Creating a New “Paradise” Through Community Organization

Vila Paraiso (Villa Paradise) is a small community of less than 100 homes that teeters on the rural-urban perimeter of Horizontina, a town of 18,000. Villa Paraiso was founded 16 years ago as an informal settlement on the town’s outskirts. Since its founding, residents have struggled to gain a sense of community identity; presently residents lack property titles for their homes, sidewalks, and paved roads. The community has an unkempt small park with an old, abandoned three-room school building that poses a safety and health threat to neighbors, especially young children.

As little as six months ago, community members were unorganized and resolved to let forces outside the community determine their future. Adélio Furtado, who has lived in Paraiso for the past nine years and is a truck driver for a dairy company, explains: “Community members barely talked to one another; everyone focused on their own problems without thinking about what the community could do together to solve community priorities. I didn’t participate in any community activities; I thought it was better to do my own thing and let others solve community problems.”

In January 2015, the Sowing Futures program began to engage community members to motivate them to begin organizing and planning for their community’s future. Program staff helped to facilitate a community assembly meeting where residents agreed to nominate and elect community members to a community development council (CDC). Sowing Futures trained CDC members from Paraiso and other target communities on how to carry out community assessments and develop community action plans. Paraiso CDC members worked with their neighbors to develop a community vision, and to identify and rank community priorities.

During a recent community assembly meeting, CDC members presented the results of the community action plan and residents agreed to prioritize and work towards: (1) obtaining property titles for their homes, (2) revitalizing the community park and (3) forming a neighborhood association. Paraiso residents have already begun to see the fruits of their community organizing efforts and local government engagement – potholes have been filled by the municipal works...
“We now know that when we organize we can achieve more together than we can individually...And as a leader I can help to harmonize the community and allow everyone a chance to speak out on how to manage Paraiso’s development.”

—Adélio Furtado

Global Communities, along with the John Deere Foundation and the John Deere Brazil Foundation, has identified opportunities for expanding community development activities that catalyze meaningful change for communities in need located near John Deere’s Brazil operations. The mission of this three-year program is to build the capacity of communities and local institutions to prioritize needs and mobilize resources that improve socio-economic conditions, particularly for at-risk youth.

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