



Helicopters, nurseries, and joint efforts: How the MST aims to plant 100 million trees by 2030

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From the top of a Federal Highway Police (PRF) helicopter, 12 thousand kilos of juçara and araucaria palm seeds were [dropped](#) into legal reserve areas of the Landless Workers Movement (MST), in Paraná. The action carried out in May is part of the MST plan to plant 100 million trees in the country by 2030.

Aerial seeding is the most massive of the movement's different methods to achieve this goal. Among other actions are the implementation of [agroforestry systems](#) in settlements and camps, the distribution of seedlings in schools, the creation of nurseries, and the establishment of agreements with universities, public and private entities.



Landless workers refuel a PRF helicopter in the Dom Tomás Balduino pre-settlement, in Paraná. Photo: Gabriela Moncau

The Plan

The "National Plan Planting Trees, Producing Healthy Food" was launched at the beginning of 2020, as a decisive action to project "the MST, popular agrarian reform and agroecology as central axes in the formulation of alternatives to the environmental crisis", in [words](#) of Camilo Augusto, one of its coordinators.

Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the movement's in-person actions to be reduced for at least two years. Even so, in December 2023, the MST counted 25 million trees planted, 300 nurseries created and 15 thousand hectares of degraded lands [recovered](#).



Recovery of areas destroyed by the Vale dam

Of the [reforested](#) territory, around a thousand hectares were destroyed by the collapse of the Vale/Samarco dams in [Brumadinho](#) (MG). The 2019 tragedy killed at least 270 people, and among the many affected were a thousand MST families camped near the Paraopeba River.



In the Paraopeba Basin, the MST planted 34 species of trees. Photo: Agatha Azevedo / MST-MG

In 2015, the environmental disaster that occurred in Mariana (MG), which killed 19 people and was committed by the same mining company, affected 23 MST settlements in the R o Doce basin.

The movement in 2016 signed an agreement with the Minas Gerais state government and the Renova Foundation, an NGO created by Samarco through a Transactions and Conduct Adjustment Term (TTAC, after its name in Portuguese) to respond to the damages caused by the tragedy.



Through this project, residents receive technical assistance to plan their plots with the planting of agroforestry, with the objective of reforesting 5,226 hectares, mainly in aquifer recharge areas. Nurseries were built in the Estrela do Norte, Nova Conquista, Liberdade, and Emiliano Zapata settlements.

The experience inspires the most recent one in Brumadinho, where the "Plant Trees" project was launched when the dam collapse was a year old, in January 2020. There, in 10 hectares previously contaminated by mining, 30 thousand seedlings of fruit trees of 34 different species.

According to the MST, these actions in Minas Gerais include the recovery of degraded areas in the Chapada dos Guimarães Park, in Mato Grosso, in addition to the natural regeneration of around a thousand hectares and the restoration of 100 hectares of permanent preservation areas (PPA) in Pará, among others.



Preparation of seedlings for planting in the Mártires de Abril settlement, in Pará. Photo: Carlinhos Luz / MST-PA

Sowing with PRF helicopters

Releasing tons of seeds at once by air is the largest-scale reforestation action carried out by the MST. The idea arose in a conversation between two residents of the [Dom Tomás Balduino](#) pre-settlement, from Quedas do Iguaçu (PR).



Josué Evaristo Gomes, son of settlers and scholar of the juçara palm tree, participated in the recovery of the endangered species and made the proposal to Tarcísio Leopoldo, from the state directorate of the MST in Paraná. The idea was "incredible at first," says Josué, but the movement made it a reality.

"We have the wealth of having peasant families who know the palm tree and know how it behaves," says Tarcísio. "They already sowed the seeds by hand in the legal reserves that border the lots and saw that they germinated very easily and in quantity. So we were already sure of the success of aerial seeding before doing the first one last year."



A juçara palm seedling that germinated from the 2023 planting, was identified in the middle of the forest. Photo: Gabriela Moncau

In fact, it's working. In June 2023, the first experiment scattered four thousand kilos of juçara palm seeds into the air. This year, in the second [Nature Day](#), in addition to the movement tripling the number of seeds planted, the effectiveness of the previous experience was evaluated.



Around 10 thousand juçara seedlings per hectare were identified by the postgraduate group in Agroecology and Sustainable Rural Development of the Federal University of the Southern Border (UFFS). In one year they germinated and measured, on average, 14 cm high.

The air launch was possible thanks to an alliance between the MST and the PRF, based on local coordination in Paraná. The joint action was sealed during last year's Nature Day, the first year in which Fernando César Borba de Oliveira was in charge of supervising the organization in Paraná. With a degree in journalism and a postgraduate degree in political communication in Social Sciences, from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), Oliveira worked at Agencia Brasil and in union entities before becoming a highway police officer in 2013.

Associations

The alliances with the PRF, Ibama (Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), the UFFS, and other entities involved in the MST Nature Day are just some of the various alliances made by the MST to make the "Plant Trees" plan possible.

"There is a need for some companies to make environmental compensation for the sale of vehicles, for example. We managed to form alliances with the mediation of the municipal environmental secretariats to plant a significant number of trees in the northern region of Paraná," says João Flávio, agronomist and member of the MST coordination for the reforestation plan.

Agreements were also developed with nurseries from Itaipú Binacional, the Water and Earth Institute (IAT), and other smaller municipalities in Paraná. "We obtain a large number of seeds by extracting the pulp of the fruits," says Tarcísio, referring to species native to the Atlantic Forest, such as *guabiroba*, *uvaia*, plum, cherry, and *jabuticaba*. "And we provide nurseries in exchange for seedlings," he explains.

"We have an activity at the Don Tomás Balduino School that has already won some awards. A large number of seedlings are given to the students, who plant them in their homes and are monitored," says Leopoldo. At the Vagner Lopes



Itinerant School alone, students have already received 15 thousand tree seedlings.

In São Paulo, the MST partnered with the Center for Support for Culture and Extension in Education and Environmental Conservation of USP to carry out the "Dandara Project: agroecological transition in agrarian reform territories."

Through this project, 22 families from the cooperatives of the Dandara and Reunidas settlements, in the city of Promissão (SP), implemented 20 agroforestry systems on 13 hectares. In total, 18,800 seedlings of 81 different tree species were planted.

"The biggest challenge"

According to João Flávio, "There is a very clear perception that this burden cannot remain solely on the shoulders of peasant families. Therefore, we are permanently seeking the contribution of public policies to materialize this plan."

But "the biggest challenge," assesses Bárbara Loureiro, who is also part of the coordination of the "National Plan Planting Trees, Producing Healthy Food" is to transcend the numerical goal.

What is sought, says Loureiro, is that "this dimension of caring for the common goods of nature gives materiality" to the popular agrarian reform defended by the MST. And so, along with initiatives of great impact and visibility, it is also incorporated as an "everyday action."

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