

# **Empowerment of local communities: a sustainable path towards revitalization of vulnerable environments**

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**ABSTRACT:** Elos is a Brazil-based foundation with several years of experience in the development of strategies for the revitalization of South American communities under high level of socio environmental vulnerability. One of the most successful projects is the "School for warriors without weapons", a practical training program for university students who are committed to the preservation of traditional cultures via community-based sustainable development. During one month, approximately 60 university students and young professionals from all over Latin America learn how to carry on revitalization projects with impoverished communities.

An important characteristic of the project is the active participation of the inhabitants in the decision-making as well as in the realization process. This empowerment process, which also fosters partnerships between non-governmental organizations, government and private sector, embraces following steps:

- Learn of local construction techniques, social organization and communication.
- Survey of the priorities as they are perceived by the community.
- Elaboration of a collective proposal for actions to be undertaken.
- Participative realization, with active collaboration of the students and the inhabitants.

**Keywords:** participative democracy, low-cost housing, ecological rehabilitation

