



## O sonho – a comprehensive intervention building on poverty fighting

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### Abstract

“O Sonho” (The dream) is a Portuguese NGO that works in Setúbal – a city 45 Km from Lisbon.

Since 2005 “O Sonho” has been expanding its participation in community settings. In October 2007 “O Sonho” made a protocol with the Portuguese Social Security System, to work for a national poverty ending program – Rendimento Social de Inserção (Social Integration Income), aiming to promote labor, social and community integration of low income population.

This program intends to build with families new tracks for their development, on employment, education, housing, health and civil rights and duties. Intending to build a comprehensive intervention, we have been growing in the areas of microcrédit – building a coalition to give credit to promote self-employment; training – doing and promoting training on health promotion and prevention; food supplies and clothes – building coalitions in order to address serious hunger and poverty situations; and housing – promoting and developing mutualist solutions with families for access to houses.

We stand for the crucial proactive role of individuals, families and communities in their own development, so we assume as core principles for intervention the trust relationship building; and the family’s capacity and autonomy in their integration process – promoting families’ participation and empowerment –, we base our efforts on finding ways to support people on creating new opportunities for using their strengths to grow out of poverty.

We assume an active role on poverty ending and community development, focusing on social entrepreneurship and serving people in its most important development issues.

We believe that this way of creating new supporting structures for and with the community helps to promote community development and systems change.

**Key words:** Empowerment; community empowerment

This paper intends to describe the growing strategies and the work that a Portuguese Non Government Organization (NGO) – “O Sonho” (The dream) – has been doing in Setúbal, a city 28 miles (45 Km) from Lisbon.

Dedicated to children activities, particularly to pre-school and free-time activities for children, and inside poor neighbourhoods and close to rural communities in the boundaries of Setúbal, this local organization started an entrepreneurial process aiming to promote development.

We describe their community intervention growth process in this paper. Since 2005 “O Sonho” has been expanding its participation in community settings – it is representing part of the NGO’s from Setúbal in the local council for social work (Rede Social), and also being part of its executive group.

In October 2007 “O Sonho” signed a protocol with the Portuguese Social Security, to work for a national poverty ending program (“Social Integration Income”), aiming to satisfy basic needs and to promote labor, social and community integration of low income population. Its intervention was defined on a specific area, including urban area, social

neighbourhoods, and rural area. They started with a (team with 10 members) 10 members team and with the responsibility for 230 families and 720 people (responsible for 230 families witch means 720 people).

This program intends to work with families helping them to build new tracks for their development, on employment, education, housing, health and civil rights and duties. The professional's role is to negotiate integration process in these areas and to support and follow-up the families. That implies to do joint work with other community organizations, for instance schools, recreation activities organizations, RSI partners, educational system (like schools), health system, social security services, the employment and professional training local institute and local administration services.

That implies that professionals must be aware of empowerment processes so the opportunities created can be matched with people's voice and integration process. In so, this program aims to promote family's autonomy not only at social integration level but also at economic level.

"O sonho" stands for the crucial proactive role of individuals, families and communities in their own development, so assumes as core principles for intervention the trust relationship building; and the family's capacity and autonomy in their integration process – promoting families' participation and empowerment –, and bases efforts on finding ways to support people on creating new opportunities for using their strengths to grow out of poverty.

For these strategies to be effective, the join work must be oriented to a community approach. That means that the professional's role must be focused on a deepen knowledge of the community, and the crossing of resources and integration opportunities with people's qualifications, needs and voices.

Working closely to families made the professionals realize that there were fewer opportunities for integration that were suspected. That fact boosted the organization to start an entrepreneurial process aimed to bring development opportunities to local area residents.

The main difficulties found in facilitating integration processes were: lack of food supplies, personal belongings and assets (clothes, electric appliances, furniture, etc.), credit to start new businesses, educational opportunities.

The main strategy used to create opportunities for local people were based on the establishment of

strategic partnerships, as partnerships as are a good strategy to (Berkowitz & Wolff; cit. in Wolff, 2001)

Partnerships were created to bring food supplies (with the "Programa Comunitário de Ajuda Alimentar a Carenciados"); personal belongings and assets (with Fundação Portuguesa "a comunidade contra a sida"); for micro credit (with ANDC – Associação Nacional de Direito ao Crédito); for entrepreneurship training, IT training, educational and Professional training and education programs (FDTI – Fundação para o Desenvolvimento das Tecnologias de Informação); and for basic literacy programs (Education System Services).

About the results of such initiatives, they are expected to be more concrete in the beginning of next year. when the activities are expected to be in motion. Nevertheless, this is a new reality for the organization and for its community, since this kind of resources and opportunities usually are not available in this particular geographic area.

This local organization assumes an active role on poverty ending and community development, focusing on social entrepreneurship and serving people in its most important development issues. This model for intervention creates new opportunities at the local level, which is crucial to put in practice the social policies and social programs, and to allow new development perspectives for these communities. This is a vision for poverty alleviation through community development.

Nevertheless, resident involvement in agency is also important to create more lasting community change (Association for the Study and Community Development, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2006; Kubisch et al., 2002). Therefore, there must be a deeper relation to residents, which means that those activities have to take place and time, to sustain its capacity, as well as new strategies adopted to promote other groups initiatives to build a more capable community – building community capacity for change.

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