

## Swiss Re sponsors World Vision's integrated 'Água é Vida' project to combat drought effects in semi-arid northeast region of Brazil

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World Vision, the non-governmental organization that has been present in Brazil for 26 years, and Swiss Re, one of the world's largest reinsurance companies, today announced an agreement to implement the Água é Vida Project. The project is aimed at improving access, management and use of water resources for more than 6,000 people in the rural communities of the Brazilian Northeast region - the planet's most populous semi-arid region.

The primary objective is to promote water management for domestic and agricultural use in the Brazilian Northeast, including the rural communities in the states of Pernambuco, Alagoas, Rio Grande do Norte and north of Minas Gerais, where dry climate prevails and access to water is extremely limited. These communities will each be responsible for the maintenance of abundant, good quality water during the whole year including dry spell periods.

Swiss Re's sponsorship of the Água é Vida project is a Sharing Solutions initiative in support of the company's commitment to sustainability. As a global reinsurer, Swiss Re shares knowledge, intellectual capital and expertise to find long-term sustainable solutions.

Jean-Paul Schweizer, President of Swiss Re Brazil, said, "Swiss Re, through a firm social responsibility policy, is demonstrating leadership in showing how water availability and quality affect society, ecology and economy. Swiss Re is committed to water issues, and through these initiatives, such as Água é Vida, we are helping people and demonstrating the importance of appropriate management and preservation of water resources."

He added, "Swiss Re is committed to the Brazilian marketplace and contributing to Brazil's restructuring economy. Swiss Re is actively involved in modernizing the country's insurance and reinsurance industries through new products, services and capacity. Swiss Re has been doing business in Brazil for 60 years since the establishment of Brazil's reinsurer and reinsurance regulator, Instituto de Resseguros do Brasil (IRB)."

World Vision, which operates in approximately 70 social development programs in Brazil, is responsible for the elaboration and execution of the project. Swiss Re, which supports initiatives worldwide for the preservation of water resources, is supporting the project. The implementation phase will be completed by end of 2002.

The Água é Vida project is based on three principal factors:

- Awareness for the preservation of lacking water resources and water treatment
- Transference of appropriate technology for low-cost systems, and improvement of agricultural production, through irrigation
- Water collection techniques, as well as community involvement to participate in hydrographic bay committees in their regions.

The project involves the construction of 96 family cisterns (with a total capacity for 10,000 liters) and 24 community reservoirs (with a total capacity for 50,000 liters), in addition to 60 wells and underground reservoirs. These cisterns will be supplied by rain during the rain season or by water trucks supplied through partnerships with local governments and the army, and will attend communities with potable water for a period of up to six months.

The new wells and cisterns as well as the implementation of irrigation systems will facilitate rational use of water for agriculture and cattle breeding. Organic food represents an opportunity for the economic development of these rural communities, since regular access to water increases productivity and quality of products, with direct impact on the families' incomes. The project privileges women as being responsible for good water management, guaranteeing a better efficiency for actions.

### **The Northeast and the Drought**

The Northeast region of Brazil is the planet's most populous semi-arid region, with 25 million inhabitants. It is one of the less developed regions in Latin America. Drought has serious, long-lasting consequences on agricultural production, contributing to hunger and social problems including the spread of several diseases. Because of lack of nutrition and the consumption of bad quality water, mortality rates especially among children increases.

The land in the region does not favor water infiltration and there is a lack of investment in water technology. There is a lack of water due to rain irregularity (it rains on 18 days per year, in average), and high evaporation indexes and high temperatures during the day.

### **Community involvement**

Community participation is the main reason for efficiency of the project, as well as maintenance of water systems in good conditions. Community training projects have already started, focusing on hygiene, conservation and protection of water resources, maintenance of simple water systems and on the principle of equal access to all. Project management included an investigation of the population's needs, with meetings to promote the involvement of the community in the technology transference project. By working and building the capacity of organizations and local communities, the Água é Vida Project allows communities to maintain the project's long-term benefits.

### **Successful Experience - SOS Drought**

The implementation of the Água é Vida Project was preceded by the successful work experience of World Vision in the combat to drought. Through the SOS Drought program, which started in 1999 in the state of Alagoas, a 63% reduction in the children mortality rate was registered, due to the growth of food safety and long-term access to water cisterns, using the same system now expanding to other states.

### **Notes to editors**

Based in Zurich, Switzerland, Swiss Re is one of the world's leading reinsurers has approximately 8,000 employees worldwide in over 70 offices in more than 30 countries. Through its scientists, researchers and actuaries, Swiss Re provides research and expertise through its award-winning sigma studies, proprietary publications, seminars and high-level forums held at the company's Centre for Global Dialogue in Rüschnikon, Switzerland. Swiss Re recently held an international conference on sustainable water management to discuss solutions and best management practices for protecting and improving the use of water resources.

Swiss Re's gross premiums in 2001 amounted to CHF 28.5 billion (USD 16.9 billion). Swiss Re has a strong track record of earnings growth only interrupted in 2001 with a net loss of CHF 165 million (USD 97.8 million), largely due to the 11 September event. At the end of 2001, Swiss Re's shareholders' equity amounted to CHF 22.6 billion (USD 13.6 billion) and the total balance sheet stood at CHF 170 billion (USD 102.4 billion). Swiss Re is rated "AAA" by Standard & Poor's, "Aaa" by Moody's and "A++" by A.M. Best.

World Vision is a humanist Non-Governmental Organization, founded in 1950 by journalist Bob Pierce. Today, World Vision is present in more than 90 countries, and has been in Brazil since 1975. Giving priority to the work with poor communities, World Vision concentrates its actions in the Northeast region of Brazil and in Tocantins, North of Minas Gerais, Amazonas and in large urban centers, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte.

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