after the breakup.

Since January about 760 families are being monitored with psychosocial support through periodical visits; residents have been supported in: emergency needs, maintaining the unity of communities and helping the action of local community committees; support in assemblies to access information on missing persons, among other specific demands.

The distribution of food and drinking water reached a number of 1390 families attended (considering also partnerships with the churches).

Taking into account what happened in Mariana, the presence of social organizations in the region is essential, among them the ecumenical ones. This ensures that the population isn't helpless and vulnerable to the agreements proposed by Vale. The presence of Churches, the Movement of Affected by Dams, Ecumenical Forum, among others, guarantees a balance in the region and supports the main role of affected people in the struggle for repairs and compensations.



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One of the achievements was the negotiation with communities and the Public prosecutor's Office for indemnities and compensatory measures by Vale in the Court of Justice of Minas Gerais.

*After judicial decision, Vale must pay:*

- 1) For people in the Municipality of Brumadinho, monthly for a period of 12 months
  - A minimum wage (s. m) for each adult;
  - Half minimum wage for each young or adolescent;
  - and 1/4 minimum wage for each child.
  
- 2) For people who live within a radius 1km by the Paraopeba River and up to 20 km of Brumadinho:
  - The same Provisional indemnities decided for Brumadinho: 1 S.M. per adult, 1/2 s. m per young or adolescent and 1/4 S.M. per child, monthly for 12 months.

Crimes such as this in Brumadinho are not isolated facts. The list of impacts and threats by large companies related to the use of common goods is not small in Brazil or in other countries of Latin America. While these countries continue to be treated as the backyard of companies like Vale, crimes like Brumadinho and Mariana will keep happening.





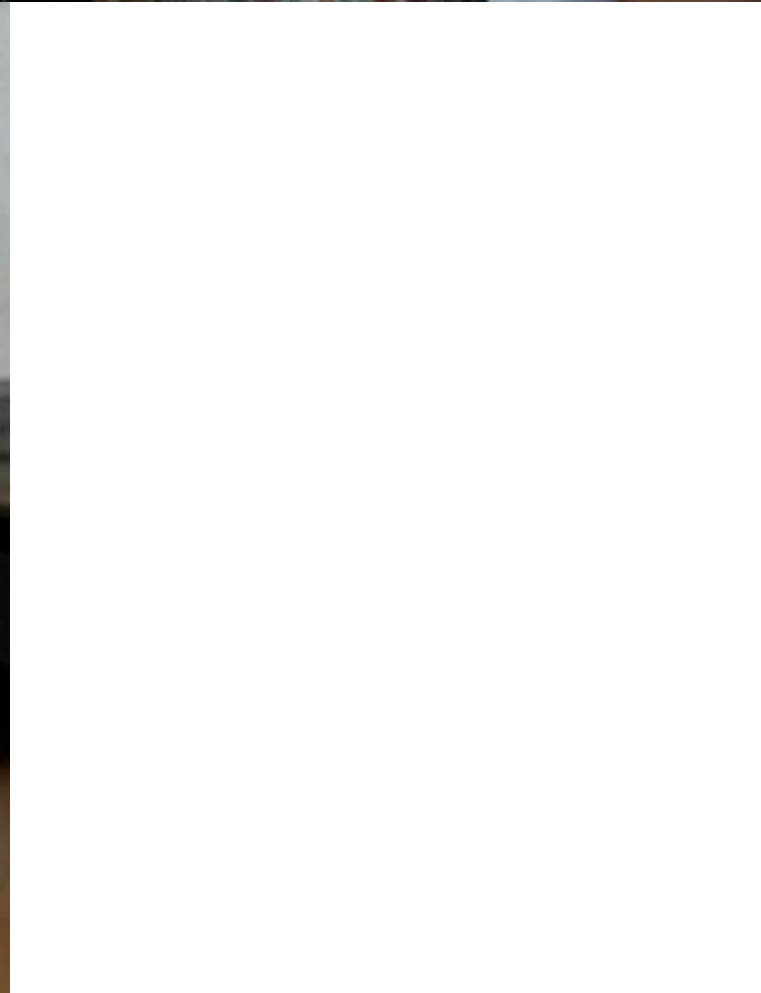
Photos: MAB Communication team







Photos: MAB Communication team





Photos: MAB Communication team









## WHAT ABOUT THE LIVES THAT STAY?

Débora and other partners reported that stories of children drawing bodies, blood and helicopters are now common in the region, in a clear sign of the traumatic experience they faced. The resident Sara de Souza Silva tells about the trauma in her children, who can no longer sleep alone.

“For me, Vale had to get everyone out of here. How will the children grow up with that memory? How are they going to develop in the midst of all this mud?”

The region presents distinct and complex scenarios. In the center of Brumadinho, people try to maintain a regular life, and the families of the region of Córrego do Feijão think of how to move forward.

The relationship with the local government and the company Vale makes things more difficult since they both demonstrated mutual interests in weakening the mitigation negotiations. The affected population is participating in committees (10 committees with an average of 100 families each) trained with the help of the MAB/FEACT-KOINONIA articulation since the first week after the disaster.

It was found that the responsible mining company infiltrated with false victims in family committees, used illegal digital control, mobilized mobile playgrounds (where there was work of the psychosocial team with children) and hired psychosocial professional, causing an intense flow of external volunteers, with the community itself reporting discomfort with the situation.

The MAB/FEACT – KOINONIA articulation not only improves the

action of coordinating the lists of assisted families and free advocacy services, but also seeks to ensure a more sustainable long-term contribution, as with the experience gained in similar cases. Reconstitution and guarantee of rights can take years.

Débora tells that they became known as “the people of the little house”, because they ended up establishing a circle of trust with the community. “We ended up creating a bond with people. The families wanted us to be in the funeral with them, they felt safe when they saw the people with our T-shirt. They called us to go to the houses. So they see us and already know that we are people with whom they can talk.”



Photo: Rodrigo Zaim R.U.A/Christian Aid

**Check out the remainder of the interview/report by Débora Matte:**

## YOU NEED TO HEAR PEOPLE'S PAIN, AND WE'RE THERE FOR THAT.

Listening with empathy. This is the most common used verb by Débora when reporting on the work performed by the psychosocial support team. A pain that cannot be measured, but can be heard.

“And when the operations are over, will we be forgotten here?”, it was a question that Deborah has frequently heard. Not only her, but other people on the team:

*The psychosocial support of MAB is there to listen and let those people feel that pain. The moment is about the pain, and they need to feel it, we're there to feel it with them. If they don't do it, this will turn into a psychic symptom sometime later. There's no way you're going to drown out this moment. We are there to encourage people to talk about their pains, like them, how can the community organize themselves to face this together? What are the doubts? What are the demands?*

*It bothers me the discourse that the person must thank God because she didn't die. She's not dead but her life is destroyed. She lost cousin, uncle, grandmother, dog, house, land. It's not just giving 'thanks God'.*

*Our role is to ensure the affected people are on the lead. Because they're usually people who aren't used to being protagonists. It is the greatest psychosocial support we can offer. There's a lot of entities that want to put those people in the role of the poor. And that role doesn't favour the person, she needs to talk and understand what she's going through.*

## THE CITY BREATHES, WAKES, SLEEPS, LUNCHES AND EATS CRIME

*The Rescue Operations Center is in Brumadinho city. So there's no pause, the helicopters don't stop, you're at religious celebration and the bodies fly over you. You're talking to people on the street and another body passes flying. Because even if they're in the bags, you know what it is, and people are in the shade of it.*



Photo: Rodrigo Zaim R.U.A/Christian Aid



*Another frequent thing there were the sirens. At daybreak, it was raining, a siren rang. And no one knew the reason for the siren, there were no kind of preparation to escape in case anything else happens, there was no escape route training. Moreover, the other neighbouring mining company, MIB, continued to operate until justice blocked its operation.*

*There was a night I talked to a fireman, me and a journalist, because we heard a strange noise. And the population there, right? Worried about other dams possibly breaking, the lack of information. That's what I think is the most cruel, the lack of information from Vale to the people.*

*Families who lost four, five people. It's a situation that has no pause. People's lives today are taken over by the breakup. They stopped on the 25th. Everybody knows someone who's dead. From two to five candles a day, the smell of death is there, that smell of rot.*

*Vale does not do more than the obligation to offer and strengthen the public policy of the region. Because people are going to get sick after that.*

## **YOU WASH YOUR HAIR AND YOUR HAIR DOESN'T GET CLEAN**

*The water that arrives in people's homes, no one knows where it comes from. Vale would inform people, , but then no one had the confirmation of the information, what kind of water was being distributed. Nobody saw the distributor truck.*

*No one knew if the water was good or bad, then the order was not to drink or cook (only with mineral water).*

*A part of my skin got dirty with the mud in one of the days, and it wouldn't leave. I was trying to get the stain out for more than four days. And what about those who live there? That's in the backyard of their house. There's even families living on top of the mud, in Córrego do Feijão. Because they didn't want to get out of there, and it's their right. You take a whole family and put it in a hotel, and then what? The hotel is for a temporary situation. It's not a thing for you to stay a month, two months.*



Photo: Rodrigo Zaim R.U.A/Christian Aid

## **THE ROOTS OF THE PEOPLE WERE INVADED BY THE MUD, IT IS THE MATERIAL AND INTANGIBLE GOOD**

*For Vale, the farmer is the one who's affected. Or people who lost a family member or the ones who lost a house. But there are visible and also invisible impacts. Because it's a countryside community, so people earn their living from farming and fishing.*

*Practically in all houses there are chickens, vegetables, fruits, and all of this is inappropriate for consumption. So what about these families, who own these foods but can no longer consume? This is a kind of income that cannot be evidenced.*

*For example, a gentleman came looking for us because he was having trouble at work. The boss was threatening him because he wasn't able to go to work because of the lack of transport.*

*With the rupture of the dam, the road<sup>1</sup> that connected Córrego do Feijão to the center of Brumadinho was interdicted. People were taking 2 hours to get downtown. They were isolated. There were no buses, and not everyone has a car.*

*So there was a legal dispute with Vale so they would provide transportation to the population. We always say to people that they can demand this kind of thing. It's their right. Because in Brazilian culture, people seem not to know their rights. Then the person is vulnerable.*

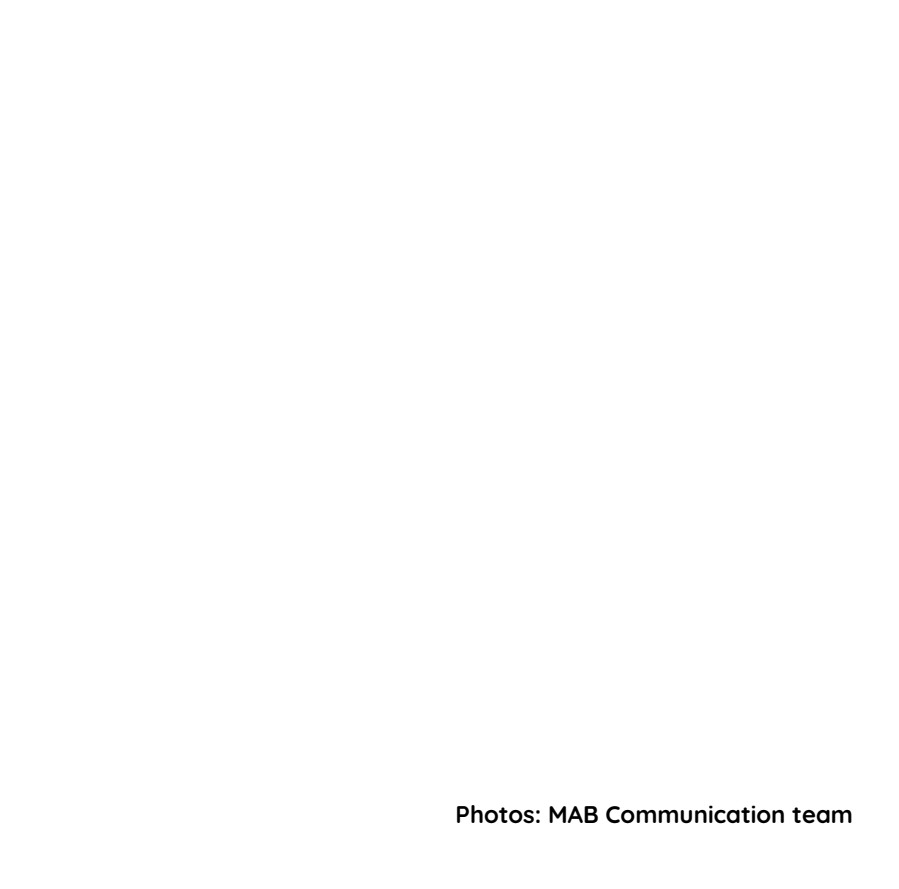
<sup>1</sup> - A month after the disruption, the road had been released. But soon, it came a flurry, precluding the passage again. Only in the first week of April Alberto Flores Avenue, which connects the region of Córrego do Feijão to the center was released by Vale.

*They don't need a lawyer, they can count on the public defender. They can make a commission, appeal collectively, because the collective is stronger than the individual. And it represents protection to the people.*



Photo: Rodrigo Zaim R.U.A./Christian Aid





Photos: MAB Communication team





Photos: MAB Communication team







Photos: MAB Communication team

**Photos:**

MAB Communication Team and Christian Aid Brazil

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*to FEACT Brasil/ ACT Aliança*

