

Water for rural communities in drought prone NE Brazil

Fundraising Target: £6,000

Summary

In Northeast Brazil, Oxfam helps small-scale farmers to make a living in what is a harsh and drought-prone region. Ensuring access to a safe water supply is the top priority and Oxfam is launching (working in partnership with other organizations) a huge campaign to build one million cisterns to collect rainwater in this region.

Background

The Northeast of Brazil is the most populous semi-arid region in the world. 11 million rural people do not have access to drinking water. They must travel for miles in search of the last muddy water holes. The high infant mortality in the region is caused by diarrhoea from cholera – in turn due to lack of clean water.

Some rely on distributions made by water trucks, the deliveries of which are used by local politicians to capture voting support, with the poorest families having to promise their votes in return for water. In non-election years, distributions cease. Without access to water many rural people are forced to leave their native land to move to the already overcrowded cities.

Brazil is one of the richest countries in the world – but its income distribution is one of the worst. The average monthly income for a family in the NE, the poorest region in Brazil, is around US\$50.

For the past two centuries, the region has suffered droughts every ten years, but the effects of “El Niño”, exacerbated by global climate change, has reduced this to every five years. Ensuring access to a safe water supply is Oxfam’s top priority in the area.

Oxfam has supported local partners in developing cistern reservoirs. These water cisterns are tanks designed to collect torrential rainfall from house roofs through a series of gutters which channel the water from the roof into the cistern. They have a storage capacity of 18,000 litres – enough to supply a family with its drinking and cooking water for at least eight months of the dry season.

The cisterns are built by the community/beneficiaries themselves through appropriate training and access to the materials they need. They assist people to remain on their land, even during the worse months of the drought, and free them from dependency on local politicians that control the supply of drinking water.

Oxfam GB is a pioneering organisation in the region and has been supporting cistern production and other water-related device building for more than 14 years, providing financial and technical support to partners, with over 30,000 cisterns being built to date.

The “One Million Cisterns” project brings together for the first time a large number of regional and national Brazilian NGOs, International NGOs and the Brazilian Government.

The programme is only just beginning and needs financial support to achieve a critical mass. The more cisterns built at this stage as proof of their great positive effects, the greater likelihood of increased Brazilian government support.



Brazil – Country Facts

- Population 165 million
- One third of the population live in poverty
- The North East has the highest proportion of rural poor
- Infant mortality in the NE is 25%
- Literacy in the NE is 60% (compared with 93% nationally)
- Oxfam has been working in Brazil since 1968

“When we see clean water slipping away, it makes us feel like going away too”



Maria da Conceição, a 56 year old rural worker used to walk 12km carrying 20litres on her head to get water for her family. She now has a cistern.

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Objectives

- The One Million Cisterns project aims to bring clean water to half the families in the region.

The objectives of this specific proposal are

- to act as a beacon to highlight the benefits of cisterns and so encourage greater involvement from other NGOs and the Brazilian Government.

Activities

Oxfam's main partner in this Project is the Articulação no SemiArido (ASA), a network representing 600 community based organisations from across the region. They work to form and implement public policies aimed at alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development in the semi-arid region.

They understand that lobbying government is not enough and believe that civil society should mobilise resources to implement policies and practices which will benefit millions of people in the semi arid region. Activities will include:

- Selection of local families to benefit, using networks of local organisations to prioritise the poorest families in each community.
- providing training to bricklayers in cistern building in 30 communities
- construction of cisterns
- training for the beneficiary families and their community leaders – especially women – on how to manage their water resources and to keep clean and safe the water collected on the cisterns,
- improve operational and institutional capacity of the local organisations responsible for managing the resources, organising the training course and following up the construction of the cisterns.

The project will be accomplished through the National Co-ordination of ASA who will manage the funds, training course, logistics, social organisation and communications.

Oxfam will accompany and monitor the project through a close relationship with ASA National Co-ordination, visits to the field and review of progress reports.

Outcomes

- Each new cistern provides water to 5-6 people on average

Impact

By providing clean water for the eight month dry season, the beneficiary population will be able to remain on the land they grew up on. Health conditions will improve, and the people's reliance on factors beyond their control will be reduced. In this way it will also empower people as citizens.

It is estimated that the benefits to participants would equal a saving of 10% of the average work time (approx. one hour a day). In addition, they will gain productive days currently spent sick from drinking dirty water. Children would be able to spend time at school. Poor families would no longer have to buy water and would have reduced medical bills.



“Before I didn't have anything, now I can say I have something”.

Sr Ze Preto has two cisterns and now runs training courses on water management for local communities

Budget (prices approximate at time of printing)

For the construction of each cistern, the co-ordination of the project by ASA and monitoring by Oxfam

Construction of each cisterns:

Per cistern (USD):

Cement – 70

Iron – 30

Zinc – 20

Tubes – 15

Other materials – 10

Bricklaying – 80

Cost of Training – 75

Subtotal: 300

plus \$ 100 community/workforce
/beneficiary counterpart
contribution

Total: USD 400 (£284)

Funding

For example: a donation of £3,000 would fund the construction of 10 new cisterns, making a huge difference to the lives of many ordinary people and giving a real boost to the campaign.

“Small children rarely die in our community. Before a lot of children died because of fever. Cisterns have really helped the health of our children.”

Maria da Conceição

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