

Fibria

Community nurseries take root



1.8 MILLION

TREE SEEDLINGS SUPPLIED EACH YEAR
BY COMMUNITY NURSERIES
SUPPORTED BY FIBRIA



To meet its long-term goal of restoring 40,000 hectares of native Atlantic rainforest and cerrado by 2025, Fibria needs hundreds of thousands of tree seedlings. The company has set up community nurseries to help service this demand, improving employment opportunities and incomes for local people.

Background

Fibria is committed to restoring native forest alongside its plantations in Brazil. The Atlantic rainforest and the Brazilian cerrado are biodiversity hotspots, which makes restoration vitally important. One of the main challenges is finding the necessary seedlings.

Many of the rural areas where Fibria operates are poor, and there are few job opportunities, even in agriculture or cattle ranching. By supporting community tree nurseries, Fibria hoped to improve local incomes and promote green economic growth, while securing a consistent supply of quality seedlings for its own needs.

The project

In São Paulo state, Fibria helped to establish an association of small nurseries. Together with the Ecology and Forestry Restoration Laboratory of the University of São Paulo, the company provided technical training to regularize quality and production methods. Today, there are 16 nurseries, producing over a million seedlings of 100 species each year. These nurseries also sell seeds of native tree species, following training in collection, processing and storage coordinated by Fibria.

Fibria helped to set up and provide training for a similar operation in Ibirapuã, Bahia state. The nursery now produces over 150,000 seedlings of 80 species annually, using organic techniques.

In Espírito Santo state, Fibria helped to set up two nurseries, Meninos da Terra and Angelim. Meninos da Terra, based within an earth sciences school, produces 200,000 seedlings per year and runs lessons for children up to 17 years. Angelim is a local community nursery run exclusively by women, producing 150,000 seedlings per year, also using organic techniques.

Also in Espírito Santo, Fibria maintains commercial relationships with Asambiental, a local NGO which operates a nursery producing 120,000 seedlings of native species annually, and SEJUS, a resocialization project for prisoners. Around 12 offenders take part in the project, producing 150,000 seedlings a year. Revenues are distributed between their family and a savings account in their name, and for every three days of work, one day is taken off their sentence. The project has inspired similar programmes for growing vegetables and ornamental seedlings.



Community tree nurseries growing seedlings for Fibria to promote economic and social development.

Photography © Fibria

“When we started the nursery, we had the incentive to gather other people who were lost in life, at rock bottom. We weren’t looking only for poor families, but for anyone who really needed an orientation and self-esteem. We gathered girls living on the streets of the slum, who now have their own houses in the village. We sought drug dealers’ wives, alcoholics, prostitutes, widows going through a difficult situation, criminals’ wives. Today we have all these women living here honestly and earning an income.”

Mrs Branca, first president of Ibirapuã nursery

Benefits

The tree nurseries that Fibria supports have contributed to social and economic development in the region. The social impact can be clearly seen in Bahia and Espírito Santo, where most of Fibria’s forest restoration programme is taking place. Around 20 families are involved in the Angelim and Ibirapuã nurseries that Fibria helped set up. Most of the workers are women aged 25 to 45, who were not previously in paid employment; with a part-time job at the nursery, they have seen their household income increase by 30-40 per cent. For some, the job at the nursery is the only source of income: earnings are around US\$8,000 a year, a good salary in rural areas like these.

Ivonete, a single mother of seven children, is one woman whose life has been turned around by the Ibirapuã nursery. Before coming to the nursery, she was working as a prostitute to earn money to raise her children. She was drinking a lot, and spent time in rehab. “After I got here, my life greatly improved,” she says. “I have money to pay the bills. I don’t need to sell my body. I don’t need to ask anyone for anything.”

Maria, a mother of three, was a housewife struggling to raise three children before she came to Ibirapuã. “Today I spend the day here, I’m happy, I’ve got my income and my friends,” she says. “We produce plants that will recover the environment. We have seen these little plants become trees.”

Fibria aims to restore 40,000 hectares of forest by 2025. This regular, long-term demand for seedlings provides the nurseries with a consistent income, which allows them to build capacity and supply other markets – for example by growing ornamental plants for gardens and landscaping. This will help them to become successful businesses in their own right.

Next steps

The community nurseries supply around 10% of Fibria’s seedlings, so there is significant scope for them to expand – the supply of seedlings remains the main bottleneck in the forest restoration programme. However, it’s important that these enterprises remain self-sustaining in the long term. Fibria continues to provide technical assistance and to invest in building technical, management and teamwork skills to improve the running of the nurseries.

An ongoing challenge is to create successful business cases and demonstrate the value of green economy initiatives such as this, particularly when illegal activities may give better short-term economic returns.



Women working at the Ibirapuã nursery have increased their household incomes by 30-40 per cent.

Photography © Fibria

30-40%

INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY TREE NURSERIES

