

Sensitive and collaborative methodologies: Uncovering the resistance and struggles of vulnerable territories in the Cerrado biome

Metodologias sensíveis e colaborativas: desocultando resistências e lutas dos territórios vulnerabilizados no Cerrado

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ABSTRACT This study analyzes the limits and possibilities of sensitive and collaborative methodologies, based on the experience of the Workshop on Sensitive and Collaborative Research and Action Methodologies for Deepening Understanding of Ecocide in the Cerrado, held in 2025 with representatives of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities of the Cerrado. Twenty-nine people participated, including Fiocruz research groups, representatives of Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, coconut breakers, fishermen, social movements, and members of civil society organizations. Participants were invited through articulation with existing socio-territorial networks and the National Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado. The main outcomes included a shared commitment to continuing the actions and strengthening articulation between academia, communities, and public policies. Additional key results included proposals to expand participation from other territories and deepen the exchange of experiences to strengthen struggles in defense of the Cerrado; the need to carry out training activities within the territories; the development of research protocols; the strengthening of popular communication; and initiatives to value and preserve the memory of Indigenous and traditional peoples.

KEYWORDS Methodologies. Health. Cerrado. Indigenous peoples. Communities.

RESUMO Objetivou-se analisar os limites e as possibilidades do uso de metodologias sensíveis e colaborativas a partir da experiência da Oficina de Trabalho Metodologias Sensíveis e Colaborativas de Pesquisa e Ação para Aprimoramento da Compreensão do Ecogenocídio no Cerrado, realizada em 2025 com representantes de povos originários e comunidades tradicionais do Cerrado, discutindo como essas práticas contribuem para a produção compartilhada do conhecimento, do fortalecimento territorial e da compreensão crítica do ecocídio no bioma. Participaram 29 pessoas, incluindo grupos de pesquisa da Fiocruz, representantes de povos originários, comunidades quilombolas, quebradeiras de coco, pescadores, movimentos sociais e integrantes de organizações da sociedade civil. O convite aos participantes foi realizado por meio de articulação com redes socioterritoriais já existentes e com a Campanha Nacional em Defesa do Cerrado. Dentre os resultados obtidos, destacam-se o compromisso de continuidade das ações e o fortalecimento da articulação entre academia, comunidades e políticas públicas. Além disso, ressaltam-se como resultados: proposta de ampliação da participação de outros territórios e aprofundamento da troca de experiências para fortalecer as lutas em defesa do Cerrado; necessidade de realizar formações nos territórios; elaboração de protocolos de pesquisa; fortalecimento da comunicação popular; ações de valorização da memória dos povos originários e tradicionais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Metodologias. Saúde. Cerrado. Povos indígenas. Comunidades.

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Introduction

The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) has taken on the challenge of forging scientific, technological, and productive collaborations that deliver meaningful and distinctive results, promoting partnerships focused on innovative health solutions. This effort reflects an understanding that it is necessary to move beyond the ‘comfort zones’ achieved by the expansion and consolidation of Unified Health System (SUS) nationwide, and to engage directly with territories that have long been made vulnerable—home to Indigenous peoples, rural communities, forest and riverine populations, as well as residents of urban peripheries.

Beyond its role in strengthening public policies—both those related to the SUS and policies addressing the socio-environmental determinants of health—the FIOCRUZ has developed strategies and approaches designed to make its methodologies and actions more sensitive, collaborative, and far-reaching, aligned with the ‘ways of living’ of these peoples and communities. This work is carried out in accordance with its innovation policy, which guides institutional action to promote the generation of knowledge, products, and services, while expanding access to health for society as a whole. Among these strategies are the ‘Sustainable and Healthy Territories’ (TSS), ‘Participatory Territorial Governance and Management’, ‘Sensitive and Collaborative Methodologies’, and ‘Popular Health Surveillance’ (VPS).

TSS is an aspirational strategy grounded in the relationship between sustainability, health promotion, and territory. It enables analysis and action for interaction- and solidarity-based cooperation among the individual body, society, living beings, and the planet, thereby laying the foundations for emancipatory practices that foster autonomy and health¹.

Participatory Territorial Governance and Management conceives of territory as a space of conflict, constantly shaped by struggles over the production and reproduction of ways of life. Within this dynamic, community

protagonism is central, as these struggles increasingly rely on the building of interscalar networks of solidarity. Such networks are vital to the development of horizontal, strategic, and participatory forms of governance and management, constructed in partnership with social movements. Advancing this approach requires governance and management frameworks capable of giving concrete expression to counter-hegemonic principles, enhancing and democratizing processes of planning, management, evaluation, and administration, while establishing systems of accountability and autonomy that strengthen both management capacity and governability^{2,3}.

Sensitive and Collaborative Methodologies foster instituting processes through which people who live, work, and mobilize within territories assume an active role—particularly in recognizing, validating, and supporting forms of knowledge oriented toward social transformation, struggles for rights, and the pursuit of dignity and well-being. Developing TSS within an agenda shaped by socio-environmental crises calls for a recovery of an epistemology grounded in wisdom, one that integrates ontological, methodological, pedagogical, artistic, and affective dimensions. From this perspective, social transformation also requires moving beyond a hegemonic model of science that, in the name of objectivity, excludes knowledge systems and lived experiences rooted in other spheres of community life, including traditional ones⁴.

VPS has been used to describe surveillance practices that prioritize the protagonism of communities, organizations, and social movements. These practices may involve varying degrees of engagement by the State, academia, and health professionals, provided that popular actors and forms of knowledge are recognized and that these actors commit themselves to participatory and dialogical processes⁵.

The convergence of these approaches—alongside other similar ones—through territorially grounded actions developed in recent years has fostered the production of

knowledge and forms of intervention that make it possible to know, generate knowledge, and transform realities together with territorial subjects, drawing on their worldviews, ways of living, and aspirations⁶. This convergence is also rooted in a decolonial understanding of health, which conceives the production of care and knowledge as processes shaped by historical power relations, and calls for overcoming the coloniality of knowledge, of being, and of nature through the valorization of epistemologies from Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and popular knowledge systems⁷.

In this context, the struggles and forms of resistance of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities in the Cerrado territories express not only responses to but also historical processes of dispossession and marginalization. At the same time, they constitute powerful forms of knowledge production, care, and social organization, grounded in alternative rationalities. These experiences—shaped by intense conflicts over land rights, the defense of biodiversity and water resources, food sovereignty, and the daily confrontation of structural violence—underscore the urgency of recognizing and incorporating such practices and knowledges as constitutive dimensions of a new paradigm of health and sustainability. By articulating territorial practices of resistance with innovative institutional strategies, FIOCRUZ positions itself within this broader field of disputes over development models, contributing to the construction of integrated and participatory responses to the multiple crises affecting territories and the lives of the collective subjects who inhabit them.

Material and methods

This is an experience-based report grounded in a qualitative and participatory approach, in which the Workshop on Sensitive and Collaborative Methodologies, held in March 2025, constitutes the central empirical field.

As an experience report, this article describes, analyzes, and critically interprets the processes that took place during the meeting, taking into account its objectives, participants, methodological procedures, formative dynamics, and collectively produced outcomes.

The workshop was held in the auditorium of a hotel in Brasília/DF, in a closed, formally structured meeting space. It began with a *mística*—a practice widely used in Latin American social movements consisting of a symbolic, aesthetic, and spiritual activity aimed at strengthening collective identity, awakening emotions, and connecting personal experiences to the memory of territories. This was followed by participants' introductions and a historical overview of FIOCRUZ's work on the topic, emphasizing its engagement with the ecology of knowledges and a decolonial perspective on health. The workshop also presented its cooperation with the National Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado, including studies and data on environmental and human impacts in the region. Reference was made in this context to the 15 cases presented at the Final Hearing of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal⁸, which exposed a profound pattern of systemic violence against human beings, territories, biodiversity, and socio-environmental dynamics. It was highlighted that there are ongoing processes to which FIOCRUZ can contribute in a structured way, and discussions addressed methodologies and procedures capable of expanding actions beyond the communities already involved.

The workshop was structured around discussion circles, body-based practices, and participatory activities designed to activate emotions, narratives, and situated experiences, while fostering an environment of attentive listening and collective knowledge-building.

Participants' contributions were systematized and analyzed through the lens of Sensitive and Collaborative Methodologies, informing critical reflection and the development of the analytical framework underpinning this study. Methodologically, this article

draws on the active reflections generated during the workshop, based on the transcription and organization of its different moments. The records included the voices of territorial actors in the broader discussion, conceptual framings, and shared practices, as well as the outcomes of group activities, which provided key elements for the analyses presented below.

The workshop was conducted in accordance with the specific objective 'Develop a model for studying health conditions' within the research project 'Ecocide and Globalization of the Brazilian Cerrado: Resistance and Struggles of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Communities for the Rights to Health and Life', which was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Aggeu Magalhães Institute – FIOCRUZ Pernambuco, under Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Consideration (CAAE) No. 53414421.3.0000.5190 and Opinion No. 5.174.726, as an integral part of the broader research project 'From the Territories to the Cerrado Court: Pesticides Dossier on the Agenda'.

The workshop and the systematization process described in this article received institutional support from FIOCRUZ and were developed within the scope of the FIOCRUZ Cerrados Foresight Project.

Results and discussion

The discussions held during the workshop highlighted a wide range of themes related to education, territorial protection, the strengthening of traditional communities, and the development of collective strategies for resistance and the promotion of life.

Within the field of differentiated education, particular emphasis was placed on practices such as the social mapping of territories, understood as a participatory method that enables communities to represent space based on their own lived experiences, identifying vulnerabilities, potentialities, and collective memories⁹. This understanding is aligned with

studies that frame New Social Cartography as a counter-hegemonic practice of territorial affirmation, capable of making visible conflicts, processes of dispossession, and community identities, while strengthening strategies for territorial claims and management¹⁰. In the initiatives analyzed, such cartographies have been incorporated into educational practices as pedagogical tools that reinforce community bonds and broaden the participation of local knowledge holders, herbalists (*raizeiros*), and community leaders, thereby valuing traditional knowledge systems.

Differentiated education is grounded in the sociocultural, territorial, linguistic, and historical specificities of peoples, recognizing their distinctive ways of learning and producing knowledge, closely linked to cosmologies and traditional modes of knowledge transmission¹¹. This perspective departs from standardized pedagogical models by affirming historically marginalized epistemologies, strengthening collective identities, and expanding community protagonism¹². Its effectiveness depends on formative practices rooted in listening, autonomy, and engagement with the territory and the lived experiences of individuals¹¹.

The pedagogy of struggle emerged as a central concept, highlighting that the organizational processes of traditional communities also constitute educational practices that strengthen resistance, social cohesion, and the creation of possible worlds. This understanding resonates with analyses that describe the pedagogy of struggle as arising from the territorial experiences of Quilombola, Indigenous, and Afro-Brazilian religious (*terreiro*) communities, in which collective gatherings, circles of knowledge, *ipádès* (ritual and political assemblies), and concrete confrontations with colonial violence constitute distinct ways of learning, teaching, and engaging politically¹³. Exchanges of experience were valued as mechanisms for the collective construction of knowledge, capable of broadening understanding of the challenges faced in the territories, both for the peoples themselves and for society at large.

Within this process of reflecting on pedagogical practices rooted in social struggles, debate also emerged around Quilombola identity and its impacts on the educational trajectories of young people. It was emphasized that Quilombola identity goes beyond phenotypical markers and cannot be reduced to skin color, as it is rooted in ancestry, collective history, and a sense of territorial belonging. This understanding prompted discussions on the criteria for access to racial quota policies in higher education, given that current policies often fail to recognize the complexity of identity formation processes. Participants' statements highlighted that identity validation based exclusively on physical characteristics or institutional documentation overlooks community-based forms of recognition and fails to account for the effects of structural racism, violence, and territorial dispossession on the educational trajectories of young Quilombolas.

Beyond these issues, it was emphasized that strengthening leadership development is essential, as the intensification of violence and persecution has made it increasingly difficult to sustain these processes within communities. In response, the creation of permanent and popular education initiatives was proposed, involving the entire community in processes of struggle and resistance. Such initiatives would ensure that formative practices take place within the territories themselves and are sustained through networks of mutual support, strengthening social bonds, expanding political capacities, and fostering community-based protection.

In the realm of public policy, emphasis was placed on the need to prioritize policies specifically tailored to Quilombola and Indigenous peoples, alongside emergency measures in response to escalating violence. Urgent demands were identified for both health and territorial protection, as well as for coordinated action across government agencies to address the exclusion and violence linked to the expansion of agribusiness. The discussion also underscored the urgency of measures to confront gender-based violence, warning that women

leaders are under increasing threat and may be forced to withdraw from ongoing struggles.

The right to free, prior, and informed consultation was reaffirmed as a key legal and political safeguard for community autonomy and self-determination. This right is established under International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 and incorporated into Brazilian law through Decree No. 6.040/2007, which recognizes traditional peoples and communities and guarantees their participation in decisions affecting their ways of life and territories. It was stressed that consultation should be carried out through recognized participatory channels—such as public hearings, councils, conferences, and community protocols—capable of ensuring meaningful and informed community input on initiatives that affect their territories, ways of life, and sociocultural practices^{14,15}. Against this backdrop, concern was raised about the presence of external actors and researchers entering territories without prior consent, underscoring the need to regulate and monitor access to these areas and to ensure that any action or research complies with consultation and authorization procedures collectively defined by the communities themselves.

In addition, participants argued for the need to strengthen coordination among territories and to reinforce community-based protection networks, ensuring that agroecology remains central as a strategy for territorial sovereignty and resistance. Communication was also identified as a key element in defending the Cerrado, underscoring the importance of valuing memory, traditional identities, and territorial governance.

In this context, the creation of a virtual space was discussed for storing and organizing materials produced about the territories, allowing communities, researchers, and institutions to access information in a secure and controlled manner. Access would be granted upon request and accompanied by a justification, ensuring transparency and respect for community-defined protocols governing

the use and circulation of territorial information. It was further emphasized that materials should be produced primarily in clear, accessible, and popular language, so as to facilitate understanding and strengthen community ownership of the information, thereby supporting formative processes, territorial defense initiatives, and social mobilization.

Coordination with government authorities was identified as essential to ensuring the protection of the lives of Indigenous peoples and environmental leaders, as well as to addressing crimes such as ecocide, genocide, ethnocide, and epistemicide. More effective protection networks were also proposed, including the involvement of agencies such as the Federal Police. In addition, participants suggested organizing events and meetings to strengthen connections among territories and expand the exchange of experiences.

Finally, the discussion addressed the need to confront epistemic denialism, understood as the rejection of the legitimacy of science in public debate. This phenomenon exploits the inherent uncertainties of scientific practice to manufacture false controversies and undermine consensus, and is often associated with misinformation and political disputes¹⁶. It was also noted that this form of denialism challenges science's capacity to justify its authority beyond specialized domains¹⁷.

During the workshop, it was emphasized that addressing this challenge requires a pluralistic approach to science that engages with traditional knowledge systems and the lived experiences of territorial contexts. The defense of the diversity of Cerrado peoples was linked to the need for training initiatives that integrate health, environment, and rights within a unified framework. It was understood that the protection of life entails recognizing environmental impacts as part of an ongoing process of destruction—characterized as ecocide—that extends beyond nature itself to encompass the histories, ways of life, and knowledge systems of traditional communities.

Vision and Voices from the Territories

The accounts provided by communities reveal the complex realities experienced across the Cerrado territories, marked by multiple forms of social, environmental, and political vulnerability. Among the most frequently reported impacts are contamination by pesticides—including aerial spraying over residential areas—and the consequences of agribusiness expansion, which are associated with rising rates of illness and broader health problems. Reports of political persecution, arbitrary arrests, and illegitimate pressure to relinquish land rights point to mechanisms of institutional repression targeting community leaders. These challenges are compounded by weak environmental enforcement and inadequate local infrastructure, which hinder mobility and deepen exclusion. Difficulties in accessing technical reports, along with the fragility of the legal frameworks supporting complaints, further expose the State's limited capacity to respond to the violations experienced on the ground.

Water contamination was widely reported, with particular emphasis on a community where analyses detected the presence of multiple pesticides—a situation also identified in studies documenting recurrent contamination of both surface and groundwater in regions with intensive use of these substances¹⁸. This exposure has been associated with dermatological diseases, cancer, neurological disorders, and depressive symptoms^{19–21}. It was noted that the presence of pesticides in water supply sources undermines the right to safe water, as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly, which establishes access to sufficient, safe, and affordable water as a universal human right²². This commitment is further reinforced by the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 6, which calls for universal access to safe drinking water, with specific attention to vulnerable populations²³.

In 2024, the intensification of deforestation led to the loss of approximately 700 hectares

of native vegetation, directly undermining the livelihoods of families whose economies are closely tied to the sustainable use of Cerrado fruits and medicinal plants. The indiscriminate clearing of babassu groves—a characteristic element of the Cerrado—was identified as an expression of the extractive logic of certain economic ventures. The babassu palm is a native species of major ecological, economic, and cultural importance. Its fruits are widely used by local communities to produce oil, flour, charcoal, and food, while its leaves and fibers are used in handicrafts and household utensils²⁴. These uses sustain ways of life, generate income, and are embedded in the cultural and organizational practices of the *quebradeiras de coco* (coconut breakers), who depend directly on the preservation of babassu groves for their social reproduction. The destruction of these areas undermines food security, disrupts local economies, and weakens the socio-territorial ties that are fundamental to communities living in the Cerrado.

The struggle for access to fundamental rights such as healthcare and land tenure regularization has proven to be an ongoing process marked by institutional barriers. Even with the assignment of community health agents in some localities, there are still reports of long waiting times for basic laboratory tests—sometimes exceeding 90 days—which undermines timely responses to health needs. These challenges are compounded by the recurrent failure to implement planned projects and the non-release of previously announced funds, further weakening the effectiveness of public policies.

It was further noted that judicial decisions often favor the interests of economic sectors linked to environmentally damaging practices and violations of social rights. Concerns were also raised about the alleged involvement of agencies such as State Departments of Transportation (DETRANs), police forces, and municipal governments in arrangements that undermine the legitimacy of community claims. In relation to land regularization, the National Institute for Colonization and

Agrarian Reform (INCRA) reportedly announced the titling of five territories for 2025; however, according to community accounts, the process has been repeatedly delayed, with portions of land being excluded in ways that residents and local leaders describe as arbitrary. The expression ‘areas considered arbitrary’ refers to sections of territory that are removed or reduced during delimitation processes without transparent justification or prior consultation, contradicting communities’ historically grounded recognition of their own territorial boundaries. Such reductions have been documented in studies on land conflicts in Brazil, which indicate that administrative decisions frequently establish borders based on criteria external to local realities, resulting in maps that fail to reflect territories as they are actually lived and experienced^{25,26}.

It was observed that the impacts of environmental degradation extend beyond the boundaries of the Cerrado biome. In the states of Maranhão, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Pernambuco, the expansion of agribusiness has often advanced in disregard of the rights of local populations. Communities reported pesticide spraying affecting crops and contaminating water sources, with potentially serious consequences for both human health and the environment. Leaders who oppose these practices described experiencing threats, physical violence, and coercion. Social movements and researchers have interpreted this situation as a form of ecocide, whose impacts undermine the sociocultural reproduction and health of Indigenous and traditional populations. This context also reinforces what has been denounced as environmental racism, given that historically marginalized groups are disproportionately affected.

The concepts of ecocide and environmental racism are central to this reflection and debate. In this context, ecocide is understood as the large-scale destruction of the ecosystem of a given territory²⁷, rupturing the relationship between society and nature and violating the very foundations that sustain life. Emerging

from the struggles of the peoples of the Cerrado, however, the National Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado and the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal have deepened and expanded this understanding by advancing the notion of the ecogenocide of the Cerrado. This concept frames socio-environmental destruction as a violent and ongoing process that profoundly undermines the diversity of life historically created and sustained by the peoples of this biome-territory²⁸. Drawing on the experiences discussed in this study, the testimonies gathered point to the ecogenocide of the Cerrado—and, consequently, the violence inflicted upon Indigenous and traditional peoples—as being at an advanced stage.

The ecocide and ecogenocide of the Cerrado are inseparably connected to the notion of environmental racism. This concept, which arose within the context of struggles led by social movements, draws attention to the human groups and territories most exposed to capital's encroachment upon natural resources, while framing the racial debate within policies that govern the occupation and distribution of social groups in healthy and dignified environments—those with basic sanitation and free from any form of social exclusion. Thus, the fight against environmental racism is a “[...] struggle for territorial dignity and for the recognition that all lives deserve to be lived in healthy environments and that all deaths deserve to be mourned”²⁹.

Thus, given the ecocide of the Cerrado and environmental racism, the lack of effective public policies—together with neglect on the part of public authorities—tends to deepen the vulnerability of these populations. Since 2016, the National Campaign in Defense of the Cerrado has worked to make these violations visible and to mobilize national and international support for the peoples of the Cerrado. Central to this effort is the training of representatives from diverse social groups engaged in the struggle for the Cerrado biome. At the same time, the campaign is grounded in the production of informational, conceptual,

and advocacy materials, developed collaboratively with the peoples of the Cerrado, which help strengthen their struggle³⁰. Documents addressing land, water, and related issues have been widely produced³¹.

FIOCRUZ has also maintained an active presence in these territories, conducting studies on health and sustainability. Experts and community leaders have emphasized the urgency of strengthening support networks and expanding strategies to confront the socio-environmental impacts of agribusiness, with a view to promoting development models that reconcile social justice with environmental preservation.

Conceptual and practical approaches: interculturality, TSS, VPS, and dream mapping

The concept of territorialization was presented as a necessary organizing principle for health policies, integrating traditional and scientific forms of knowledge. It was argued that FIOCRUZ should develop a national assessment of communities under attack to inform intersectoral policies. Participants identified environmental racism²⁸ as a structural driver of conflicts in the Cerrado, as lands predominantly occupied by Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, riverine populations, and other traditional communities have increasingly been threatened by the implementation of large-scale projects embedded in development models based on agribusiness, mining, energy production, among others.

The discussions underscored the importance of strengthening support networks and expanding community-based surveillance strategies as key instruments for monitoring and reporting potential socioenvironmental violations. It was emphasized that processes of environmental degradation—interpreted by many leaders as forms of ecocide—severely undermine the continuity of traditional ways of life by destabilizing the territorial, cultural,

and economic foundations of communities. In this context, participants pointed to the need for public institutions, such as FIOCRUZ, to deepen their territorial engagement through participatory methodologies that recognize local knowledge and promote dialogue between scientific production and social practices rooted in the territories. This approach is seen as strategic for strengthening bonds of trust, ensuring greater effectiveness in actions to promote health and environmental justice, and contributing to the construction of integrated responses to the multiple forms of vulnerability experienced by affected populations.

Within the discussions, knowledge production was understood as an inherently participatory process, grounded in horizontal relationships and in the recognition of experiences and forms of knowledge generated by different social movements. Accordingly, the imposition of academic frameworks detached from territorial realities was rejected in favor of a dialogical approach capable of fostering meaningful exchanges among diverse actors. Key themes were addressed, including interculturality, the construction of TSS, VPS, and symbolic methodologies such as ‘dream mapping’, which express the collective aspirations of communities.

The reflections were permeated by critical questions, such as ‘what is intended to be uncovered, and for whom?’, pointing to the urgency of adopting intersectional perspectives that expose the inequalities produced by structural racism. It was emphasized that the vulnerability of a territory is not an intrinsic condition, but rather the result of the absence or neglect of the State, whose presence is expressed, among other factors, through the implementation of adequately funded public policies. Therefore, it is acknowledged that academic institutions themselves, when disconnected from local realities, may end up reproducing dynamics of capital accumulation and the coloniality of knowledge.

The discussions stressed the importance of ongoing training processes guided by an

ethics of care and a commitment to community struggles, since health surveillance and territorial protection depend on sustained action. One of the key challenges identified is the insecurity faced by untitled quilombola territories, where legal protection remains fragile. As a methodological path forward, participants proposed the pedagogy of territory¹⁰, seen as a powerful way of connecting training, resistance, and social transformation through the specific realities of each territorial context.

It was noted that academia and communities operate on different temporal logics: while community ties are built and sustained through ongoing relationships grounded in presence and reciprocity, academic engagement is typically organized around time-bound projects and fragmented frameworks, which can make it difficult to build lasting commitments and follow processes over time. This mismatch in timeframes and methodological approaches poses a challenge to the consolidation of genuinely transformative practices. In this regard, attention was drawn to the need to innovate in the systematization of collectively developed methodologies, so that they can be applied and adapted across different contexts in the Cerrado while respecting their socio-environmental specificities. This task was understood as a shared responsibility between the SUS and environmental public policies. However, participants also pointed out that the State has fallen short of fully embracing this commitment, whether through the discontinuity of actions or the lack of structural mechanisms to ensure the implementation of strategies discussed in the territories.

The importance of researchers’ direct and committed engagement with communities was emphasized, highlighting how such interaction can be transformative for both territories and researchers themselves, and underscoring the need for work grounded in care and attentive listening. Participants also proposed broadening the discussion beyond the national context by engaging with other

Latin American experiences, fostering regional exchange, and strengthening alliances. The value of holding meetings within the territories was reinforced as a way of deepening relationships and supporting processes of resistance. Attention was also drawn to the model developed by the Bocaina Observatory of Sustainable and Healthy Territories (OTSS), where most scholarship holders come from the communities involved and are known as popular researchers—an experience regarded as successful and potentially replicable in other socio-territorial contexts.

The institutional role of FIOCRUZ and of the networks already operating in the Cerrado was questioned, with participants arguing that priority should be given to strengthening existing alliances—through genuine partnerships with communities—rather than creating new structures. The importance of active, sensitive, and respectful listening was emphasized as a fundamental ethical principle in the development of collaborative processes. In this context, the inclusion of Indigenous scholars in knowledge production was highlighted as essential, with their knowledge recognized as central to understanding and transforming territorial realities.

Questions were raised about the development of a research model capable of defining the objectives, scope, and intended audiences for making struggles visible, in line with the concrete needs of the territories. Thus, emphasis was placed on the need to set priorities based on active listening to communities, recognizing the worsening of living conditions and the urgency of continuing research and intervention processes. These demands emerge from contexts marked by multiple forms of violence, often linked to structural racism, which undermines people's ability to remain in their territories. Although relevant actions have been carried out, even with limited resources, sustaining them requires sustained strategies to strengthen these processes. It was also noted that some groups are in a situation of greater vulnerability,

revealing inequalities within the territories themselves and reinforcing the need for approaches sensitive to local asymmetries.

The inclusion of local communities in research processes was strongly supported, with recognition of their situated knowledge of everyday living conditions. Participants stressed that territorial arrangements have a direct impact on health, and that autonomy in knowledge production and surveillance practices must be rooted in the communities themselves. Discussions also addressed the specificities of popular education and Indigenous education, calling for approaches that bridge national frameworks with local realities. The slow pace of land recognition and titling processes was questioned, along with ways of overcoming it. The relationship between research and territory was further problematized based on project time constraints, highlighting the need to better align academic timelines with community dynamics. The concept of an ecology of knowledges was then discussed, underscoring the importance of intersectional approaches that bring different forms of knowledge, experience, and identity into dialogue. The value of traditional knowledge in dialogue with scientific knowledge was emphasized, supported by intersectoral coalitions and institutional engagement from FIOCRUZ. Participants also pointed to the State's long-standing failure to ensure full citizenship for the peoples of the Cerrado, reinforcing the urgency of sustained resistance and collective action. Finally, attention was drawn to the leadership of historically marginalized groups, particularly women, in community resistance and organization strategies.

The relationship between academic research and the logic of capitalism was examined, emphasizing the need to develop strategies that safeguard the protection and sovereignty of information gathered in these territories, so as to prevent its misappropriation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, settled communities relied on living pharmacies and

medicinal plants, underscoring the central role of traditional knowledge in ensuring health-care and health autonomy. Concerns were also raised about the imposition of restrictions on traditional practices, such as home births assisted by midwives, with advocates calling for the recognition of traditional Brazilian medicines as integral components of public health policies. In the legal arena, the concept of ecocide was debated, drawing attention to the role of the State and corporations in intensifying territorial exploitation and environmental degradation. It was argued that the Judiciary can play a significant role in this context by mobilizing institutions such as the Public Prosecutor's Office to ensure accountability and the protection of collective rights.

Key strategic themes and cross-cutting questions were raised, such as:

1. Worldviews, ways of life, and ancestry/theories of care for nature and the body: What care practices (spiritual/teor, and others) do your people maintain in providing food (hunting, planting, harvesting, fishing, cooking)? How are different generations involved in these practices, and how can these traditional care practices and forms of healthcare knowledge be reactivated and strengthened?
2. Challenges posed by external impacts and threats to territories: What are the main threats, conflicts, and challenges faced in your territories? How have your people responded to the impacts of economic activities and projects in their lands? How have your people experienced and perceived the climate changes, droughts, and wildfires in recent years?
3. Opportunities and limitations in relationships with academia, institutions, and

technical organizations (non-governmental organizations) working from a health, dignity, and territorial rights perspective: What has been your experience in engaging with academia, government institutions, technical organizations, and networks in care-related actions within your territories? Can you provide examples of partnerships? How have they respected—or, conversely, failed to respect—the traditional knowledge and practices of your people? What could be done differently in these relationships? Are there protocols or other instruments in place to ensure respect for, and the sovereignty of, your people and territory?

Finally, the importance of holding events in local communities was emphasized, as this increases visibility and strengthens those communities. The presence of institutions such as FIOCRUZ can put pressure on the government to guarantee territorial rights and socio-environmental justice.

Group discussions

On the second day of the workshop, participants were organized into three working groups tasked with deepening the discussion around three main thematic axes: Central Grievances, Resistance and Strategies, and Follow-up Actions and Solutions. The composition of the groups was designed to ensure balanced representation among community members, representatives of social movements, members of FIOCRUZ, and other participants, fostering a diversity of perspectives and an exchange among different forms of knowledge and experience. Below, *table 1* presents a synthesis of the main contributions and reflections shared during the collective discussions carried out by the groups.

Table 1. Systematized contributions from group discussions

Axes	Content
Key complaints	• Institutional violence and persecution of community leaders, including threats from landowners and politicians, and police repression. • Environmental contamination by pesticides, with impacts on health, biodiversity, and fishing. • Environmental racism and the absence of public policies, worsening access to healthcare, and the protection of territories. • Environmental destruction, land grabbing, and criminal arson driven by economic interests. • Multiple forms of social violence, such as domestic and mental violence, are compounded by the absence of schools and educational policies.
Struggles, resistance, and strategies	• Defense of territories through agroecology and resistance to the expansion of agribusiness and development projects, such as Vale's railway. • Recognition and valorization of traditional knowledge, spirituality, and memory as forms of cultural resistance. • Community organization and leadership of women and men in the struggle for health, gender equity, and territorial justice. • Institutional and intersectoral partnerships with universities, INCRA, land registries, and the creation of management committees. • Production and circulation of popular and technical knowledge, including research, informational materials, and environmental education. • Political advocacy critical of the State and preventive strategies to guarantee rights and community sovereignty.
Actions and proposed solutions	• Strengthen popular communication and coordination between communities, researchers, and public policies. • Intensify advocacy within public institutions and judicial bodies to ensure accountability and the protection of territories. • Systematize complaints and produce technical evidence to support legal actions and political claims. • Promote environmental education and training workshops as instruments of mobilization, resistance, and territorial strengthening. • Establish management committees and community-based monitoring networks for active and continuous protection of vulnerable communities

Source: Own elaboration.

Conclusions

The workshop underscored the strength of dialogue between communities, social movements, and institutions such as FIOCRUZ, highlighting pathways for strengthening struggles in defense of territorial rights and public health. Among the key guiding principles that emerged were the valorization of traditional and quilombola education, the protection of territories, and the development of collaborative approaches that respect and reinforce local knowledge systems.

Participants' collective evaluation of the meeting—including representatives of traditional peoples and

communities—emphasized that methodologies grounded in active listening, care, and the exchange of experiences foster greater engagement and the protagonism of communities, while also expanding their capacity to respond to persistent inequalities. The participatory design of the workshop, based on territorial diagnostics and group work, created a space conducive to sharing lived experiences and co-producing solutions.

Despite the breadth and depth of the discussions, one key limitation of the workshop was the absence of government representatives responsible for some of the actions under debate, particularly those related to health protection, territorial defense, and

intersectoral policies. This absence made it difficult to move forward on broader institutional commitments and showed that not all key stakeholders were present or represented. It also points to the need to strengthen engagement with public institutions in the next stages.

The presence of participants and the mutual support among them were identified as key factors enabling the continuation of struggles within the territories, highlighting the articulation of an active and supportive network of resistance. The leadership of traditional peoples in guiding the discussions reinforced a sense of belonging and the legitimacy of collective voices, emerging as a fundamental dimension of the learning process. The exchange of experiences—together with the diversity of worldviews and the participation of institutional representatives from FIOCRUZ—gave both depth and legitimacy to the meeting, understood as part of a broader set of initiatives arising from the struggles and organization of social movements engaged in defending the Cerrado. Dialogue fostered through initiatives such as this can, over time, contribute to strengthening these struggles.

In closing, participants reached a shared understanding of the need to continue the actions and strengthen articulation between academia, communities, and public policy, with an emphasis on including new territories and further deepening shared practices. It was also proposed to develop a communication strategy to ensure that communities are heard and made visible, alongside a commitment to returning to the territories through itinerant training activities aimed at valuing and circulating local knowledge systems.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of holding training sessions within the territories, co-designed by researchers and communities, as well as developing research protocols to guide field visits by researchers. It also underscored the need to strengthen popular communication within the territories

and to support initiatives that value and preserve the memory of Indigenous and traditional peoples.

The event established itself as a space of reciprocal learning, where community-based and institutional knowledge became intertwined in a collective learning process, revealing the potential of sensitive methodologies as catalysts for critical reflection and transformative action. By drawing on lived experiences in the territories, these approaches fostered a deeper recognition of the multiple dimensions of the challenges faced—from environmental degradation to emotional well-being, as well as struggles for dignity and quality of life.

In this process, the centrality of care and emotional bonds emerged strongly as a structuring element of resistance. It was acknowledged that bonds of solidarity—rooted in listening, presence, and care—are inseparable from the political struggle for socio-environmental justice. Future initiatives were therefore encouraged to expand spaces for cultural expression and collective gathering, recognizing that the celebration of knowledge, memories, and identities is also a form of resistance and a way of shaping the future.

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