

## Itacaré

Itacaré is a small town located on the coastal zone of Bahia, south of Salvador, the State's capital, 70 km north of Ilhéus where the Contas River flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Itacaré was founded as a Portuguese colonial settlement, originally called São Jorge dos Ilhéus, in 1532 and today it has a population of approximately 8,000 people.

The town was a notorious hangout for Dutch and Portuguese pirates during the early colonial period and later became a hub for the cocoa plantations and a port for whalers. It was officially given city status in 1881. After a major crop disease called Vassoura de Bruxa (Witch's broom) which devastated the region's cocoa crops in the 1980s, Itacaré has depended mostly upon tourism. It is a popular destination for surfers, hikers and ecotourists. The town has a series of beautiful small cove type beaches and other picturesque beaches further along the coast. Itacaré is on the edge of a national park, one of the last large fragments of Atlantic rain forest left in Brazil.

The change from an agrarian town to touristic hub has not been an easy one. Large resorts and B&Bs brought economic development to the region creating jobs boosting local economy. On the other hand, this has caused land prices to soar encouraging many small farmers to sell their plots and move to the city, leading to an increase in unemployment, urban violence rates and unplanned city sprawl. The fact that not all new touristic development projects are environmentally sound further increased environmental degradation. This is a worry as larger property development projects are attracted to the region.

To protect this important biodiversity hotspot from unsustainable development practices an Environmental Protected Area (EPA) was created in 1993. EPAs are a less restrictive category of protected areas under the Brazilian environmental legislation. Under this legislation, a series of economic activities like farming or even constructions are allowed in an EPA provided they comply with the approved regulations.

Today there are around 14 thousand people living in the Itacaré EPA and more than 70% of its area is covered by cocoa agro forestry and native forests. Agriculture is still the main source of income for most of the population.

Literacy rate amongst farmers in the region is around 60%. Their average age is 41 years old and the average farm size is less than 10 ha. All work is done entirely by the family but more and more teenagers don't want to stay in the farms and move to cities in hope for higher life standards and work opportunities.

The establishment of the Itacaré EPA has brought some important changes in the way farmers live and farm their lands. If in the past agriculture was mostly practiced by slash and burn of forests to open new fields, now under the new rules farmers are not allowed to cut trees, poach or use of agrochemical products. These tight regulations made conventional farming a harder and less attractive activity. Many farmers were then forced to sell their lands and migrate to cities in search for jobs.

Worried about this trend, some Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) began to work in the region to assist farmers in this transition towards a more sustainable farming. Their projects involve strengthening of farmers associations, technical support to diversify production, environmental education, training and capacity building, small scale food processing and payment for ecosystems services. Unfortunately not all farmers have partnered with local NGOs and therefore don't benefit from their technical support. One of the reasons for that is the resistance to change, particularly strong in rural communities. Apart from the direct benefits accrued from this partnership, farmers who are working with

NGOs have also developed a better understanding about how to match agricultural production with environmental protection. They see the EPA not as a barrier to their economic development but rather as an opportunity to be tapped on and are aware that other businesses like ecotourism and agro forestry, for example, are only viable if nature is protected.

One of the most active NGOs working in the Itacaré region is the **Instituto Floresta Viva** (Live Forest Institute). The Floresta Viva Institute started its activities in 2000 as a sub-program of the former Southern Bahia Institute of Socio-Environmental Studies (IESB). Its main objective is to improve life standards of families living in rural areas coupled with the conservation of the Itacaré Atlantic rainforest. The Institute was formally set up August 2003 with a clear mission to promote human development and conservation of natural heritage in the region of Serra do Condurú through programs and projects based on the integration of educational and local culture/knowledge, improvement of local agriculture through crop diversification and low environmental impact techniques and promotion of local sustainable development. Floresta Viva has 5 focus areas: Development of Sustainable Communities, Environmental Protected Areas, Environmental Regeneration, Governance and Environmental Monitoring.

## Project Description

**Floresta Viva** has five thematic areas, that are all equally important as part of the Floresta Viva's strategic plan to bring about sustainable development to Southern Bahia. Below is a short description of the main actions and outcomes from each one the five thematic areas.

### 1. Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities objectives is to bring about development alternatives to the region by means of technology transfer, aid and assistance in organic farming, agroforestry, horticulture, community based ecotourism and organizational support to farmers. The group works closely with the Bahia Estate Government in the implementation of rural development and environmental protection amongst small scale farmers. In 2008 HSBC NGDP group worked with Sustainable Communities group helping farmers to get a better understanding of business and financial aspects of their agricultural production.

### 2. Environmental Restoration

The Environmental Restoration group works towards the environmental recovery of degraded areas, especially forests. This programme works closely with Sustainable Communities Programme by creating incentives for farmers to produce seedlings of native species trees, which are then planted in previously identified areas. Amongst the main projects is th Forestry Restoration of Serra do Conduru Estate Park, a partnership with the Bahia Estate Government in which 30ha of degraded forests are to be recovered. This project also aims to offset CO2 emission from Bahia's government air travel.

### 3. Environmental Protected Areas

The main objective of the Environmental Protected Areas group is to promote the creation, expansion and protection of environmental protected areas in the region. The group provides technical and legal assistance to land owners who are willing to set up natural reserves in their estates or farms. The group also provides training and plays an important role in local environment councils.

### 4. Environmental Governance

The Environmental Governance programme seeks to assist local communities, traditional and ethnic groups in access to land, land rights, social and economic development, cultural heritage and strengthening of local institutions.

## 5. Environmental Monitoring

The Environmental Monitoring group works in the monitoring of the regions ecosystems in order to protect its forests and biodiversity. The group works closely with the Environmental Protection Agency in avoiding wood log, wildlife protection, apprehension of illegal log and timber.

### Context

As far as regional context, Itacaré region is facing a big challenge in terms of the development model to be implemented in the region, as many different regions in the world.

On the one hand, federal government wants to bring to region an industrial complex, known as Porto Sul, consisting of a harbor, a railway, mining industry and airport; to export minerals and commodities produced in the middle-west of Brazil. This harbor will have serious impacts on the region's economy, currently based on ecotourism, society (increase of suburbs, criminality) and environment (water and air pollution).

On the other hand, there is the local sustainable development plan at Serra Grande village, currently being developed after the participatory diagnosis process made with the community.

In this diagnosis, a technical team has identified together with local communities the main problems and what they thought was the solution to those problems.

Some issues identified by this diagnosis are already being implemented, such as: local social bank, education facilities, housing and health structure.

The next step after the implementation of the development plan is a workbook to be distributed to the community with guidelines for sustainable living.

The diagnosis was developed by Floresta Viva and its partners (Ynamata Institute, local government and community), funded by Institute Arapyau. Guilherme Leal, Natura's president and founder of Instituto Arapyau, aims at making Serra Grande a sustainable village model for the world.

Floresta Viva role in this process is to articulate stakeholders and build partnerships to promote conservation and human development. Also, Floresta Viva is having an important role in the advocacy regarding Porto Sul.

### Challenge

The challenge is to analyze the sustainable development model versus the industrial development model within the local context and help Floresta Viva and other NGOs build a sustainable vision for the region.

#### **Possible focuspoints and activities in these scenario's include:**

- How to strengthen local economie – coffee and agricultural products
- How to build a more sustainable port – sustainable design and building
- How to avoid the creation of favela's by offering alternative housing opportunities
- How to replicate the system of social banking to strengthen community involvement