



*Proceedings of the Sixth International Permaculture Conference  
September-October 1996, Perth, Western Australia*

© Copyright Permaculture Association of Western Australia Inc. and authors.

## **Permaculture in Bahia – Brazil**

*Liliana Pires (Brazil)*

*[Submitted Paper]*

### **Brief history**

The *Instituto de Permacultura da Bahia* is located Lauro de Freitas, in the outskirts of Salvador, capital of Bahia. It was founded by Marsha Hanzi and Didier Bloch in September 1992, with the purpose of propagating permaculture and giving support to those people interested in developing projects and enterprises under its principles.

### **In which stage are we today?**

We are working to propagate permaculture through several strategies, including the courses, talks and field days, the media and the participation in related events. In August 1995 we held the Brazilian Permaculture Conference, which brought together more than 130 people from all over Brazil. We intend to have a Conference every two years.

The creation of models for the main three different ecosystems of Bahia is also very important to give a solid basis to our work. We establish links with other non-governmental and governmental organizations, groups, Agrotechnical Schools and communities to give them technical support in permaculture. Some people have already developed models that are a reference for us, as for example, Ernst Goetch's agroforestry system. We are part of the Agroecological Exchange Network (*Rede de Intercâmbio em Agroecologia*), which encompasses 12 NGOs working with rural communities.

The publication of the Portuguese version of *Introduction to Permaculture* has been an aim of the Institute since its foundation, as it is necessary to have it available to the students. In Brazil, books are quite expensive to publish and purchase, and we have been trying to find ways of doing it. We are almost there!

We have been working closely to rural and urban communities through two different projects. In partnership with the Associação São Francisco we are developing the Project Self-Reliance at Colinas do Mar, an extremely poor community in the suburb of Salvador. Although we have been there since February 1995, we are at

the first beginnings, as the community's history and reality (most people came from the semi-arid searching for jobs) creates competition for survival, being difficult to restore their people's self confidence and sense of cooperation. Even though, we have been making lost of progress working with the women's group and the children, going through an educational process to bring back and introduce traditional and new values, habits and practices important for the self-sustainment, dignity and citizenship.

In the Health Group the women get together to work on the herb garden and produce remedies from the medicinal herbs. The also produce leaf meal (solar dried leaf powder) from *Cajanus cajan* and *Dolichos lablab* to be used as a food supplement and in the making of the green pasta. As an extension of the Health Group the Nutritional Education Workshop was created to be a space to exchange the knowledge to improve the diet without raising the costs, using local resources. There is also the Sewing Workshop, and as the group evolves we intend to stimulate the creation of a cooperative of clothes, alimentation goods, natural soaps and cosmetics and other possibilities. The Children participate in workshops of music, leather, toy making, gardening and capoeira (a Brazilian kind of dance and martial art with African roots), in which they can express themselves, discover and build their own knowledge, understand the historical facts determinant of their reality and be able to propose solution to change it.

The Leaf for Life Project is being developed with the Small Farmers Association of the Amargosa Region (APARA). This Association encompasses about 700 small farmers. They first came to us to ask for the creation of commercial alternatives, as they are very susceptible to the intermediary agent. We first had the opportunity to develop something more concrete with them when the American NGO Leaf for Life (Find your Feet in Britain) propose to us to develop a project with them to produce leaf meal from several kinds of leaves (*The Vigna unguolata*, *Cajanus cajan*, *Dolichos lablab*, *Moringa oleifera*, *Manihot esculenta*, etc.). The leaves are blanched and put in solar dryers to be ground in a powder when completely dry. The leaf meal is a very rich food supplement to be added in dishes created by the women. Once the Health Group at Colinas do Mar gets ready to produce and commercialize green enriched pasta and other goods, they can be supplied by APARA. Our intention is that this food supplement reaches the social market, as orphanages, creches, schools, etc. David Kennedy can be contacted for more information leaf projects in Latin America (Leaf for Life, 250 Radford Hollow Road, Big Hill KY 40405, USA).

This project has been giving us the opportunity to work more intensively with APARA (the farmers association) and address questions related to their production system, which is very much based on monoculture. As their immediate problem is the fair commercialization of their products, we are discussing the idea of creating ways of selling them straight to the consumer, for that they will have to offer more variety than they have today (mainly cash crops, as cassava, orange and cocoa). This brought out the discussion about biodiversity, soil conservation, water management, seed saving, subsistence agriculture and many concepts related to their self-sustainment as farmers. Together with them, we are working to develop an appropriated agricultural model for their conditions in 1 hectare of APARA's land, involving as many community representatives as possible through courses, field days and field trips.

## **The perspectives**

Our fiscal and financial structure is quite small, but the demand has been growing a lot. Most people in the Institute work on a voluntary basis and it is being a heavy load to develop the community projects, teach permaculture and give the students the regular feed-back they need. Lately, we have been rediscussing our role and the strategies we should adopt. As our main aim is to propagate permaculture, we must focus our work on forming professionals to develop their own projects and enterprises in permaculture. This way, we will be able to decentralize our work and permaculture will be reaching the people and communities through our students.