

# BRASÍLIA, BRAZIL:

## Stakeholders Come Together for Ecosystem Regeneration

Circular strategy:  
**REGENERATE**





## Introduction

Brazil's populous capital city, Brasília, is no stranger to drought and water scarcity. The city, which is located on the dry Brazilian Highlands, faces dwindling water supplies, a growing population, and worsening dry periods related to climate change.

Protecting the ecosystems that help local water bodies recharge is key to maintaining the city's water supply going forward. One such ecosystem is in the Serrinha do Paranoá, a watershed to the north of the city that recharges Paranoá Lake. Working under the umbrella of the Serrinha do Paranoá Waters Project (Projeto Águas – construindo juntos uma sociedade sustentável na Serrinha do Paranoá), collaborative governance networks among public institutions, civil society organizations, and community members enabled implementation of initiatives including participatory mapping of water features, stream restoration, and establishment of conservation areas.





## Context & Key Actors

After three years of low rainfall, water scarcity in Brasília reached crisis levels in 2016. While the city had previously drawn water from local reservoirs, dwindling supplies forced it to tap nearby Paranoá Lake in 2017. With the Paranoá Lake now part of the city's water supply, it became even more important to ensure its adequate water recharge. A key source of water for the lake is outflow from the Serrinha do Paranoá watershed, an area of preserved savannah and natural springs to the north of Brasília. However, encroaching developments threaten the Serrinha do Paranoá's regenerative functions.

While various community groups have been actively working to conserve the area since 2011, objections to a planned housing development in 2017 helped multiple stakeholders, including civil society organizations, NGOs, municipal departments, and public institutions, coalesce into a coherent movement under the umbrella of the Serrinha do Paranoá Waters Project.



## Intervention

The Serrinha do Paranoá Waters Project was galvanized by widespread opposition to planned housing developments in the Serrinha do Paranoá on the grounds that the developments did not have adequate technical measures in place to protect the area's water recharge functions. Involvement of the Public Prosecutor's Office, which conducts public interest investigations, drew additional scientific and municipal stakeholders into the project.

Collaboration continued following the case, and was strengthened by the wide network of involved stakeholders. Government actors include the North Lake Regional Administration (Administração Regional do Lago Norte), the Environment Secretary, the Federal District Parliament (Câmara Legislativa do DF), and the University of Brasília. Involvement of these academic and government actors was key to the establishment of protected conservation areas in the Serrinha do Paranoá, which protect ecosystems and their services in the region going forward.

Over 25 civil society organizations, including residents' associations, conservation groups, religious organizations, and student groups, became involved; thousands of people would eventually participate in the project through one avenue or another. Volunteers assisted with critical on-the-ground interventions, including a participatory mapping project that involved geo-referencing locations of hundreds of unmapped water features in the watershed, as well as multiple vegetation restoration initiatives.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration also helped establish on-going participatory governance mechanisms, including four citizen bodies: the Rural Sustainable Development Council, the Local Planning Council, the Culture Council, and the Environmental City Commission.



## Success Factors

- **Cross-sectoral collaboration:** networks among governmental institutions and civil society organizations help maintain consistency and longevity of policies and interventions, preventing cessation or interruption from the government side (e.g. due to turnover of civil servants, new administrations).
- **Legal support:** the investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office drew other high-level government actors into the project, led to the involvement of local scientists, and helped build the legal foundation for establishment of conservation areas.
- **Strong public participation:** involvement of various local groups, not all of whom are typically active in conservation efforts, raised public awareness and built an extensive volunteer base.

## Impacts

- **Ecosystems mapped and restored:** volunteers mapped 115 springs and restored 25 degraded water features.
- **Protected areas created:** As of 2019, one park has been created and four other conservation areas are in the final stages of official approval.
- **Ongoing collaboration:** the cross-sectoral governance networks built and strengthened through these efforts will ensure continuity and longevity of interventions going forward.







## Author

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## References

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