



Vila Torres, Curitiba, Brazil – Community Vegetable Garden – Health, Education

This community vegetable garden has transformed wasteland used for illicit activities into productive green spaces that benefit local residents. The result is twofold: providing healthy food for 270 disadvantaged people from the community and making the district safer. The beneficiaries are involved in the maintenance of the land and the cultivation of vegetables. The long-term goal is that the project achieves financial autonomy through compost making and the sale of excess vegetables. The project was awarded AIC's Dominique Prize for Sustainable Development in 2018.



Context:

Vila Torres is a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Curitiba, in South-East Brazil. Many people there have little or no education and a low literacy level, so it is difficult for them to earn a decent living. Big families squeeze into small homes, and food is generally of poor quality, and often scarce. As a result people find themselves on the fringes of society and can easily fall into a life of crime (assaults and especially drug trafficking).

Objectives:

- Increase the amount of food on the table in disadvantaged households
- Encourage disadvantaged families to produce their own food
- Encourage families to eat more vegetables
- Transform an idle space into a productive space
- Protect our "Common Home" by ensuring sustainable consumption

Specific Theme and Activities:

When visiting local families, the AIC volunteers noticed that many had poor diets, lacking in vegetables. The families did not have vegetable gardens, not even basic ones, but there were many unused plots of land in the area that served only for theft and drug use. This was how the idea of using one such space to create a community vegetable garden was born in June 2017.

The vegetable garden project has brought numerous benefits: it gives disadvantaged people access to healthy organic food and has made the district cleaner and more attractive. The community helps to take care of the garden and this experience has encouraged several families, including children, to start growing vegetables at home as well.

The local AIC volunteers help to irrigate, tidy and supervise the garden. They also organize the harvesting and the distribution of the produce. In addition to this, they support this community in other ways, through basic food parcels, handicraft making, literacy training, hygiene and guidance on obtaining employment and access to healthcare.

Key Figures:

- There are 270 beneficiaries: 95 women, 55 men and 120 children - 29 elderly people.
- The first garden started in June 2017, and the second in August 2018. Both are planned for a period of 3 years but the volunteers will continue to help and supervise.

Partnerships:

The project was initiated after consultation and support from the local government in Curitiba. A technician analyzed the land, gave the AIC volunteers guidance on the preparation and use of the soil and provided them with fertilizers and seeds to begin the garden. The volunteers are allowed to use the land free of charge, and the water bills are subsidized by the prefecture.

Future Perspectives and Impact:

- The produce is distributed free of charge on a weekly basis and this allows the volunteers and the beneficiaries a chance to give feedback.
- The beneficiaries have created a social network on Facebook to share recipes and information about unconventional plants. Some have replicated what they have learned by creating their own gardens at home.
- The project is gaining visibility in the community and was featured on a Catholic TV report.
- The residents live in a safer environment now that this land, once frequented by drug users, has been closed off and used to produce food.
- The aim is to make the project self-sustaining, so composting is done to produce fertilizer. Surplus produce is sold and the profits are reinvested in the project. The volunteers do fundraising to cover water and electricity bills.
- In the future, the volunteers would like to start a third vegetable garden.

