

SOCIAL FARMING FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN ITALY

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Country: **Italy** | Principal organisation: **LENTAMENTE**

ABSTRACT

Lentamente Società Cooperativa Agricola reclaimed and rehabilitated abandoned land, and established an urban social farm in Benevento. Lentamente and its partners such as Coop La Solidarietà use social farming as an innovative tool to respond to the socio-economic challenges faced by the Benevento community.

The social farming project ensures social inclusion of disadvantaged communities, and provides them with education and employment benefits.

ILC COMMITMENTS



STRONG SMALL-SCALE FARMING SYSTEMS

INTERNATIONAL
LAND
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Lentamente
società cooperativa agricola

COMPETENCIES

AREAS

- // **COMMUNITIES, INDIGENOUS & RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND RIGHTS**
- // **URBAN LAND GOVERNANCE**

SKILLS

- // **PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT**
- // **KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

BACKGROUND

A farm in the middle of the city of Benevento lay abandoned and unused for over 20 years. The land remained abandoned and neglected, and over time became a local informal dumping site. Plastic and other forms of garbage accumulated on the land, creating environmental challenges often associated with vacant and abandoned urban land.

THE CHALLENGE

Abandoned land is difficult to reuse without regeneration and revalorisation to make it usable again. While the regeneration of abandoned land presents great socio-economic and environmental benefits, it can be difficult as the land carries the stigma of contamination. Furthermore, it is often difficult to get the necessary permission from local authorities to establish an urban farm on abandoned land.

Lentamente, its partners and the Benevento community were uncertain about the municipality's response to their proposal to reclaim abandoned land and use it as an urban social farm. In this case, the land had been in disuse for over 20 years, causing environmental challenges related to unproductive land, and social challenges wherein the local community had turned the land into an illegal waste dumping site.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Lentamente Società Cooperativa Agricola has worked with the Benevento community to recover and re-use previously abandoned land. With a social perspective of the “common good,” Lentamente and their partners, Coop La Solidarietà have established Orto di Casa Betania (the social gardens of Betania) and the Caffè dell’Orto where families and associations manage vegetable gardens.

With a social inclusion approach, Lentamente is working with community members, including disadvantaged populations, disabled people, drug addicts and formerly incarcerated people to provide economic and social opportunities that allow them to function in society. The social gardens of Betania and Caffè dell’Orto have a social centre, café, and garden for experimenting with ancient and new crop species. The café and social centre are a space for the community to congregate, and consume food that is prepared using organic vegetables produced in the social gardens.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

Lentamente and, Slow food and Cooperativa la Solidarietà have reclaimed formerly abandoned land and established Orto di Casa Betania, an urban agricultural garden in Benevento dedicated to social farming projects for the benefit of disadvantaged people. The space includes organic vegetable gardens, play areas and a bar with a multi-purpose hall. Lentamente manages Caffè dell’Orto, while Cooperativa la Solidarietà and Slow Food manage production at Orto di Casa Betania.

The gardens have given disadvantaged community members, especially formerly incarcerated people and drug addicts, an opportunity to be part of the community. Through the social farming project, they have gained useful farming skill that include vineyard dressing, pruning, beekeeping and general farm management to earn a living in a dignified manner.



THE GOOD PRACTICE

IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS

1

SECURING THE LAND.

Lentamente and Coop La Solidarietà conceived the idea of reclaiming abandoned land and converting it into a social farming project. The local community was amenable to the idea of establishing the social gardens and social bar of Betania; a space for organic farming projects, recreation, community collaboration and farming knowledge sharing. The municipality was equally enthusiastic about the project that would reclaim abandoned land for social farming purposes.

2

PREPARING THE LAND AND SEEDS.

Over a 3 year period, Lentamente, Coop La Solidarietà, Slow Food and the community worked together to collect traditional seeds that the community of Benevento had sheltered over time. With the aim of enhancing the local biodiversity, they collected traditional seeds of, among other things, tomato, aubergine, pepper and zucchini varieties that are not commercialised.

3

EXPERIENTIAL AND DIDACTIC TEACHING METHODOLOGY.

A combination of experiential and didactic teaching is essential for interactive learning. Lentamente and partners have used a “learn by doing” approach in order to encourage hands-on and experiential learning.

4

ORGANIC FARMING.

After clearing and dividing the land into 30 square meter beds, the community used organic soil management techniques such as mulching to manage the garden. In order to prevent weeds from forming and the soil from compacting, and to save water, the farmers used a combination of drip irrigation and mulching. Cooperativa la Solidarietà has overall management of Orto di Casa Betania and ensures its smooth operation.

5

COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION.

The community often enjoys social events at Caffè dell’Orto – a bar that serves food that is prepared using vegetables produced in Orto di Casa Betania. The community, young and old, comes together to enjoy food prepared using their additive-free and preservative-free organic products. The social events also present the community with an opportunity to share important information about agriculture and encourage more community members to undertake urban agriculture.

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY



Lentamente, Slow Food and Coop La Solidarietà use a combination of didactic and interactive teaching methodologies to impart knowledge about rural food traditions; agricultural innovations; social inclusion; civic consciousness; land reclaim and reuse processes. Using a holistic approach to farming education, they have worked with schools, creating an environmentally conscious youth.

Through workshops, they also offer the community recreational and educational moments during which food, farming and agricultural traditions are shared with the community.

FIND OUT MORE

- ▶ <https://lentamente.wixsite.com/lentamentecoop/sociale?lang=en>
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/Lentamente-Societ%C3%A0-Cooperativa-Agricola-183046895225466/> <https://www.facebook.com/Caff%C3%A8-dellOrto-Fattoria-Sociale-Orto-di-Casa-Betania-403569513030489/>
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/alimentabenevento/>
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/GramignaODV/>
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EEN5gSz5so>

LESSONS LEARNED

Social urban agriculture is important to the agro-food sector as it contributes to urban food and nutrition security. It also builds social capital and improves interpersonal relations and skills, benefits that often are ignored.

A lack of knowledge on urban agriculture has hindered its relevance in urban and peri-urban areas. Lentamente and its partners have explored some of the socio-cultural and economic, benefits of urban agriculture that include social inclusion of excluded and disadvantaged people, food security and the substitution of store bought perishable food items with urban farming products.

Furthermore, urban agriculture has ecological benefits as it reduces illegal dumping in cities and improves urban biodiversity.

UNITED FOR LAND RIGHTS

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