

# Restoration Cases Flagship Collection

## Case # 9: Mutirão Reflorestamento: a joint effort to restore forests in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



*Reforested areas of Parque Natural Dois Irmãos in the City of Rio de Janeiro.  
Photo credit: Angela Meurer*

Authors: Robin Chazdon, Hyeone Park and Anazelia Tedesco

Contributors: Luiz Carlos Pereira Lourenço and Claudio Alexandre de Aquino Santana,  
Secretaria de Meio Ambiente da Cidade (SMAC)

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## In brief

### Overview

Initiated in 1986 by the Municipal Secretariat of Social Development (SMDS) of the Prefeitura do Rio (City Government), the Mutirão Reflorestamento (MR, Reforestation Joint Effort) aims to restore native Atlantic Forest vegetation cover and ameliorate social and environmental problems within low-income settlements (*favelas*) located on steep hillsides in areas highly vulnerable to landslides, rockfalls, and fires. Paid volunteers (*mutirantes*) from local communities prepare reforestation sites, plant seedlings, and maintain and protect sites after planting. In 1994, the MR was transferred to the Municipal Secretary of the Environment (SMAC). Steady efforts over 35 years led to significant reforestation and improvement in ecosystem services. By 2019, 10 million seedlings had been planted in over 3,400 ha in 92 neighborhoods across the Rio metropolitan area. The MR recruited and trained 15,000 paid volunteers who became agents of change that improved the quality of life and the environment of favela residents.

### Exemplary practices

This pioneering joint effort established new partnerships between the City Government and local community associations. The project is executed by recruiting an unemployed workforce from the communities, emphasizing training and helping prepare workers for integration into the workforce. The project and its benefits are discussed by the *favela* communities, who elect a project manager to be responsible for the recruitment of labor, control of materials, and local participation. In addition to providing financial assistance and preparing and monitoring the project, SMAC provides equipment and supplies. Seeds are collected from diverse sources; 2,500 mother trees and native seedlings are grown in five nurseries across the Rio Metro area. A dedicated staff and the effective diffusion of information through media, newsletters, and conferences were effective strategies for institutionalizing the program and ensuring its continuity through changes in local administration and municipal government.

### Key lessons learned

- ◇ *Communities and favela residents' associations should be the focal point for environmental education and restoration efforts.*
- ◇ *A single coordinating agency should govern the reforestation project.*
- ◇ *In urban neighborhoods, planting trees that produce fruit, medicines, or other useful timber and non-timber products can contribute to local food security, enhance livelihoods, and promote community engagement and stewardship of local forest areas.*
- ◇ *Alleviating urban poverty is essential to ensuring urban environmental restoration.*
- ◇ *Strong civil society and grassroots initiatives are essential for lasting solutions to poverty and environmental degradation.*