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From Street Children to all Children

Improving the Opportunities of Low Income Urban Children and Youth in Brazil

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Introduction

"The child is the beginning without end. The end of the child is the beginning of the end. When a society allows its children to be killed, it is because it has begun its own suicide as a society. When it does not love the child it is because it has failed to recognize its humanity".

Herbert de Souza, 1992 (1)

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the national and international media and local and international children's and human rights organizations focused considerable attention on the plight of 'street children' (2) in Brazil, particularly on violence against street children by death squads and police. Indeed, the image or symbol of child and youth poverty in Brazil, as presented in the national and international press and in numerous research reports, might be said to be the street child.

But is this image accurate? And more importantly, does this image of the street child point children's and youth policies and programs in Brazil in the right direction? Street children may be the most visible and in some cases the most obvious examples of poverty and inattention to children's needs in Brazil, but there are millions of 'invisible' children and youth who, while relatively more protected than children living or working on the streets, lack important supports for their healthy development.

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In this chapter, we argue that this focus on street children - however well-intentioned - deflects attention from the broader population of low income children and youth in poverty. Of course street children in Brazil continue to have urgent and acute needs. The governmental and non-governmental organizations, advocates and researchers working on behalf of street children in Brazil are carrying out vital work that has helped thousands of children and youth who need intensive and immediate assistance, protection and care-giving. But this focus on street children has meant that most children's programs in Brazil have directed their attention to a relatively small number of children and youth in the most dire situations. Unfortunately, relatively little policy or program development in Brazil has focused on assisting and supporting the far larger number of low income children and youth who continue to live with their families but nonetheless require special supports - supports that may prevent them from becoming 'street children'.

Brazil is not alone in focusing its child and youth policy on those in the most at-risk situations; this has been the tendency in many countries in the Americas region, and to some extent in the U.S. Brazil, however, offers compelling conditions to change its focus from 'street children' to 'all children'. In 1990, Brazil passed a progressive law on the rights of children and adolescents, called the Statute on Children and Adolescent, based in part on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides for protection, and also calls on the state and civil society to provide developmental supports for all children and youth.

The Brazilian Statute codifies into national law the collective wisdom and experience from children's advocates and child development experts nationally and internationally in supporting the notion that all children and youth, by virtue of their stage in the human life cycle, need special protection, care and opportunities for growth, exploration and education, both formal and informal. The Statute and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child are also unanimous in their assertion that such developmental supports are needed by all children and youth and not just those who face specific risks, such as risk of being abandoned or abused.

Since its passage in 1990, advocacy around the Statute and its implementation have focused, with some exceptions, on child protection - responding to and protecting children and adolescents from abuse and abandonment. Such advocacy has been crucial for the well-being of children and adolescents in Brazil, and for improving community-based mechanisms for child protection. But there is a need to take the Statute even further. In particular, we need to ask: What would be required to implement the concept of developmental supports for all children and youth embodied in the Statute?

We are using the term 'developmental supports' to refer to community resources that offer young people safety; caring relationships; opportunities to develop skills, friendship and self-confidence; and activities and services that contribute to the cognitive, social, creative, cultural, vocational and emotional development of children and youth. While some of these supports may be provided in the formal education and health sectors, developmental supports generally refer to community supports and resources available outside the public school and public health systems.

This idea of developmental supports may sound utopian. In a country like Brazil and for most of

Latin America, with massive constraints on the public budget and unmet basic needs for much of its population (adult and child), it may sound even more remote from reality. Nonetheless, we will cite a few case examples of programs in Brazil that have sought to implement community-based developmental supports for children and youth. We will defend the idea that this trend, which is also happening in a few other countries in the region, may lead to a positive shift in interventions which traditionally have focused on deviance and deficits among low income young people toward a perspective that highlights or accentuates their potential and their competencies. While we recognize the difficulties in implementing such universal supports for children and youth, we will argue that such a paradigm shift in child and youth policy is not only possible, it is necessary, in Brazil and throughout the region of the Americas.

Poverty and the Situation of Low Income Children and Youth in Brazil

Brazil has experienced tremendous economic growth in the last 40 years, and is currently on the list of the world's ten largest economies. However, as in much of Latin America, economic growth in Brazil has been extremely uneven, providing wealth and financial stability to a few and poverty and financial instability for most. Currently, nearly half, or 47 percent, of Brazil's population of 160 million live in poverty (UNDP, 1994; IBGE/UNICEF,1997). According to recent figures from the World Bank, Brazil has the worst income distribution among more than 60 countries for which data is available. As of 1989, the richest 10 percent of the population controlled 51.3 percent of total income, while the poorest 20 percent of the population had access to just 2.1 percent of total income (World Bank, 1997).

Looking at Brazil's recent past, after rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980's were marked by recession, widespread economic instability, high external debt, high unemployment and staggering inflation, which in 1989-1990 reached more than 1,500 percent per year (UNDP,1993). This hyperinflation further increased income inequalities in Brazil. In 1994 the Brazilian government adopted a new currency, which so far appears to have succeeded in controlling inflation, but has caused some prices to stabilize at a level beyond the reach of much of the population.

During this period of economic turmoil, the Brazilian government demonstrated rhetorical commitment to the poor, but in practice the models of development adopted in the country have done little to address income inequalities. Social exclusion and income inequality in the country can be demonstrated by the proliferation of new 'favelas', the low income settlements that ring Brazil's major cities, plus population increases in existing favelas, a growing homeless or street population and an escalation in urban violence.

Chronic poverty in Brazil and in the rest of Latin America has had a direct impact on children. In 1990 more than half of Brazilian children and adolescents (53.5 percent) lived in families whose monthly per capita income was less than half of one minimum salary (or less than US$75 per month). In absolute numbers, this amounts to roughly 32 million young people (IBGE/PNAD,1990, in UNICEF, 1993). Another trend in poverty in Brazil is the concentration of poverty in female-headed

households; 1989 census data in Brazil found that female-headed families now represent about 20 percent of all households, with higher concentrations among low income, urban households (Bruce et all, 1995).

The size of Brazil's child and adolescent population, and the number of poor children and youth, present tremendous challenges for the social services sector, the most important being the public education system. Nearly 50 percent of Brazil's population is under the age of 20. The public education system in Brazil can best be represented as a bottleneck with nearly universal enrollment at the primary level converging to dramatically reduced enrollment at the secondary and tertiary level. The school enrollment rate in Brazil falls sharply from 84.2 percent at ages 10 -14 (the primary level, and the level at which education is compulsory) to 56.8 percent at ages 15 -17 (the secondary level) (Oliveira, 1993). Of those teens ages 15-17 who were in school, only 22.5 percent were enrolled in secondary school, demonstrating the high rates of retention and failure.

One of the main reasons for high rates of school drop-out and retention in Brazil, in addition to the lack of adequate education infrastructure, is the need for children and youth to work. Household survey data from 1990 find that 50 percent of youth ages 15-17 and 17.2 percent of 10-14 year-olds were working (Rizzini, Rizzini, Holanda 1996). In urban and rural areas in Brazil many low income children and youth are frequently compelled to forgo school attendance to support themselves and their families.

As previously mentioned, within the issue of low income children and youth in Brazil, the common image, and the focus of considerable attention, has been that of 'street children'. In the late 1980s, UNICEF and some international advocacy organizations estimated that as many as 7 million children and youth spent most their time and/or slept on the streets in Brazil, a number that is now recognized as an overstatement (Barker, Knaul, 1991). In the past few years, however, a number of censuses and studies in some Brazilian cities have provided what seems to be a more reasonable estimate of the number of children and youth in this situation. A recent study in Sao Paulo found that 4.520 children and youth circulated in the streets during the day, but only 895 slept on the streets at night (Jornal do Brasil, 1995). In Salvador, Bahia, a recent study found 15.743 children and youth working in the streets and 468 living in the streets (Projeto Axe, 1993). In Fortaleza, research found 184 children and youth living in the streets out of 5.962 children and youth working in the street (Secretaria de Ação Social, 1994) (3). The consensus that is now emerging in Brazil is that the number of children and youth living in the streets is not nearly as large as once estimated, and is the 'tip of the iceberg' of low income children, the majority of whom continue to live with their families but often in difficult situations that compromise their development.

The Path to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent

To understand the potential of the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent as an advocacy tool for potentially shifting policy and program attention from 'street children' to 'all children', it is important to offer a brief overview on its history and impact to date. The Statute emerged out of a confluence of historical trends and events, among them the drafting of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the national and international mobilization on behalf of street children in Brazil, and the return to democratic rule in Brazil (4). The Statute was one of the first successes of the organized civil society movement that emerged during the time of the military government, seeking to promote the participation of civil society in policymaking.

A review of the history of children's policy in Brazil finds that since the beginning of the century, poor children wandering and/or working on the streets were systematically placed in large, closed-door institutions, many of which followed a prison-like model with the justification that it was for their own protection in the case of young children and for 're-education' in the case of teenagers. For most of the 20th century, the government's attitude toward poor children has been ambivalent: policies sought to protect children while at the same time seeking to protect society from the potential 'danger' of so-called antisocial youth (5).

Until 1989, the minor's codes adopted in Brazil offered little variation in the way that the children of the poor were treated, particularly those who were found on the streets and were seen as a threat to society. Violence and maltreatment on the part of police and the institutions where they where placed without a hearing and a general disregard for their rights were the general rule. Without due process, the state could summarily withdraw guardianship with little or no notification to children or their families. Furthermore, criteria for withdrawal of guardianship was often subjective and discretionary. Poor children who were on the streets or without the immediate protection of a guardian were in effect considered delinquents unless proven otherwise (Pilotti, Rizzini, 1995).

In the 1970s and 1980s, with tremendous migration from the poorest areas of the Northeast to Brazil's major cities, mainly in the Southeast, and an increase in the number of the urban poor, the number of children found wandering, working or living on the streets became more visible. The social mobilization that resulted from this phenomenon led to a strong questioning of the government. Starting in the mid-1980s, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), university research and advocacy centers and grassroots movements many of which were linked to the Catholic Church together with progressive policymakers began collaborating to improve children's policies and programs. Media reports on the often abysmal conditions in existing children's institutions and the treatment of street children by police, plus advocacy efforts by NGOs, resulted in a considerable national outcry on behalf of street children.

A number of studies on street children also began to demystify their backgrounds, finding that the majority were not delinquents as commonly portrayed, but were low income children and youth often working on the streets to support themselves and their families (Rizzini, 1986; Fausto, Cervini, 1991). This movement on behalf of street children also included the participation of children and youth themselves; in 1986, the First National Meeting of Street Children in Brazil, coordinated by the

National Movement of Street Children in Brazil, included more than 500 children and youth participants, some of whom spoke on the floor of Brazil's Congress. The Statute on the Child and the Adolescent was born in large part out of this national movement on behalf of street children.

What has the Statute meant in terms of children's rights in Brazil? Until the advent of the Statute, childhood was not seen as being associated with rights. The term "minor" as used in the Brazilian legal code, was associated with the terms "delinquent" and "abandoned", or "without moral supervision", all connotations that implied that the state had all the rights, and the child none. The Statute called for a dramatic reversal of this situation, and introduced the notion that children were "subjects of rights", entitled to all human rights and additional rights and protection because of their special stage in development. It is important to point out that in Brazil, the notion of citizenship and rights only began to circulate in the 1980s (after having been repressed during the military rule).

The Statute also introduces the concept of developmental supports for all children and youth (while not using that exact language) in recognizing that all children and youth - not just those of the middle class - are in a 'special stage of development' and thus due special assistance, priority and protection from the state in collaboration with civil society. The Statute includes codes for children in need of special care - in cases of abuse and abandonment, for example - as well as juvenile justice codes, and provisions that call on the government to provide both preventive and developmentally-oriented health, recreational and educational supports and services that all children and youth need.

For implementation, the Statute stipulates the formation of two specific bodies. One is the Guardianship Councils, which are established at the municipal level, for responding to individual cases of children in conditions of need or risk and for ensuring that children receive the best possible assistance. The Councils act as a point of entry into the children's services system and as an advocate for children and families within the state and non-governmental service system. The Statute also calls for the creation of Municipal Children's Rights Councils, which are charged with coordinating children's policy and funding at the municipal level. As of 1992, two-thirds of Brazil's states had created state-level Children's Rights Councils as had slightly more than one-fourth of Brazil's municipalities (Rizzini et all, 1992). According to a national newsletter set up to promote the Statute, as of 1997, slightly fewer than half of Brazil's 4500 municipalities had Guardianship Councils (ECA em Revista, 1997).

The implementation of the Statute has been uneven, reflecting the vast regional differences in the country in terms of public administration and levels of public resources. A central tenet of the Statute is that municipalities have responsibility for all of their children and adolescents. While this gives municipalities and local communities a tremendous say in the kinds of programs and policies effecting children, it also implies considerable responsibility. Some municipalities have risen to the challenge, while others have not reached the level of organization or political commitment required to make the system work.

In addition, the functioning of the Statute in general and the Guardianship Councils depends on the existence of adequate local children's services - something that by and large is scarce. Furthermore, in spite of the Statute's calls for services and programs that support the integral development of all children and youth, program efforts in Brazil continue to offer mainly low quality remedial services to low income children. Nonetheless, at least at the level of remedial services, the Statute has, in some municipalities in Brazil, changed public attitudes about low income children and youth, contributing to a sense of optimism that socially excluded youth can be reintegrated into society and that municipalities can resolve the needs of its neediest children and youth (6). And, as we will see below, in some municipalities, the State has provided the policy framework and support for the beginning of community-based, developmental supports for children and youth.

Learning from the Experiences of Programs for Street Children

For many community-based organizations and NGOs working in child welfare or working in the social area in Brazil, street children during the 1980s and 1990s became a symbol of the worst examples of social exclusion. While recognizing the limitations of these programs, as previously mentioned, it is nonetheless useful to examine how these programs developed their impressive legacy in terms of their advocacy efforts, research and program methodology and philosophies. While it is not the purpose of this paper to provide an exhaustive analysis of the collective experience of programs working with street children (and other children with special needs) in Brazil, aspects of these programs are worth highlighting, particularly as they offer insights for programs seeking to reach all children and youth.

Concern for street children plus an apparent increase in the number of children working and living on the streets in Brazil in the 1980s led to the creation of numerous organizations and efforts to assist them. Among these is the National Movement of Street Children (Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua), a national umbrella, advocacy and training organization comprised of individuals, NGOs, governmental agencies working on behalf of street children, and children and youth themselves. A number of NGOs were founded in the 1980s to work with other populations of children in need of special services, including working children, children and youth exploited through prostitution, and children who had been victims of abuse. The common characteristic of all these programs is that they offered (and continue to offer) services to children and youth who faced some urgent and identifiable need or risk.

One of the most important lessons learned from these programs - and a lessons that merits applying to all developmental supports - on behalf of street children is the emphasis on children as being agents of their own development, or ‘agents of change in their own lives’ (Myers, 1988:137). On the negative side, some programs for street children in Brazil have over-dramatized them as little heroes, or resilient survivors, which has sometimes had the unfortunate effect of making it seem like they did not need assistance, or in some cases perversely glamorizing the poverty and hardships they have endured.

The majority of programs working with street youth have sought to offer street children options,

recognizing that the majority of street youth had few options apart from work and survival. Thus, the cornerstone of most good programs working with street children in Brazil has been working with them to reflect, envision and acquire an alternative future. These programs have sought to help street children find or recover a sense of what it is they want to do with their lives. Thus, street educators (outreach workers) and other staff at these NGOs typically work with youth individually and in groups to discover or rediscover their personal interests and desires and design the program based on those interests (7).

Another important legacy of street children's programs is that of developing a philosophy and a profession of staff to work with street children - the street educator. This educator, who is both outreach worker, advocate and friend, may be either a volunteer or trained adult staff or youth (in some cases street educators are former street youths), who approaches the street child, befriends them and works with them to resolve their immediate needs. Street educators generally serve as the first point of contact to organizations and other options (education, vocational training, health services, income generation, etc.) that a given NGO or governmental program may offer.

The National Movement for Street Children in Brazil, and numerous other organizations, developed training programs for street educators, and in collaboration with universities in Brazil, have sought to create a loosely defined profession of the street educator. This effort to create a profession is important in that it represents the first time that a profession has been created and identified in Brazil specifically to work with low income children and youth. Of course, teachers, psychologists, and social workers, among other professions, in Brazil also work with children and youth, but the effort to create and define a field of work based on street education and street outreach is the first attempt to create a 'youth worker' field in Brazil (Castro, 1997; Chalhub, 1997). It is also important to note that street educators have had an important voice in structuring programs and policies on behalf of street children.

Programs with street children in Brazil have also been notable in their flexibility, their creativity and for creating rules and timetables that flow from and accept who children are, rather than trying to make the children fit the programs. In this way, they stand in sharp contrast to the public education system in Brazil; whereas the public school system generally tries to make children fit its norms and structure, good programs for street children have tried to make their program fit the norms of the children. Thus, some of the admirable qualities of some street children's programs in Brazil include listening to children's voices, seeking to understand their realities, and striving to be non-judgmental of youth.

Street children in Brazil have also benefited from an impressive body of literature on the situation of needs of these children and youth. Situation analyses and other studies have provided understanding of various facets of the lives of children who both live and/or work on the streets in Brazil. Some of this research on the life courses of children living and/or working on the streets has also begun to provide important ideas on how to prevent other youth from ending up the same situation. Research in central Brazil, in the city of Goiania, comparing the family situations of children who lived on the streets versus those who worked on the streets, found that family cohesion was an important factor. As compared with families of working children, families with children

living on the streets generally did not function as a coherent and cooperative unit; instead, individual family members seemed to look out only for themselves (Fausto, Cervini, 1991; Rizzini et all, 1992). Research with girls living on the streets, and girls exploited sexually through prostitution, found that being sexually abused in the home, particularly by a stepfather, was often a precursor to ending up on the streets (Vasconcelos, 1992). This kind of research offers important insights on what could be done to prevent more children from ending up on the street by offering services such as family support, employment possibilities, or family counseling (8).

These programs and the movement for street youth in Brazil as a whole have been extremely important for the relatively small number of children and youth they have reached.. Unfortunately, many of the most impressive programs for street youth - and other categories of 'at-risk' children and youth - in Brazil are, as Myers (1991) called them, 'jewel boxes', important for the small number of children and youth who benefit from them, but whose wider impact on well-being of low income children and youth in a given community are minimal.

From Street Children to Prevention to Developmental Supports for All Children and Youth

In the last few years, most advocates working on behalf of street children have acknowledged the need to expand what they do to reach the much greater number of children and youth who are not yet living or working on the street but require assistance to prevent them from doing so, or simply to support their healthy development. A number of well-known NGOs working with street children and youth in Brazil have started prevention components. Using their knowledge of and experiences with children already living or working on the streets, they have developed programs and projects that seek to assist children and youth who are still connected to their families, and perhaps still enrolled in school, but who seem to be at risk of becoming street children.

While the trend toward prevention has been growing in influence, it still is extremely limited. The number of solid, ongoing community-based prevention efforts for children and youth in Brazil - and Latin America as a whole - is small. Little has been done to develop community-focused efforts to assist children, youth and families in those communities that are the origin of many street children, particularly efforts that would allow street children to return to their families. Another fundamental gap in services are programs and policies supported by the state that would assist low income families in being able to care for their children.

Prevention-based programs and policies are an important move away from a focus on a relatively small number of children and youth living and working on the streets, and have a number of advantages that have yet to be fully explored in Brazil and in much of Latin America. Prevention-based programs, for example, do not foreclose the need for remedial and intensive services for youth who have acute needs and problems, but in a situation of resource scarcity, the typical lower cost-per-youth for prevention programs means that more youth can be reached for the same cost (Barker, Fontes, 1996). However, as some street children's programs in Brazil have made this movement to prevention in recent years, another important question have emerged: Is prevention enough? Should programs for low income children and youth focus on preventing problems and risks, or should they focus on

supporting healthy development? And, what is the difference?

In the U.S. and in Colombia there has been some debate at the policy and program level over risk-based prevention programs versus programs that focus more broadly on youth development models, i.e. supportive services and activities that are open to all youth (Barker, 1996). Prevention or risk-based model have been criticized for focusing on the negative aspects, or deficits, of young people's lives instead of building on their competencies. 'Prevention' or 'risk models' can also indirectly or directly stigmatize children and youth. For example, programs that seek to prevent girls from ending up on the streets may send an indirect and subtle message that the low income girls it assists are potential street girls. This is a different message than saying they are potential future citizens and equal partners in their families. Even when they do not stigmatize youth, prevention activities too often focus on a single cause of an undesirable activity, start too late, end too early.

The prevention model is also questioned because of its assumption that youth who are free of problems or risks do not need help or special attention. Pittman and Cahill (1991), in making a case for promotional and developmental activities for all youth in the U.S., state that "*problem-free does not mean fully prepared...*". "*Youth development ... should be seen as an ongoing, inevitable process in which all youth are engaged and participate. The emphasis here is on constancy (ongoing) and inclusion (all youth)*".

In Western Europe, many countries now accept a notion that all children and youth - regardless of their 'risk ' or their income status - require and deserve special supports by virtue of their stage in development (Sherraden, 1992). Recognizing the major social differences between Western Europe and Brazil, though, how might this kind of model apply to Brazil? Should programs and policies for children focus on prevention of problems or should they focus on developmental, support services and activities for all youth?

To most children's advocates in Brazil, the Statute advocates for developmental supports for all children and youth. The question that follows is therefore: What are the developmental supports that all children need? And, secondly: How can the state and civil society collaborate to provide these supports?

One obvious starting point to determine what these developmental supports should include is to ask families and youth themselves what kinds of supports they would like. Most parents if asked, regardless of their income level, will say they want more for their children than simply for them to stay out of trouble, or not to end up on the streets. One useful way to explore this issue in Brazil is to look at middle class families, who through their own means typically provide a range of what we could call developmental supports and services for their children. A typical middle or upper middle income family in Brazil generally insures that its children obtain a high quality education by enrolling their children in private schools, and they often enroll their children in a private health insurance plan (9).

However, most middle class parents recognize that private school is not enough for 'holistic' development, nor to keep their children occupied. They typically also enroll their children in sports

activities (private swimming classes, a soccer club, etc.) and recreational and cultural activities (such as ballet, arts, music, etc.). If their son or daughter is having trouble at school, or in some other domain, they may engage a counselor or psychologist, or some other kind of specialist. Such families typically also pursue additional career-related activities such as foreign language classes or computer classes. It is important to note that most middle class families do not merely invest in activities that would prevent their children from 'getting in trouble', but instead generally seek to promote the overall integrated development and happiness of their children. Entire industries of private schools, tutors, psychologists, coaches and art teachers exist in Brazil to provide these services, for pay, to millions of middle class families. It is precisely these service and support networks that generally exist for middle class children and youth that should be advocated for low income children and youth.

Debate over children's policy in Brazil and much of the world has often assumed that prevention is more cost-effective than remedial services. Policymakers and funders are often convinced to fund prevention programs based on evaluation that confirms the absence of problems as a result of a given policy or program. But the Statute requires us to look beyond prevention and support integrated development for all children. One difficulty with broad-based developmental supports is that they are more difficult to evaluate and their long-term impact may be more diffuse. We contend that developmental supports do in fact 'prevent' problems, but their long-term impact on child and adolescent well-being may be more akin to good nutrition as compared to immunization. Whereas immunization has a direct impact on rates of certain infectious diseases, good nutrition has a more diffuse but nonetheless important impact on overall health throughout the lifecycle. Similarly, the impact of developmental supports may be less direct, more difficult to measure but nonetheless every bit as urgent as prevention-based services (10).

Another issue that must be debated in terms of providing developmental supports is that of resource allocation. The traditional argument for resources for children in Brazil has been that with a shortage of resources, funds should be allocated to those children with the most pressing needs. This is a valid concept that also applies to developmental supports for children and youth; government resources should in fact go to those children and families who cannot on their own pay for developmental supports. The risk with this mindset, however, is weak long-term political commitment and the possibility of creating and perpetuating a two-tier social service system. If developmental supports are defined in Brazil as something that the government funds only for poor children, middle class families will continue to send their children to private services and supports and may have only weak support for government funding for such services for poor children.

Examining some of the lessons learned in developmental supports in the U.S. and Western Europe suggests that long-term political commitment for various developmental supports for children and youth is deeper when middle class children and youth also benefit, that is when the middle class is also part of the system. Furthermore, the quality of these supports is higher when middle class families participate because they typically have the political power to advocate for higher quality services, and in fact generally will only use publicly-funded services if the quality is on par with what they can obtain for themselves in the private sector.

Envisioning a System of Developmental Supports for All Children and Youth in Brazil

"With the support of the states and the Federal Government, the municipalities will encourage and facilitate the directing of resources and spaces to cultural, sports and leisure programs oriented to childhood and youth".
Title II, Chap. 4, Art. 59, Statute of the Child and Adolescent, 1990.

Many advocates, program staff, policymakers and members of the Municipal Children's Rights Councils in Brazil are fully supportive of the provisions in the Statute that call for developmentally oriented supports and services for all children and youth. For various reasons, though, these programs have not received the attention they deserve. One obvious reason is the lack of resources, but that explanation is limited. Historically, Brazil has invested on children and youth when they were perceived as representing a threat to the social order. Thus, on both sides of the 'social order' question, the public has reacted to the needs of children in difficult circumstances - either calling for more repression, or calling for their protection from the abuses of police and other authorities. The same kind of public attention has not been mobilized around low income children and youth in general.

Many of the existing governmental agencies and NGOs have been reluctant to shift their focus to either preventive services, or to developmental supports for all children and youth. In other cases, program planners may lack a vision of what community-based, developmentally oriented services for youth and children can and should be. Another barrier to the implementation of community-based programs for children and youth - both in Brazil and in Latin America in general - is the fact that public policies have typically been dictated by central level governments, impeding or usurping local leadership and policymaking, and generally serving to block any true local empowerment of low income communities. This has also implied that the concept of 'community' as a participant in developing programs and services for children and youth has been absent. Communities have been extremely important in the lives of children and youth in Brazil, providing informal supports in the absence of state-sponsored services and programs. However, in large part local communities have neither been empowered nor involved in decision-making about the need of their children.

At the political level, there is also a lack of commitment to the needs of all children and youth. While the vast majority of voters in Brazil would agree that children should not be abused, for example, it is fair to say that many voters in Brazil are not prepared to accept the idea - embodied in the Statute - that low income children deserve, and that the government should provide, the same level of developmental supports as those enjoyed by most middle class children.

In spite of these barriers, there are several examples of community-based, developmentally-oriented services for children and youth in Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America that involve growing community participation and local autonomy (Barker, Fontes, 1996). To illustrate what we mean by community-based developmental supports for children and youth, we have included three examples from Brazil. There are thousands of examples of community-based NGOs providing services and carrying out developmentally supportive activities with children and youth in the Latin American (and Caribbean) region. There are also numerous examples of government-funded services and activities for children and youth. The examples we have included deserve special attention because of four important factors: 1) they are all publicly-funded efforts; 2) they seek to involve the community, NGOs, and youth and families themselves; 3) they seek to reach a significant number of children and youth in the area they operate within; and 4) they take an integrated developmental approach to the needs of children and youth.

These three examples from Brazil are state- and municipal-funded efforts to assist children and youth in low income communities. All three of the examples demonstrate an important degree of community participation and leadership in the process, and all three seek to provide a range of activities and services to assist children and youth in their holistic development.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

ABCs - Aprender, Brincar e Crescer (Learn, Play and Grow Centers)
State of Ceará, North-East Brazil

The Social Action Secretariat (the state-level social welfare ministry) in Ceará, working with other state governmental organizations has since 1991 operated a program of community-based after-school centers that provide a range of cultural, education, recreation and vocational training activities for children and youth ages 7-17 (offering services both for children and youth enrolled and not currently enrolled in school). As of 1996, these centers, called ABCs (Aprender, Brincar e Crescer - Learn, Play and Grow), provided activities to about 1000 children and youth ages 7-17 per month in each of about 20 centers.
The overall goal of the ABCs was initially preventive: to provide an alternative capable of strengthening family and community ties with the purpose of preventing the migration of children and youth to urban centers (Neto, 1994). The program is motivated by a desire to prevent children from migrating to work or live in the streets of Fortaleza, the capital and largest city in Ceará. To prevent children from working or living on the streets, the ABCs offer a combination of tutoring and literacy courses; cultural and recreational activities; and vocational training, all with the goal of being attractive to youth and offering them something to do instead of going to the city. The state government also offers services and activities for children and youth who work and/or live in the streets, and for youth involved in prostitution.

The ABCs are notable for their steps to involve the community in the design and implementation of

each center. The original 20 ABCs started out by forming a community commission in each site comprised of five members from existing and representative neighborhood associations. These commissions then planned the construction and implementation of the ABCs in their communities. All the centers have a similar array of activities but the exact mix of activities, including additional activities and services, is determined by the local community commission and the local staff of the ABCs. In 1996, the ABCs were also negotiating with the InterAmerican Development Bank for funding to develop local information collection systems, and public awareness campaigns, to extend this community support and participation.

The ABCs have faced a number of obstacles, including: the difficulty of attracting local private sector support, which has been minimal; problems in maintaining strong relationships with local schools; the challenge of offering vocational training that is useful for the local job market; and high rates of staff turnover. Nonetheless, the ABCs are important, among other things, for the level of community participation and their scope. From 1992-1994, the number of children and youth enrolled and participating in all 20 centers totaled 56.901, of whom 15.949 received vocational training. The issue of the context of the ABCs has been important. The ABCs have worked and communities have responded to them, in part because of the political climate in the state of Ceará. The state has received national and international recognition for its important public administrative reforms and its positive track record in decentralization. The ABCs were implemented during a period in Ceará's history when state government officials at the highest level rewarded and supported innovation, accountability and cost-effectiveness (Neto, 1994, Barker, 1994, 1996).

Case Study 2

Curumim Centers
State of Minas Gerais, South-East Brazil

Started by the Secretariat of Sports, Leisure and Tourism in the state of Minas Gerais, the Curumim project uses as its justification the language and message of the Statute that all children have the right to play and to be children. The project seeks to provide low income children with leisure and play activities as a complement to the public school system. While focusing on low income children, state officials insist that the program is a step toward the universalization of education in Brazil, referring to the desire to make high quality publicly-supported education available to all children.

Curumim centers are after-school, recreational centers that are built in low income communities throughout the state of Minas Gerais. Each individual Curumim starts with a community-based needs assessment that involves looking at existing needs and opportunities for children at the community level, including their needs for sports and leisure activities. With the community-needs assessment completed, an agreement is then developed and signed between the local municipality and the state.
The local municipality provides the space for the center, while the state government provides construction materials, construction and ongoing operating expenses. The centers offer an array of activities for children ages 6-12, including indoor and outdoor recreation, arts and crafts, and

homework assistance/tutoring, as well as formal and informal social interaction. While the main goal of the program is to offer children a safe place to play and 'be children', one of its goals is also to support children's educational attainment and to reduce rates of retention and repetition. Like the ABCs, the program if open to all children in a given low income community, but also emphasizes assisting children who are at risk of being abandoned by or abandoning their families. Between 1991-95, 140 Curumim centers were built in the state of Minas Gerais, 20 of those in the capital city of Belo Horizonte. As of 1995, these centers were providing ongoing activities for about 40.000 low income children.

Case Study 3

Cidade Mãe (Mother City)
City of Salvador, Bahia, North-East Brazil

Cidade Mãe (Mother City) is a governmental youth-serving project founded in 1993 run by the city of Salvador, in the State of Bahia, with funding coming both from the municipal and state governments. The main objective of the program is to improve the academic performance and employability of low income youth, and to decrease the chances of certain high-risk behaviors, such as drug abuse and teen pregnancy. The main services provided through the program are community-based vocational training centers and after-school academic support activities. The program also provides health education, recreational activities and counseling. The program works in four low income areas in Salvador and the target population is youth ages 14-18 who are at risk of living in the streets and/or of dropping out of school.

Mother City's main program strategy is to create an integrated system of interventions to provide multi-disciplinary assistance and vocational training to at-risk, in-school youth. Services are provided to youth via interdisciplinary teams who develop individual case plans for youth based on an assessment of the vocational training needs of each youth; youth are then referred or connected with services to meet their needs. Some of the major challenges encountered by the program include: the difficulty of involving the youths' families mainly because they lack time to participate in community activities and meetings; the bureaucracy involved and delays in receiving funding from the state government; and low staff salaries that has contributed to a high staff turnover (Barker, Fontes, 1996).

Comments on the Case Studies

In highlighting these programs we have to be careful not to suggest that the mere implementation of programs for children and youth in Brazil will in any facile way overcome systems of exclusion and poverty. As Dewees and Klees (1995) remind us in their analysis of policies related to street children in Brazil, we must be careful to avoid the simplistic idea of 'technical rationality', that is the belief that designing and replicating program models to resolve social problems will indeed solve these problems without ever addressing the underlying social problems and power structures: "(...)

technical rationality does not fail because of poor implementation, corrupt governments, or even the lack of good will or ideas. Instead, educational and other social policies do very little to solve social problems because there are interests that benefit from doing very little to the structures - capitalist, patriarchal, racist, and more - that favor these interests" (1995:80). These program examples, however, may not in fact be examples of changing the underlying power and income structure, but they do represent small steps toward improving the lives of many low income children and youth whose lives matter in the short run.

An important drawback to all three of these programs is that they may perpetuate the division of social classes in Brazil. All three programs are aimed at low income communities; as such, it may be that low income children and youth continue to receive second class services, while the middle class continue to use their personally and privately-funded supports. In Brazil with a legacy of discriminatory treatment of poor children (and in many cases, poor black children), special support services for poor children can perpetuate class differences. Thus, while it is true that the children participating in the ABCs or Curumim are not on the streets, they are also not participating in the same swimming classes or French classes as middle class children.

Given the segregation that already exists in Brazil and most of Latin America - with low income children attending public school and middle and upper income children attending private school - this has tremendous implications for the future of the region. In recent years, trends toward privatizing health and other sectors of the government has contributed further to this social division. It is particularly disturbing that in recent years, many middle and upper income children (and their families) have begun to avoid public transportation and public spaces where they fear they may come into contact with low income children and youth, who they associate with being 'street children'. The long-term implications of this social partition are unknown but given that it is the children of the middle and upper classes who will likely govern the country in the future, their negative perceptions of poor children do not bode well for future policies.

What if, instead of only constructing Curumim or ABC centers in low income communities, a few of them were constructed in middle class neighborhoods? As an issue of equity, the centers in middle class neighborhoods might charge a sliding scale fee to families, but the centers would nonetheless receive governmental support. Even such a symbolic involvement of the middle class could have important long-term ramifications in terms of long-term political commitment to the programs, and in terms of raising the overall quality of services. Furthermore, involving families of different social class would slowly change their vision, and their children's visions, of how they view low income children.

In these case studies, we have for the most part emphasized developmental supports for children and youth that generally involved services and activities designed for and with children and youth. However, there is another component of developmental supports which deserves special consideration, and that is the possibility of support services, including those provided in the home, for parents and families as a whole. In Western Europe and North America, such family support services have included income subsidies, food or nutritional subsidies, in-home counseling, and crisis support services, among others. There e is a need to examine the kinds of culturally appropriate

services and supports - which ultimately support children - that could be offered to parents and families directly in Brazil.

To be sure, these community-based developmentally oriented programs represent a move in the right direction. They represent a move away from a focus only on the street children, and a recognition that the state has a role in supporting the healthy development of children on a broad scale. Indeed, the number of children and youth reached by such projects are unprecedented for preventive and community-based services for children and youth in Brazil.

Finally, there is a need to be realistic about the short-term impact of community-based programs. The initiatives described in the three case studies were 'sold' to policymakers with the justification that they would prevent children from school failure or prevent them from ending up on the streets. However, an after-school program may not be enough to prevent a child from failing in school or being abandoned to the streets; for most children, the causes of school failure, family stress and abandonment are far more deep-seated, structural and multifaceted than an after-school program can solve. The risk is that policymakers will hold these programs responsible for factors that are outside their control. While we need to hold programs accountable for their activities, we must be aware of their limitations. A recent evaluation of two of the largest youth-serving agencies in the U.S., while from a different context, provides a useful point : *"In an effort to adopt an accountability approach, many [youth-serving] organizations have been compelled to use outcomes over which they have no direct control (e.g., school completion, job attainment, healthy family formation) as their measure of success; primarily because the outcomes are at least measurable. The problem with the approach is that these ultimate outcomes, in fact, result from a diverse of set of experiences (in the family, school, neighborhood, etc.); no one setting or experience alone can be expected to produce them. Focusing on the achievement of these future long-term outcomes does not provide a standard by which an organization or activity can be held accountable in the present*" (Gambone, Arbeton, 1997:3).

Conclusions

> *"The child and adolescent have the right to protection of life and health, through effective implementation of public social policies that make possible .... harmonious development in dignified conditions of existence"*
> *Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Title II, Art. 7*

A true system of extracurricular, after-school, community-based supports - including recreation, health education, vocational counseling and training, tutoring, counseling, arts and culture - for all children and youth in Brazil may be far into the future. Indeed, in promising as much as it does, the Statute runs the risk of proposing an unattainable utopia that can leave us pessimistic about what we can accomplish in the short-term.

However the Statute also offers a starting point toward pragmatic intermediary steps that can be carried out for reshaping programs for low income children and youth in the short-term, while also laying the groundwork for a better system in the future. The best starting point that the Statute offers

is that of community, family and child participation. Indeed, in asking communities, families and children what they want in terms of publicly funded services for children and youth, the emerging system may look more like our typical middle class family. It will likely include promotional services that focus on the strengths and potentials of children and youth.

The purpose of this article was not to suggest that the NGOs and governmental agencies assisting street children should cease their efforts. Instead, we are advocating that the focus should be shifted to include the needs of all children and youth. Many of the experiences of programs and advocacy organizations working with street children have provided important directions in what needs to be done with and for all children and youth in Brazil. One important step is to learn from their experiences to understand more fully both the potentials and the needs of children and youth in Brazil and what kinds of supports and activities should be offered. In that sense, the case studies presented here offer an indication of the kinds of initiatives in developmental supports that should be made known and supported.

The Statute seeks to bring Brazil's child support system on par with notions of universal supports as established by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The challenge before us is to use the Statute as a scaffold - as a way to move us from Brazil's present reality, closer to that goal. A truly universal support system for all children and youth in Brazil, as envisioned in the Statute, implies changing the way that children are viewed. That is, a conceptualization of the child based on the notion that every child has the right to a healthy and harmonious development, regardless of his/her socioeconomic status, race, religion, political affiliation, and so on (11).

Such a focus would require creating publicly-funded, purposefully linked networks and structures that collaborate with the public education and public health systems to provide for the integrated development of all children and youth to : 1) promote their individual potential, in reaching personal, educational and vocational aspirations, 2) promote their development, awareness and full participation as citizens, present and future, and 3) promote their ability to engage in meaningful and healthy intimate relationships. Such a system would require significant investment by the government in the futures of children and youth. However, this system will only work to its fullest potential if the current health and education systems are improved, both in terms of quality but also in terms of providing the necessary conditions so that children and youth can stay in school.

If appeals based on rights and social equality do not move policymakers to support services for children and youth, we should stop using the deficits or potential problems of the poor to justify the existence of programs. Focusing on the self-interest of Brazil as a country increases the chance that policymakers will see investing in children as an investment in the future. If we think about issues of global change on the horizon, for example, how can programs help prepare children and youth in Brazil for the future? One fact of the future will likely be the need to change jobs once or several times over the course of the working life. Literacy or training in one vocational area may not be sufficient for the workplace of the future.

Brazil is becoming more and more connected to the global economy. Technological advances and international competition imply the need for more training in technological tools and general

technological literacy. Brazil will need citizens who are prepared for life-long learning. Global economic changes effect Brazil more directly than the past and require support and preparation for its citizens in a more thoughtful and comprehensive way. Looked at in this light we can see that moving from street children to all children is not merely an issue of equity for Brazil, but is in fact an investment in its future.

NOTES

1. Herbert de Souza, known as Betinho, was one of the most important social activists in the area of human rights that Brazil has had in recent year. For his activism, he was forced into exile for several years during the military dictatorship. During the 1980s until his death in 1997 he led an important campaign on behalf of civic participation and citizenship that mobilized Brazil during this period.

2. The term ‘street children’ generally refers to those children and youth who work or spend most of their time on the streets, as well as to the far smaller number of children and youth who sleep in the streets and are no longer connected to theirs families and communities.

3. Counting children Counting children who are by their nature mobile and who often go back and forth from their homes to the streets is a complicated undertaking. These recent censuses of street children have also been questioned in terms of their reliability. They do, nonetheless, provide slightly more realistic accounts of the number of street and working children when compared with the kind of ‘back of envelope’ estimates that were once used.

4. Brazil was run by a military government that assumed power in 1964 and handed over rule to a civilian president elected by Congress in 1985. Direct presidential elections were held in 1989.

5. This ambivalent view of the child - at once in danger and dangerous - becomes one of the dominant themes in the Brazilian debate over the need to create juridical reforms for minors in the first three decades of the 20th century. Poor children and youth were clearly defined in the legislation as potentially dangerous and several articles were dedicated to regulate the situation of physically and morally abandoned minors and juvenile delinquents (Rizzini, 1997 a/b).

6. Cassaniga, Helena. The Guardianship Council in Blumenau, Santa Catarina. Personal correspondence, 1997.

7. Programs for street children in Brazil have sometimes drawn on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of Paulo Freire. Freire coined the term "pedagogy of the oppressed" and offered a framework for listening to the voices of the disadvantaged, and increasing their awareness about their situation while also offering concrete skills, particularly literacy.

8. For a review of some this research, see Rizzini, 1994, 1995, 1998.

9. Preventing children from ending up living and/or working on the streets also implies changes at the macro level, including improvements in the formal health and education sectors, and

transforming economic systems that exclude or marginalize thousands of low income families. However, even in countries in Western Europe and North America, for example, where public sector social services and the public education sector offer more adequate services for much of the population, many governments have still recognized the need for additional support services for children and youth that support them in their special stage of development and that make connections between the school system and other social services. See for example, Sherraden, 1992, and Whalen, Wynn, 1995.

11.

10. Private schools and private health plans are prohibitively expensive for the majority of the population. Considering that the current minimum monthly salary in Brazil is worth about US$130, public school costs the equivalent of about 4-6 minimum salaries per month per child. Joan Costello, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Personal correspondence, 1998.

12.

11. As stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent.

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