



## INTERNATIONAL SERVICE MAKING CONNECTIONS

LINKING DEVELOPMENT WORKERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY



### *connecting with . . . Lucy Burghard*

#### September 2004

Its festival time in Amazonas. Frilly lime green leg warmers and lurid iridescent costumes compete with peacock feathers and indigenous body paints amongst the dancing troops here in Manacapuru.

Whilst Carnival and local folklore festivals are part of the cultural context of Brazil, the celebration and hedonism they represent also bring with them a shedding of inhibitions and liberty that invariably leads to unplanned pregnancies and exposure to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

Brazil has the highest number of cases of HIV in Latin America, with 0.7% of the population (over 10 million people) presently infected and an endemic, as in sub-Saharan Africa, now predominantly heterosexual in transmission. Women and the poor are particularly vulnerable due to health inequalities second only to Bangladesh. An estimated 12% of the population struggles to survive on less than a dollar a day.

The projects with whom I am working are dedicated to preventing STIs and HIV through peer education and outreach at a grassroots level, by operating in the areas where risk behaviour and macho attitudes are most prevalent: the bars/ clubs/ port area and red light districts of this Amazonian town. Armed with latex penises, condoms and stomach churning (well, leg crossing) graphic pictures of advanced states of venereal diseases, they use humour and sketches to reinforce the safe sex message. While health promotion Brazil style is not for shrinking violets, some might well argue that this full on attitude has led to one of the most proactive responses to the HIV endemic seen to date. Responses range from TV ads and the free distribution of condoms (demand outstrips supply here, and female condoms are especially popular) to the manufacture of generic drugs in challenge to the monopolies of the pharmaceutical industry.

To participate in and learn from this model is why I wanted to be here. Occasionally during these initial few months, when the struggle (and invariably the failure) to keep up with Portuguese chatter has felt overwhelming, or when temperatures threaten the mid 30°C and people gleefully point out the extent to which I am sweating, I fleetingly reconsider this decision. But not for long-- after all, there's always another festival to prepare for . . .

*Photos: Lucy with several of IS's Brazilian partners at a Roundtable meeting; the Princesinha Project poster.*



#### **Lucy Burghard**

Health Worker with *Projeto Princesinha*  
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