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*Advocacy toolkit case studies*

# IMPROVING WATER QUALITY IN BRAZIL

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<b>THEME:</b>	<b>Water, sanitation and hygiene</b>
<b>ADVOCACY APPROACHES:</b>	<b>Community mobilisation Government officials: meeting with</b>

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When the north-east region of Brazil suffered a severe drought, the worst for fifty years, the water level was affected, reservoirs collapsed, a major water distribution pipeline fell into disrepair, and water supplies became contaminated by faeces. This caused an outbreak of disease, particularly acute diarrhoea, and two people died. It was difficult for the public health system to cope.

Tearfund partner Diaconia worked with communities affected by the drought. As they did so, they discovered that there was insufficient water for people to drink and produce food, especially in rural areas. They also found out that the government had a responsibility to provide people with access to good quality water.

Diaconia gathered together women's groups, their legal representatives, trade unions, civil society organisations, youth groups, schools, churches and members of the communities affected. They all shared their experiences and together they made a plan. They decided to ask the government to treat the drought as an emergency, and force the water companies to decontaminate the affected water supplies. They also decided to request a series of public hearings with the State Prosecutor.

Council officials from the affected areas, representatives from the Ministry of Health and representatives from the water companies were all required to attend the public hearings. As a result, the National Department for Anti-Drought Projects was asked to act urgently to repair the damaged water pipeline, the Secretary of State for Health decided to check the quality of the water in the affected areas regularly, and the water companies were obliged to provide tankers to communities that had no water. The Public Prosecutor's Office also agreed to mobilise the government to start an awareness-raising campaign about water conservation.

Diaconia insisted that all these agreements should be put in writing, in a document called 'Terms of Conduct'. Diaconia also continued to outwork their strategy of training community leaders and farmers to get involved in municipal councils and other decision-making forums. This led to more people influencing the setting and spending of local government budgets. It also led to Diaconia revising their planning so that all their future programmes included work to empower people to engage in municipal forums and monitor government actions.