Re-igniting love for the land in Brazil

“I am in love with the land,” says Maria Dalva. “I love to plant, nurture and harvest!”
Maria is a leader of a group of 54 farmers in the state of Para in Brazil. For many in the group, however, their love of the land was threatened by the slave-like working conditions imposed by the plantation owner.

Struggling small family farmers are often lured away from their land by the promise of work on large plantations in remote areas, only to find themselves forced to work long hours for scant wages, and in exceedingly poor and unhealthy conditions.

Development and Peace’s partner the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) in Brazil has been striving to raise awareness of workers’ rights and the risks of slave labour. CPT has been reaching out to farm workers and is working to free those caught in the cycle of slavery.

When Maria learned about the CPT’s Slavery No Way campaign, it opened her eyes to this shocking reality. “The lack of information made us blind,” says Maria. “Today, I have a different view of slave labour and workers’ rights. Our employer will only respect us when he knows that we are aware of our rights.”

Maria has shared information about human rights with her fellow workers using CPT pamphlets and posters. According to Maria, it is working. She says that there have not been recent cases of slave labor, mainly because the workers are informed about their rights.

Now with support from CPT, she is working to form farming cooperatives to allow small family farmers to access land and earn a fair living, and of course, to re-ignite their love of the land!

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A healing garden in the Philippines

Share Lent 2015

Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace
At the first hint of a cool breeze from the setting sun, a buzz of activity takes over a small plot of land that faces the sea in the city of Tacloban in the Philippines. The garden is soon full of women and children toiling away under the pinkish hue of the sky – the sign that it is finally cool enough to till the earth, pull up weeds, and tend to the vegetables sprouting from the ground.

All of the women gathered here have one thing in common: they are all survivors of Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda). Their district right on the coast was one of the hardest hit by the typhoon. Most now live in tents that grow stifling under the hot sun, and are facing forced displacement by the government, with no idea where they might be relocated. Many are also widows, because their husbands stayed behind to protect their belongings and were taken away by the storm. They struggle daily to provide food for their families.

With the help of DEVELOPMENT and PEACE partner Urban Poor Associates (UPA), the women formed the Yolanda Survivors Women’s Association. One of the first things they did was to create a communal garden. With the assistance of UPA, the association received seeds and farming tools from the government.

Little Jobert Pindos, 4, comes regularly to the garden with his mother. He clutches a folded palm leaf that holds a multitude of yams that will be cooked for dinner. Jobert is blind and his mother has been struggling to feed him and his sister since they lost their father in the typhoon.

For the women of the association, this garden provides both physical and spiritual nourishment. It is a place where they can come together to laugh, cry and even share a meal. It faces the ocean that was so cruel to them, yet helps them heal and make peace with it. Together, in the garden, they grow stronger, seeing that by working together they can create a better future.

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Farming cultivates healthy families and communities in Nigeria
Samuel Oladipupo understands the hardships of being a small family farmer. Livestock feed is expensive and is sometimes hard to come by. The low prices fetched from the products of his labours make it difficult to expand and try new agricultural activities. Poor roads and infrastructure can make it hard to get products to market. And little support is given to farmers, who are often neglected by government policies that do not benefit them.

Thankfully, the Justice Development and Peace Commission of the diocese of Ijebu-Ode (JDPC) in Nigeria has been there to help him overcome these challenges. With support from DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, JDPC is helping farmers like Samuel.

Samuel, who is a poultry farmer, had the opportunity to participate in several training sessions run by JDPC, such as bookkeeping, veterinary skills, and management. In addition, he was able to secure a loan that helped him diversify his activities.

“I started with 300 birds, and now I own 700! I have started other agricultural enterprises, such as growing plantain and raising snails,” he says.

It has also meant important changes for his family. “I was able to repay my loan, and now I can attend to the needs of my family, such as the education of my children, being able to access health care and having a good shelter,” he explains.

The future feels bright for Samuel. He not only plans to continue to expand his business, but as chairman of a local farmers’ group and through the skills he acquired with JDPC, he wants to help others in his community experience small family farming as a viable and rewarding calling.