



IMPACT BRIEF

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Brazil

Rural Communities Development Project in the Poorest Areas of the State of Bahia (Gente de Valor)

About the project

Objective. The Rural Communities Development Project in the Poorest Areas of the State of Bahia (PRODECAR), popularly named Gente de Valor (GDV) project was designed to strengthen the capacity of rural communities to thrive in the drought-prone environment of Brazil's Northeast Region through access to water, increased productive capacity, and empowerment of participating communities. Using a community-driven development (CDD) approach, GDV contributed to the construction of water-harvesting infrastructure, the development of low-cost backyard gardens, and the promotion of crops and production techniques suitable to the local agroecological environment known as the *sertão*.

Financing. Financing consisted of US\$60.5 million, with contributions from the State Government of Bahia, IFAD, and beneficiaries.

Timing. GDV was implemented in parts of the state of Bahia between 2007 and 2013 by Bahia's Regional Action and Development Agency (CAR).

The project's theory of change

As a result of a drought-prone environment and historic underinvestment, Brazil's Northeast Region (Região Nordeste) is home to more than half of the country's poor and extreme poor. Its interior is mainly formed by the semi-arid or sertao and is characterized by a biome unique to Brazil, the Caatinga, which has a very harsh environment with prolonged drought periods. In a continuation of several IFAD projects targeting the region, GDV aimed to meet communities' basic needs and address deficits, such as poor access to water and low agricultural productivity, while facilitating community organization.

GDV beneficiaries engaged in **participatory planning focus groups** that helped identify needed interventions, such as the construction of household and community **cisterns**. Local groups were formed and trained in how to manage projects and collaborate with government officials. To foster inclusive engagement in project implementation, GDV encouraged young people and women to take leadership roles within the groups. This CDD approach was meant to promote community empowerment, active collaboration by beneficiaries, and ongoing grassroots mobilization.

Production activities included **agroecological trials** to identify crops suited to the semi-arid environment and to provide opportunities for commercialization. With the increase in access to water, **backyard gardens** were constructed to promote food security and dietary diversity. The project offered specialized technical assistance both to increase crop yields and to support the health of livestock. **Training in marketing** complemented the increased production capacity, while well-organized cooperatives received funding to develop processing units for value addition for their members.

Project outreach and outputs

Determining the overall impact of the project requires first understanding whom the project reached and what outputs it generated.

Total beneficiaries: **35,000**

People trained in community organization: **32,487**

Household and agricultural cisterns constructed: **13,921**

Farmers who received specialized agricultural training: **9,417**

Backyard gardens constructed: **4,894**

Value-addition kits distributed: **780**

Marketing contracts for agricultural cooperatives: **544**

Project impact

As part of IFAD's Development Effectiveness Framework, Gente de Valor has been subject to a rigorous impact assessment.

Data and methods

The ex post impact assessment of GDV collected primary data in 2018 – five years after project closure and shortly after a major multiyear drought. The sample consisted of 2,019 households: 974 from beneficiary communities and 1,045 from non-beneficiary communities. The construction of the counterfactual, or comparison, group sample involved multiple steps. First, non-beneficiary communities were identified thanks to community-level baseline data from a 2006 project targeting survey. Propensity score matching (PSM) was then employed to identify control communities with similar targeting features within *municípios*. Geographical buffering was employed to prevent spillover effects, which could arise if the selected control communities were too close to the treated ones. The selection of control communities was then validated by the project staff, who constructed an algorithm to score similar communities in terms of targeting features and to identify reserve communities with similar scores. Finally, an enumeration

exercise was conducted to identify households within communities to allow for stratification according to treatment intensity and type of treatment (water infrastructure, backyard and home gardens, and technical assistance and inputs). The findings from the analyses are drawn both from the quantitative data collection and from a qualitative assessment consisting of key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Major outcomes studied include access to water, agricultural productivity, income, household assets, commercialization of agriculture, and women's empowerment.



Key impact estimates¹

Beneficiary households experienced significantly improved access to water. Before GDV started, people in 83 per cent of households had to leave their homes to access their primary source of water. After the project, GDV beneficiaries were found to have **34 per cent** greater access to household water-harvesting infrastructure than non-beneficiaries, even including those who participated in non-GDV water-infrastructure projects. Currently, 37 per cent of beneficiaries use their household cisterns as their primary source of water.

In addition, productivity rose for beans, corn, and cassava. For beans alone, yields (production per hectare) increased by 49 per cent. Productivity improvements did not, however, translate into greater income; non-beneficiaries earned **16 per cent** more than beneficiary households, much of it coming from non-agricultural wage work. Given the recent severe multiyear drought, it is difficult to reach to a conclusion regarding the economic viability of commercializing beneficiaries' increased agricultural production.

Results show a degree of variation in outcomes, indicating that a strong case can be made for providing a holistic development plan. It is apparent, for example, that GDV recipients of water infrastructure, home gardens, and technical assistance were the most likely to increase the value of their total production (their production value rose by **152 per cent**), diversify the number of crops, and increase their total income from agriculture.

Gender empowerment was a major outcome of the GDV, which focused on increasing women's leadership in local development initiatives. Women's autonomy over income increased by 10 per cent, their self-efficacy² increased by **10 per cent**, and their membership in local groups increased by 31 per cent, demonstrating the project's strong impact on collective agency.

In terms of wealth, proxied by asset-based indicators such as the quality of housing, beneficiaries experienced a **10 per cent** advantage over non-beneficiaries as well as a general positive impact on overall assets.

¹ These figures represent changes compared with non-beneficiaries.

² Self-efficacy, based on a scale, is defined as a measure of people's beliefs about their capacity to cope with life's demands.

About the brief

This brief draws upon the findings of an IFAD-funded impact assessment of the Gente de Valor project in Brazil, which was prepared by Alessandra Garbero and Neha Paliwal.

The impact assessment report on Gente de Valor is available upon request.

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Lessons learned

- While the recent multiyear drought (2012–2017) was extreme, even for Bahia's drought-prone environment, **the results of this evaluation draw attention to how projects will perform in increasingly volatile climatic conditions.** Agriculture-focused theories of change will require adjustment if one in three farms is expected to yield no harvest. The absence of diversified income-generating strategies may weaken beneficiary households' resilience to shocks.
- **Project planners should think more broadly about the intensity of inputs and outcomes required to have a truly transformative impact.** In the case of access to water, while household cisterns were extremely valuable to households that had never had one, they were insufficient to achieve larger impacts such as meeting water needs for agricultural production.
- **Easily replicable interventions such as home gardens can have strong impacts on crop diversity for home consumption and inclusion of women.**
- **GDV's agricultural interventions generated stronger productivity and production impacts for those who benefited from multiple activities (water infrastructure, home gardens, and technical assistance) compared with those who benefited only from, for instance, water infrastructure.** However, productivity growth was insufficient to encourage agricultural commercialization. Respondents reported that market training was limited and that local markets and middlemen were the primary avenues of sale, a situation that restricted market opportunities and prices for project beneficiaries. Addressing commercialization bottlenecks should be a primary component of project activities.
- Focus group participants appreciated the CDD approach, but issues arose in efforts to include the most vulnerable members of communities in all activities, limiting the project's potential to address the needs of the poorest households. Additionally, it is not evident that there was stakeholder oversight of the value-addition training in order to ensure learning outcomes. **The CDD approach did, however, significantly promote the empowerment of women in communities by encouraging women's inclusion in the activities and leadership of groups.**
- Given the multitude of beneficiary needs, the **alignment of GDV interventions with existing government initiatives**, such as cash transfer programs, rural transformation projects, and provision of extension, increased the project's impact.

