

## COMBATING DESERTIFICATION IN PERNAMBUCO

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The day has dawned in a different way these last few days: it rained all night. We are in the community of *Macambira* – in the county of *Solidão* – one of the communities that were involved in the project “Combating Desertification in Pernambuco”<sup>1</sup>. The project entailed working with affected families as part of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. We are visiting Pedro Izidório, known as Tota, a community leader, married to Dona Juvita, with seven children. He invites us to have coffee – as is the habit in the region – and starts talking.

*“In dry Sertão, as we all know, there is practically a 90 percent chance of a drought: rain comes only rarely. The problem is that the land gets wasted because of ploughing. In the past, the land was not ploughed. The way you drilled and planted! Then, the lands have a tendency of becoming wasted. Water goes carrying what? The best lands are eroded and become good for nothing. What is important is the land cover at the top. Water takes it away and leaves behind just what we call “the bone of land”. That family, which used to produce 40, 50 up to 100 sacks of corn started to produce 10,12. So the family encountered difficulties and then the men and young boys left to São Paulo, even here Recife, Maceió. As a matter of fact, most of my own family, are not here. The majority are all spread out all over the world on account of this agricultural failure”. We asked about this project. “I believe it will improve the lives of many families – in the case of our community, there are 30 families. First, one of the best things we can have is water for our survival. A well was perforated – that is going to provide water to the whole community for drinking and other human consumption. And after all this, we are also receiving in our community a toilet, with a septic tank too”. The student Marlúcia Araújo comments, “When we felt the necessity to go to the bathroom, we had no bathroom and we had to go to the outdoor bush and pollute the soil”.*



In Barra I, next to *Macambira*, the farmer Luiz Gonzaga emphasizes, “It was we ourselves that did the work, I mean, from the chicken-roost to the cistern: the masons themselves are from the community and the servant is from the proper locality. We searched so as to not bring anyone from outside”. We asked about the importance of the community’s involvement. Luiz answered, “Because when I’m well, my neighbour is well, if I’m bad, my neighbour will be bad too. I’m quite sure about this... it’s something concrete. I think of us as a small community”.

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About working together the bee-keeper José Guimarães says, *“The bee-keeping is important because the bee is there in the bee-hive working for us. And we are taking care of other things: taking care of a little herd of goats, taking care of the clean land, and bees are there filling the hive with honey, helping us”*.

Dona Juvita served us more coffee. Tota concluded, *“That’s why I insist to every community that in any kind of work first one should able to face any kind of work, so that in the future nothing goes wrong”*. And he reminds us why he chose to raise chickens: - *“Because we know that in the future we are going to have a chicken to slaughter, and have the eggs to sell. For sure, I have hopes of this project. And my expectation is to work so that in six months from now, not only will we have 50 chickens - it was 50 chicks that we received – but 70, 80 or even 100 chicks.”*



Summing up, Doralice said, *“We need to find out if it’s possible to survive right here, ain’t it? The more we sell eggs laid by the chickens, the more chickens we will buy, ain’t it? We should not let the project go down the drain! Instead, we should expand the project much more, ain’t it?!”*

The project “Combating Desertification in Pernambuco State” is consists of a number of measures to control land degradation in communities affected by desertification and severe drought conditions. Each measure is composed of: a qualification assessment and training course; basic hygiene equipment; water catchment and storage equipment; and a productive unit identified by each family/community on the basis of its own needs. This could be apiculture, aviculture or embroidery. In 12 months, the following had been built in total: 263 cisterns, 12 wells, 384 septic pits and 512 productive units benefiting 504 families. The total cost was US\$1,023,726.90.