

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 11



**Urban gardens  
– Building community**

Source: Fundación Abril

# URBAN GARDENS

## building community

*The fight for the right to decent housing, a recognized right, is in fact denied to many families in the country, who live in precarious housing conditions, without access to basic services and invisible in their just demands. This harsh reality led a group of tenants from Cochabamba to dream about the possibility of a community living space. The Organization of Tenants of Cochabam-*

*ba (OINCO) is facing a hard struggle, due to the commercialization and speculation of urban land, carrying out the task of building community and community housing. One of these efforts allowed access to a land in lending that allows affiliates of the OINCO to produce healthy food, organizing the Popular School of Agroecology, as part of its philosophy of learning and teaching to manage the soil.*



## The struggle for decent housing

In 2008, on March 16, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, a group of people distressed by their tenancy situation, due to the lack of the opportunity to access their own house and being victims of the land market, decided to form an organization that seeks to reclaim and articulate the needs of thousands of families in Cochabamba to access housing (Cochabamba Tenants Organization - OINCO), an open, nonprofit organization with 4,000 affiliates. The purpose of the organization, expressed by its president Aniceto Hinojosa is: "To have our own home and constitute us in social control." OINCO was able to summon some institutions and professionals who believed in their dream and helped to design an ecologic collective ownership project, which includes community use of space, orchard management, waste treatment and sewage.

Despite many mobilizations, hours of dialogue and negotiations with local, regional and national authorities, the idea of a collective condominium project collided with the speculative real estate market, a large structured land business with powerful links even at the municipal level, making the access to a space of land impossible. In this market, land-trafficker's grab large pieces of land and then sell them as individual units. OINCO managed to debate about this "bottleneck" with several authorities, even with the president of Bolivia, Evo Morales. The president showed the political will to support the organization from the Ministry of Housing, as long as the OINCO succeeds in searching an adequate land space. The organization, at this moment is on the eve of purchasing the land.

### In the meantime

The OINCO, spreading its struggle and experience, inspired other initiatives such as the



Members of the OINCO

creation of a tenant organization in the city of Sucre and is promoting a national movement for access to decent housing, proposing guidelines for a Tenancy Law and other initiatives aimed at strengthening its vision of the right use of space.

The OINCO housing project has incorporated in its design the management of the community space, orchards, treatment and recycling of waste. The ecological component is part of the process of approaching its ultimate goal of access to housing. That is why, despite the obstacles that they have faced to achieve their dream, the members of the OINCO did not faint



Source: Fundación Abril

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in their objectives, and are developing other initiatives. Even if the project is currently in a stand-by phase, its initiators have not let the courage drop, but are focusing on other initiatives, like the production of organic vegetables in the city.

## Orchards for life

Speculation of urban and peri urban land also hindered their purpose, but after many efforts, they managed that the departmental government of Cochabamba grant them a piece of land close to the governmental offices for the period of 2 years and with the possibility of extending it to 4 years. The land was full of scrap and waste that required a hard work of preparation, cleaning and adaptation. But "it was very exciting to get the first production, it was the result of our work, and this first production was delivered to the Departmental of Social Services (SEDEGES), as a donation, for delivery to asylums" recalls Aniceto.

## Horizontal and vertical

At the beginning, horizontal orchards with various crops (onion, radish, potato, lettuce, cabbage, chard and others) were planted, then the installation of irrigation systems to optimize water use (since it is a limited resource in the city) started.

Space remained a constraint on the managed terrain as it is generally in the urban context. Aware of this urban reality regarding space, the families, organized in the OINCO, began on their own initiative to work orchards in levels and vertically.

Aniceto tells us that he had the opportunity to see the production of strawberries with this system on the internet, and he thought "if it works with strawberries why not other crops". The first adjustments to the pipes for the production were difficult, but little by little they improved the technic, adapting spaces, managing water and soil moisture correctly.

The organic production of different crops is sold to members of the OINCO, but at half of the market price, seeking to recover the seed prices and some basic costs, not losing inputs and keeping the system productive, but guaranteeing the accessibility to the population. "The potatoes had a particularly good harvest. The compost as a natural fertilizer paid off"

The goal is that once people learn, each member of the OINCO can take some seeds and install vertical orchards in their home, producing and securing healthy food for their family.



Optimized space use: Hanging gardens with tomatoes and onions in various height levels.



Vertical production: Perforated plastic pipes to produce lettuce, spinach, chard and basil

## Popular school of agroecology

After a first phase, the OINCO was convinced that the gardens could serve as a training and learning place for urban agriculture and agroecology for external people as well. In that sense, these orchards were named as the Popular School of Agroecology OINCO, in which people have the possibility to learn; courses were conducted with the Faculty of Agronomy to perform bio-inputs and learn organic production. Many OINCO members took the courses. The Agroecological School

is open to families and groups who want to learn how to build and manage organic production in urban gardens.

Compost and its management are essential for organic production. In order to produce the compost, knowledge in the management of organic garbage was needed, the initiative began with the organic waste collection of the markets, which was chopped with machetes and other tools, but it was a hard work, other inputs like sawdust or cow manure were obtained. Efforts have been made to obtain support (Fundación Abril, Bolivian Platform



Popular School of agroecology



The text based on visits and conversations on site was created by Tania Ricaldi (University of Cochabamba) and Jorge Krekeler (Misereor adviser), but initially made consensual with the people visited. Special thanks to Aniceto Hinojosa, President of OINCA.

against Climate Change and Swiss contact) for water financing and a garbage mincer. To continue with this initiative the provision of organic waste as an input for the production and sale of compost has been arranged. An important aspect in the production is the certification, Aniceto explains: "the production we do is healthy, SENASAG will certify the production". As an alternative to produce their own food, it is good that the people know to do it in their own houses, here we teach free to those who want to learn.

*“It is good for people to know that this works, so that the population has this as an alternative to produce their food, it is good that people know to do it in their own homes, here we teach free to those who want to learn”*

# Messages to the future

- When people get together to achieve something, there are often initiatives that lead to real alternatives and more community in everyday life: job opportunities, housing, waste recycling and alternative forms of life.
- Often obstacles and problems can stop and even begin initiatives initiated; it is important to maintain our vision of life and to learn to achieve a success in the field, which will bring us a step closer to our concerns.
- The use of land in the city is a complex subject and loaded with interests. In this context, the aspiration for community housing has awakened the motivation and capacity to produce food in the city, with simple but intensive systems of urban agriculture.



# Almanac to the Future

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Original title “Huertos urbanos - en el camino para construir comunidad”

Experiencia Motivadora N° 11 Almanaque del Futuro

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Edition: May 2016

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