

Brazil

Introduction

The north eastern region of **Brazil** has seen few glimpses of the rapid economic growth experienced in other parts of this vast South American country. Here the climate is semi-arid, and for people living in the region, access – or lack of access – to water shapes almost every other aspect of their lives.

An inadequate water supply makes everything difficult, from cooking to basic hygiene. In recent years, droughts linked to climate change have further undermined people's efforts to create sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families. And underlying everything else is the very unequal distribution of land ownership which characterises the region, and further disadvantages the poorest farmers, many of whom are Afro Brazilian. Descended from slaves, and settled in some of Brazil's most isolated areas, they continue to experience discrimination in the wider community.

With all the overwhelming challenges they continue to face, it is not surprising that many men and women leave their villages in search of migrant labour for several months each year. The result is that the stability of the community as a whole is undermined, as are the lives of the families within it.

Project

The 2016 World Development Appeal invites us to visit this region, and to meet **ACEV (Evangelical Action)**, one of the Tearfund partners who will receive support through this year's Appeal. ACEV first made contact with the local community here in 2012, and they have not looked back since.

Water, or rather, access to water, was the first priority. In the past, water had to be transported to villages like Fonseca by donkey, and in this particular case, by way of a steep 3 km track. The first well to be built now has a run-off of 4000 litres/hour, and this is making a huge difference to the local community of 52 families. The digging of the well was not straightforward, however, as the work was opposed by some of the most powerful figures in the region, and it took some time for the community to receive the authorisation needed to begin to dig.

But now, water is flowing: water for drinking, for cooking, for washing and hygiene, and for growing crops. And because all families living in the community now have reliable access to water, people are able to start reclaiming hope for the future.

With the funds received from the 2016 Appeal, and working in partnership with local churches, ACEV will continue to focus on the provision of wells, and their maintenance; training in agriculture and organic farming methods which will make the best use of the new water systems; development of new planting and crops particularly suited to a dry climate, like moringa trees; training in reforestation and the reduction of soil erosion; and education in health and hygiene.

All this in partnership with churches whose own horizons are now expanding by moving out into the communities they serve.

Reclaiming Hope

Alexandro Martins, who lives in Fonseca, used to travel for thousands of kilometres each year in search of work, picking fruit or cutting sugar cane. The strain and the unpredictability of this routine had begun to take a significant toll on his health, although he was still a young man.

Now, however, he is well on the way to becoming a successful, settled farmer, who is able to provide a sustainable income for his family without leaving home for months at a time. "Already we are planting coriander, lettuce, beetroot, zucchini, okra . . .," he says. "And we don't use any poisonous chemicals."

Thanks to ACEV, Alexandro received both the technical training and the basic equipment he needed in order to get started. He is committed to developing his skills and learning new methods as his business grows. His vegetables are already selling well in the local market. "I have to thank you," he says. "It's all good."

Not far away, in the village of Gloria, Marcia Christina Ferreira de Caldas Lima served as the first president of the local farmers' association, formed with the encouragement of ACEV. Once ACEV began to offer support, and a well was drilled for the community, she says, "everything improved." And all because the association was in a position to raise people's awareness of their rights, and to enable them to work together to bring about change.

At their own expense, local believers are now beginning to build a church. It looks like people are intending to stay, and to reclaim hope for the future of their community. It is our privilege in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to support them in the 2016 World Development Appeal.