Brazil is one of the largest producers of charcoal in the world. And here in the northeast of the country, much of the cutting down of trees to produce this charcoal is illegal. (10)

The effect on the environment is devastating. This area has a high rate of deforestation. Many people, like Nelson Da Silva Medeiros, say there’s no choice. (11)

“The only thing we worried about was the charcoal coming to an end, and how we would survive. There was no hope.” (6.5)

The region has a population of 22 million, but only five per cent of the country’s water resources. Little rainfall, and cyclic droughts, make earning a living difficult, forcing people to turn to charcoal production. But the meager earnings from selling
charcoal are not enough, says Nelson’s wife Antonia. (21.5)

ANTONIA: (In Portugese)  F

“In the morning my children used to ask me for something to eat, and there wasn’t anything. I won’t deny it, because that’s what I’ve been through.” (8.5)

NARRATION:

Once a dry barren area, this is now a green oasis. Nelson and Antonia are both earning a living from the land. Advisors from a local project supported by the UN agency IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, are promoting agro-ecology to help Nelson and Antonia and other farmers find ways to increase their income while conserving the environment. Project supervisor Rosane Gurgel: (25)

ROSANE FERNANDES DA SOUSA GURGEL: (In Portugese)  F

“When we work with agro-ecology, we understand we can use the resources that are available, leaving future generations with as many of these resources as possible.” (9)

NARRATION:

Accessing water was key. By digging 120 meters down, the team discovered ground water- which now provides the community 12,000 liters per hour. (10.5)
NELSON ON CAMERA

“We didn't know there was so much water under our feet.” (3)

NARRATION:

ANTONIA AND OTHER WOMEN TENDING PLANTS

With this irrigated land, the 27 families here now work together, making a living from the fruit and vegetables they grow. They follow the principles of agro-ecology, using no chemical fertilizers or pesticides. None of them are involved with charcoal production anymore. (17)

ANTONIA: (In Portuguese) F

“I feel very happy. I've realized many dreams here in the same spot where I suffered a lot.” (6)

NARRATION:

NELSON AND ANTONIA SHARE WATERMELON

Not only have Antonia and Nelson improved their incomes, but also their health. For the first time, they have access to fresh fruit and vegetables. And with the success of their business, they now earn enough to feed their families. (14)

UN LOGO

This report was produced by Joanne Levitan for the United Nations. (4.5)