

Researching Support for Families

An Example from a Low-Income Community
in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

CIESPI
ELOS Research Project

CIESPI

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CIESPI

The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) is a research and reference center dedicated to research and grass roots projects about children and youth and their family and community contexts. Its goal is to inform policy and practice directed at this population thereby contributing to the implementation of children's rights and promoting their full development. CIESPI is located at, and works in collaboration, with the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio).

CIESPI has considerable experience of working on issues of child development and the social conditions of children and families, particularly those growing up in low-income neighbourhoods and favelas (slums) of large cities. CIESPI has an extensive network of international partners which leads to a continuous exchange of ideas and experiences across countries and cultures.



The ELOS Research Project

“ELOS are important human ties. From the beginning of life, children establish significant ties which become their personal reference point. If children are seen as developing, active beings in their society and the transmitters of culture, their capacity to establish deep and lasting ties is fundamentally important both at the present time and for future generations¹”.

In 1998, CIESPI (at the time still known as CESPI) started the ELOS Project with the aim of carrying out interdisciplinary research to identify, promote and strengthen the ties within the family and with the community as a means of creating more opportunities for the full and healthy development of children and youth². We believed that by understanding the everyday lives of children, particularly those in low-income neighbourhoods, and strengthening the support available for families in their own communities, children and youth would have greater possibilities to remain with their families.

The ELOS project was set up with the assumption that all children and youth even those living in unfavourable socio-economic conditions do not represent risk, but should be seen as an opportunity to build a more egalitarian society³. With ELOS, CIESPI started to focus on family and community resources that promote the education and development of children and youth, and offer them physical and emotional support⁴.

In 2000, in partnership with the PROMUNDO Institute, CIESPI started the project called “Strengthening Community and Family-Based Supports for Children and Adolescents (“Bases de Apoio” Project)⁵. This was our first exploratory study to find out about the support available to children, youth and their families and was carried out in three low-income communities in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area. In this study the families revealed that the main support on which they relied to bring up their children were their own families (brothers and sisters, grandmothers, aunts and uncles, cousins etc) and also to a lesser extent their neighbours.

In 2001, in partnership with the Catholic University of Goiás⁶, CIESPI started the project ELOS-Goiás and carried out a research entitled: “*Raising Children in the City of Goiânia, Brazil*”. The data collected in this research indicated the predominance of female family members in the role of bringing up children, firstly the mother followed by the grandmother and older sister. Apart from being responsible for bringing up the children, the mothers were also

¹ Rizzini, Irene et all (2006).

² ELOS Project received important initial support from Instituto C&A de Desenvolvimento Social, Grupo Lorentzen, Grupo Lachmann and UNICEF.

³ Rizzini, Irene, Barker, Gary and Cassaniga, Neide (2000, 2002).

⁴ Zamora, Maria H. and Silva, Nivia C. R. (Eds). (2002). These ideas have been developed in several projects carried out by the Ciespi team. See www.ciespi.org.br.

⁵ Rizzini, Irene and Barker, Gary et all (2001).

⁶ Souza, Sonia Gomes and Rizzini, Irene (Eds.) (2001).

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responsible for the children's behaviour, their health and their well being. Mothers and grandmothers, who were often young, reported feeling overwhelmed and lonely in carrying out their parental role⁷.

In these two studies parents tended to view parenting as a positive experience, and said that having children was "a dream come true" and it was "God's gift". Parents were scared of not being able to provide for the children or not being able to protect them from suffering in their lives. They resented their reduced freedom to do as they pleased now that they have children and the lack of recognition by the children of their efforts as parents.

The parents' hopes and expectations for the children's future were that the children would pursue their studies and on becoming adults they would offer them (the parents) companionship and care in old age. It became evident that many families felt isolated, lacked support and would benefit from having access to places where they could meet with other parents and exchange information and experiences.

Schools, nurseries, health centres, areas for leisure and cultural activities were not mentioned by the families as constituting an essential support and this may be partly due to the fact that there is an insufficient supply of these services for the whole community. The question was, however, if there were sufficient services offered in these communities, would they play a more relevant role in providing support to families?

The fears and difficulties related to raising their children included violence in their communities, teenage pregnancy, the need to and the difficulties related to setting more behavioural boundaries. The parents also referred to their lack of time to give the children enough attention, the challenges they faced in bringing up boys, unemployment, the fear of the violence associated with drug trafficking and its effects on the children and the lack of places in which children can play safely before and after school.

⁷ Some grandmothers were as young as 40 years of age.

CIESPI's research on parents' views about the support offered to them is similar to research carried out in the United Kingdom⁸ where parents have expressed their dissatisfaction that even when support is available, it may come too late or may be tailored according to what the service provider thinks that parents need and not the other way round. Parents also want to be able to access help at the time they need it (and not several months later). And most importantly parents do not want to lose their authority over and responsibility for their children.

Many of the challenges of raising children are shared by all those living in cities, where some worldwide tendencies can be observed. These include smaller families, sporadic contact with relatives, parents who are overburdened with too many responsibilities, place of work too far from home resulting in the children spending most of the day by themselves and new family structures which bring new challenges to the shared life with the children.

Although CIESPI has been prioritising low-income families, because their needs are more acute, the need for support should be extended to families from all levels of society.



⁸ Gbate, Deborah (2005); Moran, Patricia, Gbate, Deborah, Van der Merwe, Amelia (2004).

Executive Summary

This publication presents the results of an exploratory qualitative research study with parents and professionals working to support families in a low income community of Rio de Janeiro called Ladeira dos Tabajaras⁹. This community is located in the southern part of Rio de Janeiro between the middle class districts of Copacabana and Botafogo. It has 2040 inhabitants, out of which 761 are children and youth under the age of 20¹⁰. Ten in-depth interviews were carried out with 4 fathers, 5 mothers and 1 grandmother and several focus groups were organized with family members, women community leaders and nursery teachers. Interviews were also carried out with services providers perceived by the family members to constitute a source of support and with professionals from 4 well respected organizations in Rio de Janeiro that offer support to parents.

CIESPI's key question for this study was: *How are families, especially those most vulnerable economically, bringing up their children and who or what do they rely on for support?*

The result of this study revealed that:

Female figures are central in raising children. Frequently, grandmothers and great-grandmothers are the greatest source of support to parents and often share with parents the responsibility for bringing up children. Fathers appeared to be absent in the lives of many children. In other cases their presence was minimal because they worked long hours or far from home.

Neighbours are not relied on so much nowadays for support. The increased control of the slum by the *comandos*¹¹ and their drug trafficking has been generating great distrust between neighbours and adversely affected their relationships.

⁹ See Annex 1 for a description of the community Ladeira dos Tabajaras.

¹⁰ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) 2000.

¹¹ The term *comando* is used to indicate the leaders of the drug traffic groups in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Barker, Gary, 237:2006).

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Apart from the nurseries that cater for children under the age of 4 which are considered to constitute great support to parents, there are no other places for parents to leave their children while they work. There is an acute shortage of places where the children can play safely in the community. Furthermore, as the houses in the community tend to be extremely small, there is no space for children to play at home either. There are no schools in this community and the children have to walk long distances by themselves and as they attend school for only half the day, the children are left alone for long periods. There are many complaints about the relevance of the curriculum to the children's lives and in general families view schools as a "potential" support but which currently does not attend to their needs. The Church can be an important source of support in their lives as a space to seek peace and reflection.

The main difficulties reported by families and professionals:

Violence and the fear for the safety of their children from the harmful effects of the drugs and firearms trade was a theme that was constantly referred to by the people in this community and by the professionals working there. The violence witnessed by the families in their community or experienced on the streets also takes place at home where domestic violence against children or a spouse is commonplace.

Financial worries are a constant aspect of the lives of these families and in addition to their efforts to provide for the family's basic needs, they have added pressure from the children wanting consumer goods that often are beyond the reach of the family's finances. Unemployment of one or both parents is a cause of great stress as it can compromise their capacity to provide for their children. There are other issues that tend to

appear alongside unemployment, such as domestic violence and/or drugs or alcohol abuse.

Parents find it difficult to teach children appropriate behaviour and set boundaries without resorting to violence. They also feel that there is insufficient dialogue both between them and their children and between spouses themselves. Several reasons are given such as long working hours, the distance between home and the place of work coupled with domestic chores and gender values whereby men think that looking after the children is the women's responsibility. On the other hand, the professionals believe that the standards of behaviour dictated by specialists and the media make it more difficult for the families to feel competent to bring up their children. Some professionals want to see a public demystification of the "perfect family" depicted in some television programmes or advertisements. These professionals also believe that parents feel too guilty for not having time or energy for their children. Consequently parents tend to behave in a very permissive way by not fixing a regular time for eating or sleeping and they also find it difficult to say no to their children when necessary.

The professionals pointed out that the lack of communication between parents has a negative impact on the children. A parent will frequently take a decision which is contradictory to his or her partner in relation to their children's behaviour. This in turn, tends to leave children confused and they try to play one parent against the other. According to the services we interviewed, there is often a distortion in the family's hierarchy. Sometimes it can be caused by the absence of a father figure, other times by the large number of family members responsible for looking after the children such as mothers, aunts and grandmothers. In some cases, there is no clear authority figure in the family.

The level of difficulties in raising children varies according to the gender and age of the children. Teenage years are considered harder than earlier

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years and boys more difficult than girls. The arrival of children brings numerous changes to the lives of parents who are forced to make difficult choices such as stopping studies in order to find work to support their families. The fathers interviewed indicated that they did not have a choice or right to make decisions regarding an unexpected pregnancy of their partner.

The families' main needs and recommendations:

When asked about their needs, the responses of the parents interviewed ranged from a wish to have more comfortable houses, and more stable jobs to be able to complete their studies and provide a better life for their children. They also indicated a pressing need for a secure place to leave their children while they worked and to have some spaces for leisure activities. In addition, they asked for places where they could obtain advice on important issues such as drugs, bringing up children and emotional and psychological support.

They also wished to have help with children's homework as many parents are either illiterate or have a low level of literacy and cannot give the children the support they need. They wanted to have access to and a choice of organized sports, drama or arts activities for the children. Moreover, they hoped to see investment in the area of public safety; to have more church-based educational activities for children; and places where children could go to discuss issues of concern with an adult outside their family. Many women wished that they could have more time for themselves.

Issues regarding the provision of services to families:

There is a lack of presence of the state in poor communities, and an insufficient provision of services to meet the needs of the inhabitants. The few families that have access to support may not be able to benefit from it because it is too far from their homes, which can cause them to discontinue attendance. Sometimes the service offered to a family is located in an area controlled by a *comando* different from that in which they live and they are not allowed to enter or there may be risks involved in entering that area.

Organizations that receive some Governmental funding feel under pressure to set up and offer the programmes introduced by the Government. They complain about the centralised and top-down nature of policies for families in Brazil and that their experience and the views of parents are not taken into consideration. They argue that services can be completely irrelevant to the needs of the families. Most services available tend to work in isolation and are often discontinued or offered intermittently. The independent sector (non governmental organizations) works with very limited resources and tends to only cater for a small group of people.



Introduction

The study presented in this publication was carried out in 2006, lasted 8 months and involved approximately 200 people. Like the previous ELOS Research Projects mentioned above, this was an exploratory study which CIESPI chose to carry out in a low-income community in Rio de Janeiro called Ladeira dos Tabajaras¹². This study was able to involve such a large number of people, in such a short time due to the relationship of trust which CIESPI had previously developed with some residents of this community. Access to the families was facilitated by CIESPI's staff involved in running the project called *Rede Brincar e Aprender* (Play and Learn Community Network and the Children's Community Library).

This study has benefited from and strengthened some of the findings of the previous studies. We found many similarities in their results and we believe that they may be representative of other low-income communities in Brazil. We hope that this publication will be helpful, not only to the people who supported us financially, but also to others concerned about optimizing the use of any funds invested in supporting children and families in Brazil. We believe that CIESPI can offer policy makers the information they need to develop policies that will benefit children and youth in Brazil. We hope to contribute to our country's efforts when it is redesigning its own strategies and policies aimed at families in which the latter's fundamental role is fully recognized.

¹² Annex 1 offers a brief description of this community.

CIESPI's Assumptions

The following assumptions have guided CIESPI's research in the area of support to families:

- 1. The family is the best environment for socialization and reproduction of social relations:** The importance of community and family life for children and youth is recognized in the Brazilian Federal Constitution 1988 (Article 226), the Statute of Child and Adolescent (1990) and in international human rights law¹³. Both in the law and in the government policies¹⁴ there is recognition that family and community life (not restricted to the biological family but in all its varied forms) is an essential place for the socialization of children and youth and the best environment to secure their full development, except in cases where the child is exposed to violence and abuse.
- 2. Parents have a fundamental role in educating and bringing up their children and the State and society have the obligation to support the parents in their task:** The Brazilian Federal Constitution provides for the right of families to receive support in bringing up their children and there are some important initiatives in Brazil in this respect¹⁵. More efforts must be made to bridge the gap between the political and legal commitments to children and their families and the law enforcement and policy implementation that should follow.
- 3. Irrespective of their social and economic conditions, beliefs and cultural values, most parents aim to secure the full development and provide the best possible future for their children:** However, it is clear that most parents need some sort of support at some point in their parenting life, and some need more than others. For many parents, support in the form of information and help from their extended families is sufficient. Some families who live in poor environments who may face severe financial difficulties or

¹³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 16).

¹⁴ Política Nacional de Assistência Social (PNAS) - National Policy of Social Assistance (2004).

¹⁵ See annex 3 for further information.

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discrimination or privation of basic needs can benefit from extra support.

4. Children are the main transmitters of ethical and moral values of any society: CIESPI strongly agrees with Myers¹⁶ when he says that: "Through children humanity transmits its values. That transmission begins with infants. To preserve desirable moral and social values in the future, one must begin with children".

5. The first experiences in the life of a person such as life in the womb, birth, first contact with the world, the establishment of the first few affection ties, are fundamental for the child's full development and will influence the child's relationships with the world and with herself/himself.

6. The rapid transformations of the modern world and its repercussions in family life impose new challenges for parents such as intense pressure to buy consumer goods for their children who are bombarded with advertisements in the media. Often parents report they feel isolated and overwhelmed when raising their children and they are uncertain as to how to discipline them.

7. The significant changes that have been taking place in family life¹⁷ in the last few decades have contributed to the fact that parents have less confidence in their concept of what constitutes "good education" for their children. Parents experience more insecurity because of inter alia the easy access to firearms and drugs together with constant urban violence.

8. The representations, discourses and practices that affected families in social history, especially the families from

¹⁶ Meyers, Robert (1991:6).

¹⁷ Changes in the structure of families with increase in female headed and single parent families, and the changes in the roles of men and women in society.

poorer backgrounds, are of their inadequacy, incompetence and incapacity in caring for their own children¹⁸. Often parents have been accused of having many vices, being lazy, incapable of exerting a good (moral) influence on their own children and therefore responsible for the children's behavioural problems.

9. When dealing with children and families, the focus has been predominantly on their failings, problems, weaknesses and deficiencies. There needs to be a **change in the way of thinking in order to focus on the competency and potential of the children and their families and the abilities of parents to bring up their children.**

¹⁸ Pilotti & Rizzini 1995:14; Rizzini & Rizzini (2004).

Defining Key Concepts

Some of the key concepts of this research have been examined in numerous studies and theories. Therefore, in this work, we are seeking only to highlight some of the main points which are more relevant for us.

Family

According to the definitions from various disciplines, family is a place for the protection and self-expression of the individual, a place to seek help and also the place for the transmission of rules and appropriate social behaviour. Costa and Vitalle (2003:271) define family as:

“Family is the ultimate expression of private life. It is a place for intimate relationships, for making sense of and expressing feelings. Family is a place where one can express the psychological suffering that life constantly brings. It is seen as the environment for the expression of emotions and the development of relationships necessary for socialization which will lead to a sense of belonging to a group of inclusive relationships in one's own life. It is an indispensable place for mediation”.¹⁹

A legal definition can be found in Article 25 of the Brazilian Statute of the Children and Adolescent (1990) which provides that the natural family “is a community formed by the parents or one of the parents and their descendents”. According to the definition in Article 226 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988) family is “the basis of society which enjoys special protection from the State”. Article 16, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) defines family “as the natural and fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”.



¹⁹ Approximate translation from Portuguese.

Support

Based on our experiences of research and working with families and professionals who work with children and adolescents, the meaning of the term “support” varies for different groups of people and depends on a number of circumstances. It is widely assumed that “support” makes a difference to people’s lives and helps them to cope better with their problems or difficulties²⁰. Support can be in the form of advice, practical help, resources, emotional and financial support or specialist services. Vasconcelos (2005: 38), points out the fine line between offering support to families and interfering with their private lives:

“The introduction of social assistance to a family or home creates a clear situation of ambiguity and conflict. On the one hand, it can represent support, access to resources, benefits and services, but on the other, it can be an invasion of their private life, restricting their freedom and autonomy...”

For the purpose of this study²¹, “support” is considered to encompass developmental support and is defined as resources in the community and family 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 ”.²²

²⁰ See David Quinton for further discussion on this issue (2004).

²¹ This definition comes from CIESPI's project called Bases de Apoio (Bases of Support) by Rizzini, Irene and Barker, Gary et al (2001).

²² Rizzini, Irene, Barker, Gary and Cassaniga, Neide (2000:5).

“At risk” and “vulnerable” population

“At risk” is a term broadly used to define individuals who are in danger and require measures to protect them regardless of their social condition. As far as possible we avoid referring to the population from low income communities as “at risk” because it is systematically used as a discriminatory term to refer to the poor sector of the population²³.

Vulnerable individuals are those that for a variety of reasons are more affected by social and economic inequalities and precarious public policies.



²³ For further discussion see Rizzini, Barker, Cassaniga (2000, 2002) or Zamora (2002) and other titles from the *Bases de Apoio Project* listed here (see also www.ciespi.org.br).

Methodology and Scope of the Study

With this study, CIESPI aimed to listen to the views of parents, family members and experienced professionals about how families (especially those which are very poor) are bringing up their children and to identify what constitutes relevant forms of support for them. As this was an exploratory study, we opted for a qualitative research methodology, using a semi-open questionnaire to guide the interviews and focus groups in order to allow the participants to bring in as much of their own experience as possible. CIESPI sought to answer the following question:

How are families, especially the most vulnerable economically, bringing up their children and who or what do they rely on for support?

Study phases

The study was divided into two phases: The first phase involved gathering the opinions, perceptions and parenting experiences of people living in a selected low-income community. The second phase comprised interviews with the staff of six services identified by the community as support to them and four organizations recognised in Rio de Janeiro for their expertise in supporting parents.

Phase One

Finding out about the experiences of the families: During this phase, 6 focus groups and 10 in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out in the slum called Ladeira dos Tabajaras in the south of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

In-depth qualitative interviews: 10 people²⁴ from Ladeira dos Tabajaras were interviewed consisting of 5 mothers, 4 fathers and 1 grandmother. Those interviewed were approached informally and asked whether they would like to share their views with us and would

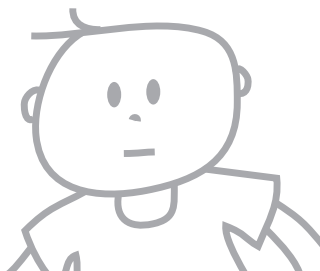
²⁴ See annex 2 for further information about the interviewees.

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allow us to record an interview. These interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.

Focus Groups: There were three different groups invited to participate in the focus groups:

1. One of these groups consisted of women community leaders from different neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro²⁵ consisting of:
 - 30 participants who were enrolled in course II for Women Community Leaders organized by CIESPI and PUC- Rio; and
 - 120 participants, organized by the Pastoral do Menor²⁶.
2. Another group consisted of the staff of the nursery called “Tia Sônia” (Aunty Sônia) based in Ladeira dos Tabajaras, and one of the very few services available in this community, in which 15 people participated.
3. The third group consisted of residents of Ladeira dos Tabajaras and three focus groups were organized with them. An open invitation was made to residents responsible for children and youth (no age was specified) who wanted to talk about the support they relied on for bringing up their children. Most of the family members interviewed also participated in the focus groups. Four residents attended the first meeting, 9 residents attended the second meeting and 11 residents attended the third meeting.



Phase Two

Finding out about the views of the professionals who support families: During the second phase of this study we collected the views of the professionals offering support to families. The following 6 services (which were identified by family members) were interviewed:

- Three nurseries for children under the age of 4, two of which are maintained by the Municipal Government. The third nursery is private

²⁵ Several small focus groups were run with these women.

²⁶ This is a charitable organization which is part of the Catholic Church.

but the children's places are paid by sponsors from an Italian NGO. Two of these nurseries are based in the community Ladeira dos Tabajaras. One of the nurseries offers evening sessions for the children which are of particular importance to parents who need to work in the evenings.

- Community Center²⁷ - Maintained by the Municipal Government and it is responsible for the implementation of governmental programmes such as bolsa-escola (financial support to working children to attend school and to prevent child labour) and bolsa-família (financial support to families whose monthly income per capita is below 120 reais)²⁸. This center has programmes to cater for all age groups and offers inter alia advice and support services to street children, the elderly, the youth and the community on a variety of topics.

- A health center - Offers emergency health care and a variety of other services such as tests, family planning, support and advice during pregnancy and food distribution for families with children whose weight is less than that which is recommended for their age.

- A non governmental organization that offers homeopathy and psychotherapy services to the residents of the Ladeira dos Tabajaras.

CIESPI also invited 4 (governmental and non-governmental) organizations renowned for their expertise in providing support to families in Rio de Janeiro, to contribute to this study. These organizations have been operating for a number of years and their views were important to complement the data collected at the community level. These organizations were:

- BENFAM: (Bem Estar Familiar no Brasil- "Family Welfare in Brazil"). This is a non governmental organization that works in the advocacy of the right to respect for sexual orientation and reproductive health. It is based in Rio the Janeiro, but works

²⁷ During our study this community center was called CEMASI "Municipal Centre for Social and Integrated Assistance" and thereafter its name changed to CRAS "Centers for Social Assistance" (Centros de Referência da Assistência Social).

²⁸ Which corresponds to approximately 60 US dollars per capita per month. Basic information about these income transfer programmes can be found in Annex 3.

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throughout Brazil. It offers tests, information, education and support in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, including family planning methods, emergency pill and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

■ NOOS Institute: Institute of Systemic Research and Development of Social Network. This is a non governmental organization that consists of a multidisciplinary group of professionals that includes doctors, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, lawyers and mediators. It conducts research, provides training, education and support to individuals and organizations in order to improve the quality of relationships between people, families, institutions and communities. It offers a variety of services including therapy for families, gender groups, and family mediation services.

■ Casa da Árvore (Tree House): Offers psychological support to children and their families by professional psychotherapist and trainees, based on the model created by Françoise Dolto. The aim of this organization is to encourage socialization and prevent violence in the family by offering psychological support to children and their families. Children up to the age of six attend sessions accompanied by their parents or responsible adult where they are encouraged to interact with the other participants. Children between the ages of 7 and 12 are allowed to attend by themselves.

■ Community Center Morro Azul: Managed by the local government and provides services to all age groups including the implementation of State and Federal Government policies²⁹. This organization also offers computer courses, residents' association group meetings and individual support to youth³⁰ (aged 15-18) employment advice and education support/training offered to youth aged 18- 24 and a women's group on a variety of topics.

²⁹ Further details about governmental programmes in annex 3.

³⁰ Financial incentive is offered to youth in both groups to attend the meetings, but no financial incentive is given to the women to attend these meetings.

A brief look at Brazilian families

Although Brazil is still a young country, it has great income inequality and an inadequate infrastructure for a large part of its population. It is estimated that 45.3% of the families in Brazil have children under the age of 15 and 41.4% of the families with children under the age of six have an income per capita of the monthly minimum wage (Summary of Social Indicators 2005, IBGE/PNAD 2004).

The Brazilian family has been changing in the last few decades and there has been a marked increase in the number of families headed by women. In Rio de Janeiro, 27.7% of children between the ages of 0 and 6 belong to families headed by women³¹. This is a crucial phase of development for the children when they need social and economic support to develop satisfactory. Worryingly, in Brazil, 60% of the children between the age group of 0 and 6 live in female headed families with an average income of up to 2 monthly minimum wages³² which is equivalent to 260 US dollars³³.

Some of the variables that appear to influence young women who are becoming mothers at a very young age are: the difficulty in effectively using family planning, low educational attainment and a low income³⁴. Among the teenage group aged 15 and 17, 6.8% have had at least one child born alive, 11% of which have already had a second child³⁵.

A low income appears to be the strongest factor associated with a large number of children followed by numbers of years of study. Even when education is higher but income is low, there is a tendency for families to have more children than families with more education and a higher income. This data suggests that these groups do not have access to the resources they need to plan and decide when to have children. Access to information is a very delicate but important issue that needs to be further discussed and investigated. It is important to consider the economic and social aspects of this issue without losing sight of the subjective aspects of being a mother in the different social groups.

³¹ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2004).

³² Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2004).

³³ The total presented above is expressed in US Dollar equivalent of the estimated costs and expenditures in the Brazilian currency (Real), based on the official exchange rate in December, 2005, R\$ 2.26.

³⁴ According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics 2004, 49,1% of Brazilian women aged between 15 and 49 with an income per capita of up to the minimum monthly wage have on average 3 or more children, compared to 21% of women with an income per capita superior to 2 minimum monthly wage.

³⁵ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2004).

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF STUDY



The strategies for survival created by poor families are built on a network of mutual assistance in times of difficulty. The families share food, clothing, living spaces and child care. Poor mothers have always undertaken the role of maintenance or assisting in the financial maintenance of the families and have had to seek ways to guarantee the survival of the family.

Poor families have historically been discriminated against in Brazil³⁶ and were often considered less capable of looking after their children. Despite important changes in legislation and policies, it is still a widespread myth that children may be better off away from their “unstructured” families and still can be taken away from them by the authorities³⁷. The concept of support to families brings to the forefront the discussion about the changes in the structure of families over the last century, and the changes required in the way support that is offered in Brazil.

Brazil is part of this worldwide³⁸ trend towards investing in support for parents in order to have a positive impact on children's lives. There is now a large body of international research that acknowledges the difficulties in bringing up children and how it becomes even more challenging when some stress factors are present such as overcrowded living conditions, unemployment, lone parent families and addiction to alcohol and drugs³⁹. Research also indicates that parenting problems that have an adverse impact on the children's behaviour are closely linked to the circumstances of the families⁴⁰. Research in the United Kingdom⁴¹ has concluded that it is difficult for stressed families to benefit from parenting programmes when they face multiple disadvantages, and thus policies that reduce everyday stresses in the lives of families (including poverty, unemployment, poor health, housing and education) will support parents to care for their children.

In the last two decades, there have been some changes in Brazil in relation to the paradigm of attribution of responsibilities to the

³⁶ For further discussion on this theme see Rizzini e Rizzini, 2004: 70-71.

³⁷ See Pilotti and Rizzini, 1995; Rizzini, 1997; Sarti, 2002; Carvalho, 2002.

³⁸ Council of Europe, Lisbon, 15 may 2006, Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2006) Gbate Deborah (2005) Moran, Patricia, Ghate, Deborah, Van der Merwe, Amelia (2004); David Quinton (2004).

³⁹ Rizzini (1999); Gbate Deborah (2005) Moran, Patricia, Ghate, Deborah, Van der Merwe, Amelia (2004); David Quinton (2004).

⁴⁰ David Quinton (2004).

⁴¹ Moran, Patricia, Ghate, Deborah, Van der Merwe, Amelia (2004).

families and the state, with new laws and governmental policies that emphasise the central role of families and the importance of sharing experiences in a family and community environment. This appears in several documents such as: Statute on the Child and Adolescent (1990), National Policy of Social Assistance (2004), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949), Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Organic Law of Social Assistance (LOAS, 1993) and the Statute on the Elderly (1998).

Families are principally responsible for providing adequate care for their children but the state and society have a clear role in supporting parents in their task of promoting the full development of all children and youth and guaranteeing their rights without any discrimination. The Brazilian government has been attempting to establish a safety net for the poorest families by introducing a range of programmes⁴². These new policies are in their infancy and not all families are able to access the financial support available. Moreover, it will take sometime for these changes to be firmly established, particularly bearing in mind the incoming governments' tendency to reverse the policies of their predecessors.



⁴² Financial support is being offered to all families with income per capita below R\$ 60,00, also financial support is offered to working children to attend school. There are a number of initiatives in Rio de Janeiro offering parenting groups to support parents. Unfortunately governmental policies and other initiatives are all very new and only a small percentage of the population have access to it.

The Results

The views of the families

This section presents the views of families living in Ladeira dos Tabajaras and includes in-depth interviews with 4 fathers, 5 mothers and one grandmother. It also contains the results of 3 focus groups totalling 24 family members of this community. The main question asked by CIESPI was:

How are families, especially the most vulnerable economically, bringing up their children and who or what do they rely on for support? The information gathered in the interviews and focus groups were organized into five sections:

- The main sources of support to families
- The main difficulties faced by families in raising their children
- The main needs of families
- The suggestions of the families
- Other important issues addressed by family members

Many of the views expressed by the residents of Ladeira dos Tabajaras coincide with the views of the residents of the city of Goiânia (Goiás State) and other neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro where CIESPI has previously carried out extensive family surveys. Some of the results of these surveys are summarized in the section called ELOS Research Project at the beginning of this publication.

The main sources of support to families

The main sources of support to families are the children's grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Grandmothers often share the responsibility of bringing up their children's children and are a great source of support to allow the parents to go to work.

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"My mother always came down to help me when my daughter was born. My mother and my aunties were supporting me." Mother, age 23

There are indications from these interviews that grandmothers and other female family members played an important part in supporting the parents of the interviewees when they were growing up, as shown in the following quotation:

"Who looked after me until I was teenager was my grandmother on my mother's side. My mother always worked and I only saw her at the weekends, because she was a domestic worker and would only come home on Saturdays." Father, age 31

Female members are the first to accept and offer support in cases of pregnancy especially teenage pregnancies. Most interviewees say that the pregnancies of their children were not planned. Some interviewees talked about their own (or their partner's) experience of falling pregnant in their teens and how unprepared they felt to deal with the pressures and demands of becoming a parent.

"The pregnancy of my first daughter was an accident but my son's pregnancy was planned. During my first child's pregnancy I thought that everybody would go mad. I hid it until I was four months pregnant because I thought that before then I was going to be forced to take it out (have an abortion) and they were going to go mad at me. When I told my mum, she already suspected it because I had put on weight, and was eating a lot, but nobody criticised me. I thought that this was going to happen because I was very young. But my mum and my aunties supported me". Mother, age 23



Absence or reduced presence of a fathers figure: With regard to sharing childcare responsibilities between the parents, the mother tends to take on most of the responsibility for raising the children even when both parents live together. The women complained about the lack of a

partner in their everyday lives and also the lack of help from their partners when they are around. As mentioned above, they relied more on their own mothers, aunts and neighbours for support than on the child's father.

When describing their own childhood, the interviewees indicated a distant presence or absence of one of their parents, mostly fathers. They talk about their difficulties in having conversations with their fathers and referred to their mothers as the most affectionate figure in the family.

“There has always been just me and my mum, I don't know if I missed a father, I don't know... my father went away, I don't know if he died, he went away, he abandoned me, I don't know what happened to him...” Mother, age 36



The reasons for the absence of fathers include:

- Long working hours or working in places too far from their homes;
- Young fathers who are too young to take the responsibility for supporting a family;
- Young fathers who die as a result of their involvement in drug trafficking;
- Fathers who abandon the children; and
- Fathers who are absent simply because they have difficulties in express emotions and having an affectionate relationship with their own children.

“My husband was a man who liked to be on the streets. You know what I mean? Although he was a good father to my children do you understand? But there was a lack of affection, and lots of things. I didn't have any help during my pregnancy. No help at all. I worked during pregnancy and would only stop to give birth, and 24 hours later I was back at work”. Mother/ grandmother, age 62

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The absence or reduced presence of fathers in the care of children is not new and is also common in many other countries. There needs to be more research in Brazil in order to better understand this phenomenon. Several studies in Brazil have pointed that in low income families, often the eldest children especially, the daughters are responsible for bringing up the brothers and sisters while their mother goes to work⁴³.

One interviewee spoke of mothers abandoning their families and a single father taking on the responsibility, but these cases were less frequent.

“When my mother abandoned me I was 4 years old. That is why, ever since then other people have looked after me. I remember that at the time, my father used to leave home at 4 am to work and he would leave breakfast ready, clothes washed, he would leave everything ready, even rice. I would stay the whole day at home, sometimes playing football; many times I would go to a neighbour's house. There were always some of my aunties who would look after me. But my father never allowed my aunties to take me to live with them (...) I am fifty times more proud of my father than my mother”. Father, age 22

Family is the most important source of support and comfort:

Interviewees talk about how important to them is to have a family and how it gives purpose to their lives. Family is regarded as a safe place to express their innermost emotions and a place for companionship and support. It is also a place where they can feel loved and wanted.

“Family for me is everything.... It is everything that I have, isn't it? Ah, it is important for a family to get on well, to be friends with each other you know? Everyone has to look out for each other, and if you need someone from your family, he or she will always be there to help.” Grandmother, age 62

“In my opinion family is everything. When you have a family you have everything. Without a family, you feel.... how can I put it.... lonely, with no one, you are nothing, you don't have anyone to pour out your heart to, to talk to.” Father, age 29

⁴³ Sousa and Rizzini (Eds), 2001.

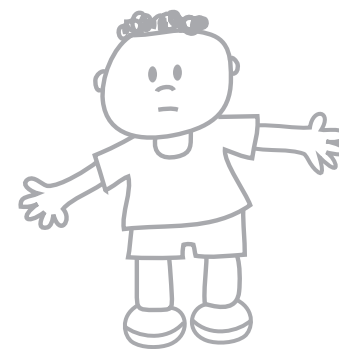
“Ah, I think that family is where you feel taken care of, where you can talk, where you can be happy and sad. Where you can share everything, the good and the bad things. Where you can fight, but where you can also make up. It is a mixture of everything. For me, family is very important”. Mother, age 36

Neighbours' support: Often some children have to spend a few hours by themselves before or after school while a single parent or both parents work. It is common for the children to play on the streets with friends and this is when the neighbours' watchful eye can become extremely important for parents. It constitutes informal care, keeping an eye on the children and informing parents when they observe inappropriate behaviour from others towards their children.

However, in general, CIESPI found that parents in Ladeira dos Tabajaras rely less on the support from their neighbours than it found in previous studies⁴⁴. The increase in the domination of the slum by the *comandos* and their traffic of drugs seem to have generated great distrust between neighbours and adversely affected their relationships.

Nurseries: The families we interviewed emphasised the importance of the support offered to them by the local nurseries. It is important to note that only 32% of the population of metropolitan Rio de Janeiro has access to nursery services⁴⁵. However out of the 25% richest segment of this population, 60% have access to nursery services and most of these families still have the means to pay for childcare at home. The acute shortage of nursery services is a major problem faced especially by people living in low income communities who need to leave their children in a safe place while they go to work.

Schools: Although access to schooling at the age of 7 is almost universal in Brazil the quality of education received is low. Therefore, school is seen as having the potential to be a support, but currently does not respond to the aspirations and daily needs of the families. The views of this young father give an insight into some of the existing challenges:



⁴⁴ Rizzini, Irene; Barker, Gary et al (2001).

⁴⁵ Instituto Desiderata/IETS, 2006.

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"... But I am going to tell you that school is not enough, you understand? Because inside the school, any school, there are also lots of people together, up to no good..... I used to go to school and do lots of shit play truant and do shit. And the teachers? The teachers are scared! The teacher is scared of the student. Do you understand? Maybe if you had to pay for your child to go to a school that would be different. Even then, it would depend on the private school. I have studied in private school and that was even worse. There were drugs all over the place inside the school gates." Father, age 18

The Church: Some interviewees mentioned that the Church represents an important source of support in their lives especially as a space for reflection and the search for peace and equilibrium.

"I think that the church helps, I am sure, I haven't got a doubt. Do you know why? Yesterday my daughter said to me: 'Dad can I go to church?' I said 'I don't know'. But I knew I was going to let her go, and she knew that I was going to let her go, do you understand? But I like to let her ask for it herself. I don't have to force her to do anything. I can encourage her. Taking my daughter's example, she went and so did her brother, her sister and friends to church. So it is like this, I didn't force anyone. So for example you have to make the best you can of everything. If the child wants to go to church, it won't harm her. It is going to do her good, yes 100%, because all churches are different but there is only one God". Father, age 29

Community Centers: In Ladeira dos Tabajaras there is a center set up by the Municipal Government of Rio de Janeiro to offer an array of services in the community. This include assessing peoples' eligibility for the various types of financial support from the government, providing information on various issues and offering courses and support groups on a variety of topics to all age groups.

The residents that we interviewed do not rely on this organization for support. One reason appears to be the high turnover of activities and the restrictions on having access to their services.

The main difficulties faced by families to raise their children

Domestic violence⁴⁶: The violence observed by the families in their community or experienced on the streets often occurs at home where domestic violence against the children or spouse is frequent. Hitting or smacking the children is widely used to discipline them as can be seen below.

Difficulty in teaching children appropriate behaviour and setting boundaries without resorting to violence: Some parents admit finding it very hard to cope with children's behaviour and do not know how to manage without resorting to physical punishment. They do not know where to find help, and therefore hitting and threatening the children is the only way they know to respond to the misbehaviour of children.

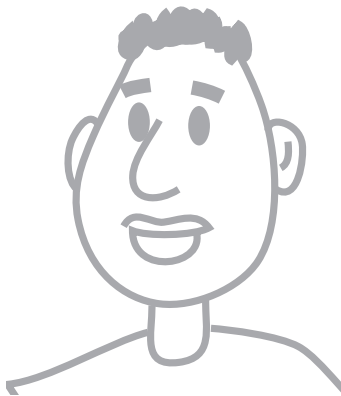
"I shout at my children all the time, I am not coping, I need some advice, I can't control them anymore. They make fun of me, laugh at me and don't listen. My youngest son (aged 3) is the worst! He is terrible, more devious because he learns from his brother (aged 8). What I say doesn't count, they want to speak louder than me, they don't do what I say unless I hit them and I don't like hitting them. But it is only when I hit... even then, I have to hit a lot because they laugh at me. It is irritating you know? I ask the older one to do something about three times and he obeys me, but the little one is too young to behave like that."

Mother, age 37

Parents appear to have low confidence in their own capacity to control the children and set behavioural boundaries and believe that it is a special skill that should be taught to them by specialists. Some parents appear to have an idealized vision of the way they should behave towards their children and feel inadequate and exposed when they cannot control the children's behaviour.

⁴⁶ We know that violence is present in the family across social classes. Based on our experience we can affirm that in the families that we focused on the study this kind of violence is very common. However of the people that participated in the interviews and focus groups only a few of them mentioned this topic. We believe that this was due to the limitations of the study, that is, only one interview of short duration.

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"'This concert', the girl told her mother: 'if you don't let me go to see it, than I am going to run away! - She threatened her mother!... In the end she died and she was only 13. Maybe if her mother had told her off, or looked after her better, she wouldn't talk to her mother like that.... The mother or grandmother should not allow a grandchild to intimidate her. Because if you allow yourself to be intimidated by a child, that is the end, isn't it? There should be someone to talk to them (to talk to the parents who have difficulties in bringing up their children). There is a need for more dialogue with people (professionals) who know how to do it, isn't there? The people who have studied and can show us a better way to deal with things, things that sometimes are impossible for people to see." Grandmother, age 62

In comparing how children are brought up today with how it used to be, the interviewees reveal that the relationships with their own parents used to be more rigid, based on fear and respect. Interviewees feel that adopting the same methods that their parents or grandparents used in the past, would not work with their children today. In their opinion, a solution would be to keep the children occupied and not exposed to the violence in the neighbourhood.

"I am scared of when my son reaches the age around 15 -16 because it is a difficult time, and the world out there is becoming more dangerous. When my dad was growing up things were slower." Father, age 18

"I see things that, when you see it you cannot believe your eyes. Children who were given only the best and nowadays can only cause grief to their mother and grandmother. What causes them to do that? Honestly, I am also asking myself that. They are all children who never wanted for anything. They had everything, they didn't have to go through any difficulties in their lives, but now they have never had a job and for me this is very scary." Mother, age 29

Lack of dialogue between children and parents and between parents themselves: Some interviewees talk about the power over a

child involved in parenting and the need to talk to the children instead of imposing the parent's own views. But at the same time they recognise that the everyday pressure of work and supporting their families leaves very little time to spend with the children. The exhaustion and stress associated with their busy lives also makes them less patient towards them. Some mothers complained of the lack of their partners' willingness to discuss the welfare of the children.



"...I think that you want to be near them and know what is happening at school, in the streets and wherever he goes. Always find a way to get the child to come to you and tell you things like: Listen dad, this or that is happening to me and I want you to know about it'." Father, age 22

"Listen! Talking is a bit complicated. My husband is very obstinate. He thinks that he brings in the money, so for him that is all he has to do. That is all that he worries about. I tell him: 'I feel the need to talk, to share things!' but he always avoids me. He never wants to talk about things like the children's education". Mother, age 36

"What is really missing in the lives of the children is the father, the mother, the uncle, the grandparent, the nephew, having real conversations, discussing the things that are right and the things that are wrong in life. That is what we have to do.... Because children also have their opinions.... But what we see more and more often is that the adults don't have time to spend with children. They have to work harder and harder to earn money. So when they get home they are stressed, irritable and that is why I say there is not enough conversation." Mother, age 29

"I spend an hour or hour and a half with him and I can't stand it any longer. I get fed up. I haven't got much patience, but he is difficult and naughty. If I have to spend a whole day with him I can do it, I don't need anybody's help. What I mean is that I can't stand it, he stays at home, in my home and my mum says that

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she is going out, I am not going to stay there the whole time with him, I want to go in the streets, so I tell my sister: ' You keep an eye on him because I am going out and not coming back.' Do you understand? This is what I am trying to explain: I spend more time on the streets than with him." Father, age 18

Financial worries are a constant theme in the lives of these families as apart from their efforts to provide for the family's basic needs, they have added pressure from the children wanting consumable goods that often are beyond the reach of the family's finances.

"Everything is going well, thank God! Here, at home what is really hard is the lack of money. My daughter is going through a phase where she asks for everything. When she sees something different: - 'I want, I really want a new top, or a pair of "Xuxa" sandals⁴⁷. I tell her that she has to wait, because every time that I have to buy one of the children something I have to buy it for the other as well. If I buy a pair of trainers for one of them, I have to buy it for the other. For example, just one pair of trainers for her school was R\$ 60, 00 (US\$ 40) I told her that I was only going to get her trainers and her uniform. Her birthday is next month and she said that she wants a party!" Mother, age 23

Lack of places to leave the children while parents' work: During their own childhoods the interviewees consider that the greatest difficulty that their parents faced was to find a safe place to leave them while they worked. Some would only see their parents at the weekends. It has become increasingly more difficult for parents to leave their children at home and go to work (which was a common practice when they were growing up), due to the presence of armed drug traffickers on the street. Most families still have no alternatives, and despite their fears and reservations are forced to leave the children by themselves while they work.

⁴⁷ Xuxa is a very famous television presenter of children's programmes in Brazil and the products she endorses are very popular with children.

"Look, I find it hard to leave them, like, I think, oh my God, if I go out today, today if I go to work I have to leave my child who is 13, of course the community is not

that bad, but you think the boy is only 13, what if someone he already knows is involved in the world of crime, comes and says 'So and so, go there and buy this for me, take this' lets say that he gives him R\$50,00 (U\$ 25) Then the next day he will say 'so and so gave me this much'...nowadays the most difficult thing is to leave the children where I live, and go out to work, because I know I am leaving them and I will be nervous." Mother, age 29

Lack of safe places for children to play: In the past children were allowed to play on the streets or in the squares by themselves while parents worked to earn a living or did domestic chores. Nowadays, however, it is considerably more dangerous and most parents will prefer to keep the children at home watching television than let them out on the streets.

"The problem, as I see it, is the problem of violence. Sometimes she is there....there playing (outside on the streets) and a motorbike speeds past. You can't complain because...sometimes the children are playing, and they go past armed, and the children get scared. The problem really is the violence. We (as parents) can't do much. What can we do? If we open our mouth we can die. If we complain we can die. So there is nothing to do. We don't have anyone to complain to, or anywhere to run to." Mother, age 26

The beaches and squares are the main spaces in which children can play. Most parents are anxious to keep their children busy because they see it as the only way to protect them from getting involved with drugs and crime.

"I know of some stories from around here... children who were left with no one looking after them, growing up like that.... Some of these children have already died. They didn't even reach the age of 16. I think that nowadays, you have to keep them busy, because if you leave the children to do as they please, you can see what happens: crime.... What was missing? Family support. Sometimes the parents are separated. Mostly the parents are separated and the mother

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has to go out to work and don't have anyone to leave the children with. The mother hasn't even got someone with whom to leave the child with and the child is left to his own devices." Father, age 31

Violence associated with the traffic of drugs: Outside their homes, the difficulty most mentioned and which caused most worries to parents was the violence associated with the armed gangs and the trafficking of drugs. Although, relatively few children end up involved in these activities, all families worry about their inability to shield their children from the exposure to drugs, arms and the power associated therewith.

"...Can you imagine, if you are working you get home tired and find out that your child says to you, 'ah so and so called me' because if he (my child) is easily led, he is going to go when called (by the drug dealers) I tell you that he goes, sometimes they go because they are scared, they say 'if you tell your father or your mother we are going to hit you, we are going to do this and that to you' this is what I am scared of, even if the world is like this we have to ask God that they (the children) don't follow the wrong path, if we give them everything they ask for they may choose the wrong path and if you give them just enough they may also go... nowadays we are, how do you say... we are at the crossroads. What is my son going to be when he grows up?" Mother, age 29

"Nothing is worse than being on the streets. Actually, worse than the streets, is the hill, the slum. There is a lot of stress here, lots of things going on, heavy stuff, drugs trafficking, everything.... A 7 or 8 year old child starts to understand. S/he starts to see lots of things that if s/he hasn't got a nice father, a nice mother by her/ his side to offer support..... There are lots of clever people here, who study and wants to study, but there are others that see (the traffic of drugs) and want to do it. To avoid them getting involved with drugs you have to keep them busy all the time, with all sorts of things like school, after school courses, football, everything..." Father, age 18

The families' main needs

The families involved in this study had the opportunity to talk about their needs and most of the interviewees referred to those related to basic social infrastructure and better living conditions. However, they feel that it is beyond their capacity to satisfy some basic everyday needs that many other citizens in Brazil are able to take for granted. Most interviewees wish for:

- A more comfortable house;
- More stable jobs;
- To be able to complete their studies;
- To provide a better life for their children;
- To have a space to leave the children in safety while the parents work;
- To have some spaces for leisure activities; and
- To have a place where advice can be obtained on important topics such as drugs, bringing up children and psychological support.

“Just a descent job really, well paid, nobody wants to earn the minimum wage. I would rather stay home than earn the minimum wage. It could be anything, as long as it well paid. Nowadays, everything in the world is about money. I would work Saturday and Sunday to have money; no problem.” Father, age 18

“I want a beautiful house and buy my own beautiful little things...” Grandmother, age 62

“To finish building my own house, so I can offer more comfort to my children.” Mother, age 23

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"I think that I should have studied more, not just to have finished secondary school, I should have gone to university, because then I would be able to.... have a fixed job, something more stable. If I could, I would do a teaching degree."
Mother, age 26

"A job, a job I mean something with a registered worker's card and with fixed times to start and finish". Mother, age 37

The suggestions of the families

The suggestions of the families regarding the support that they thought would help in their task of raising their children were:

- To have spaces where they could be listened to and advised on various parenting issues;
- To have help with children's homework as many parents are illiterate or have low literacy level and cannot give the children the support they need;
- To have access to and choice of organized sports, drama or arts activities for the children;
- To see investments in the area of public safety;
- To have more church activities for the children;
- To have spaces for children to be heard.

"There should be a person who came and helped the children with their school work, because some parents can't read or write. So they could come and explain things and help with the children's homework, to improve their learning. We haven't got anything like this here, have we?"
Grandmother, age 62

“I think that there should also be something like a church activity for children. Just for them to talk to the children do you understand? To motivate the children.” Father, age 29

“A person that could... a psychologist really, someone who could give us some guidance or some help.” Father, age 31

“I think that they should offer in all communities something like we used to have... a project that kept the children busy all the time that offered things such as volleyball, football, capoeira⁴⁶. I think that we could have these activities on for example, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, not every day because it would be too much for the children but maybe after school, there could be a person who could come and help the children with their homework. If they have difficulty in learning Portuguese, why not help them with their reading? Or even organize a play or some games.” Father, age 29

Other important issues addressed by family members

This section briefly describes some issues discussed with the families that reveal the constant changing nature of parenting and the need for parents to adapt and learn new ways of dealing with children's behaviour as children grow.

The level of difficulties in raising children varies depending on the gender and age of the children: The interviewees pointed out that the parents feel more in control of the situation when raising younger children and girls. When asked why, they replied as follows:

“Girls are more affectionate, boys are more aggressive. We learn this from experience.” Mother, age 23

⁴⁶ Capoeira is a Brazilian martial art created by enslaved Africans during the 16th Century.

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“It is easier to bring up girls. Boys are too difficult, it is too much. There are far more men killed than women.” Father, age 18

The parents perceive that during the teenage years they lose the child who needed their care and protection and have a youth who wants to be independent and who challenges the rules imposed during childhood. During this phase they find that there is a lot of conflict, which is exacerbated by these youths' exposure to violence in the neighbourhood. This in turn makes the parents more afraid of their own ability to bring up their teenage children. Parents indicate that teenage girls are just as vulnerable as boys to becoming involved in drug trafficking.

“Now I can feel it (the difference). He is at an age, like between 13 and 16 where the child starts to change, becomes more rebellious, so like, you become more authoritarian, you say one thing and that is it, it is what I say. This is a time that you have to control them, because if you don't, when they are 14 or 15, it is too late and they do not respect you any more. That is what happened with the generation that is now stealing round here, and doing all sorts of things. They were not controlled, they were not given limits.” Mother, age 29

“For young children there is no difference. During teenage years, in the past there used to be a difference. They used to say that boys were worse than girls. Nowadays it is all the same. In the older days people used to worry that the boy would get involved in crime. Now girls also get involved, so I don't think that there is a difference. The girls like the adrenaline from being in the company of men who are armed; I think that they are attracted to the power of these men.” Mother, age 26

The comments of these families reveal their great feeling of vulnerability and their fear that their children will become involved with the people connected to organized crime and drug trafficking. In a previous study carried out by CIESPI in conjunction with Promundo Institute it was observed that:

“...For boys, the parent's major concern is that they become involved with the comandos, while for the girls the biggest concern is that their daughter become romantically involved with a young man in the comandos, or even become pregnant from such a relationship”⁴⁹.

Life changes caused by the arrival of children: Most interviewees recalled how much their own lives had to change once the children arrived and difficult choices had to be made such as dropping out of school to earn a living to support the children. To become a parent is a life changing event for any person, but when basic resources and basic public services are not available, the worries about how to cope and provide for the family become much greater. This is especially applicable to unplanned pregnancies for very young parents.

“From the moment you have a child, everything in your life changes: relationships, you don't have the same friends you used to fool around with, and party with. You don't go to a friend's party anymore. For me this changed a lot. For me it was a great life experience. In my case I could go through it again... some day..., but not now... Because this was, like a good thing in my life (to become a father). It made me change a lot! There were lots of technical studies that I wanted to do, to learn. Then I stopped studying a bit, and thought now there is a family in my life, I need to stop for a while, stop thinking about studying.” Father, age 18

Fathers' participation in decisions regarding pregnancy: Some fathers talked about feeling powerless in not wanting a child but not having a choice in the matter. They also talked about their efforts to provide the best possible life for their families.

“My girlfriend did not want to take it out (have an abortion). I asked her to do it but she did not want to. I hit her several times when she was pregnant (....) I think that I was 15 years old. She is now 19, going on 20. Not one person from the family supported her.” Father, age 18

⁴⁹ Rizzini, Barker et al (2001), p.12.

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"Her mother was very young and inexperienced. I was young too, not very experienced either, but I thought that I was capable. I was always looking after her. I never allowed her to want for anything. At the time I was working, we sold everything almost everything. We did not have enough money, nor enough work, but I always wanted to make sure that she had everything that she needed."

Father, age 22

Before getting pregnant: In the opinion of the interviewees, the ideal conditions for a pregnancy would involve having a job, a house, affection, and help from the government with their nutrition during pregnancy and childcare after the birth so that the parents can work.

"I think that you should be given lots of affection. During pregnancy, you feel very needy, don't you? When a woman is pregnant everything is very hard."

Grandmother, age 62

"If I were pregnant today, I would like my life to be stable, so that I could offer my children the very best".

Mother, age 29

"...I think that the government should do something, like giving more food, right? Sometimes, people don't have any money at all to buy clothes for their baby; these mothers are then desperate. What matters is having enough to eat. Somebody needs to help."

Grandmother, age 62

Hopes for the future: The wish for their children's future includes happiness, a good job, studying and recognition for their efforts and dedication as parents.

"Ah, I wish them (my grandchildren) happiness, and that they become somebody in life, right? That they can find a decent job, and have a beautiful place to live. I think that this is my dream for all of them."

Grandmother, age 62

“That they do what I didn't: study! Because I stopped at the 7th grade of primary education. To study, to have a nice job, so that they don't have to work like me and my mum, I have many other wishes...” Mother, age 23

“All of the best. That she studies a lot, and has a good life. My only fear is that she (my daughter) gets involved with these guys who are up to no good. To avoid that, I intend to keep her busy so that she doesn't stay here in the slum, going up and down the hill doing nothing”. Mother, age 26

The views of the professionals who support families

In this section CIESPI will present the results of the interviews carried out with the professionals from four organizations based in Rio de Janeiro which are well known and respected for their expertise in various areas related to supporting families. It also includes the interviews with people working for six services located within or near the community Ladeira dos Tabajaras which were identified by the families as constituting support to them. The interviews with these professionals and services were carried out in order to complement and enrich the data collected from the families, adding different perspectives.

Most of the interviewees complained about the difficulties in getting families involved or interested in their services. In general terms, the professionals complained about an excessive workload and listed an array of social and economic factors associated with firearms, drug trafficking violence and aspects of the poverty of the community that makes their work of supporting families very difficult and sometimes almost impossible.

One aspect in common for all the organizations and services is the difficulties connected with entering or accessing the community due to frequent open conflicts between the police and the drug traffickers. It is

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also acknowledged that organizations working to support families need to form a network for the exchange of experience and information.

Set out below is a brief description of the most relevant issues raised by the professionals working to support families that in their opinion have an adverse effect on the parents in their task of raising children:

Female headed families, where the mother works long hours: A large percentage of the families are headed by single mothers who have to balance child care and work and this represents a great challenge for these families while raising their children. The people running the services in the community feel that they are filling a gap left by the mother, who is overloaded by excessive working hours.

Some of the organizations interviewed by CIESPI still use the “nuclear family” model as the ideal, which corresponds to a family consisting of a father, a mother and their children. However, this family structure is less common nowadays. Various authors stress the importance of analysing the numerous and varied ways in which families are composed in Brazil⁵⁰. Families that have a different composition such as single parent families tend to be blamed for the problems that they experience with their children.

Lack of time to spend with the children due to long working hours: Parents have to work long hours and sometimes far away from home in order to be able to provide a living for their family and as a result have very little time to spend with their children. Apart from the exhaustion and stress caused by life in a big city, they are affected by financial worries and constant violence in the neighbourhood.

Absence of a father figure: This factor was mentioned by all of the organizations interviewed. There are fewer and fewer male figures in the families to which these organizations offer support, especially those which have a low-income. Fathers appear to be taking on fewer responsibilities for raising children.

⁵⁰ Sousa, Rizzini, 2001; Peres, 2001; Pereira, 2004; Deslandes, Assis, Silva 2004.

Financial difficulties: In the opinion of our interviewees financial difficulties are the greatest challenge for the parents in raising their children. The families live under so much financial pressure that even when they work for very long periods, they still cannot make ends meet, nor purchase some consumer goods that their children or they would like, nor pay for leisure activities for their children.

Unemployment: Unemployment of one or both parents is identified by most interviewees as a cause of great stress for parents as it can compromise their capacity to provide for their children. There are other issues that tend to appear alongside unemployment, such as domestic violence and/or drugs or alcohol abuse.

The influence of the media encouraging consumptions and distorting values: According to the interviewees, the media (television, billboards, etc) is mentioned many times by the families as the “big villain”, which encourages the purchase of consumer goods which appeal directly to children and youth. The parents do not have the means to buy things that their children ask for and the parents often feel guilty as a result. This often creates conflicts in the families.

Standards of behaviour dictated by specialists and the media, makes it more difficult for the families to feel competent in bringing up their children: Interviewees criticised a current trend in the area of health, education and psychology for saying that most parents (in particular poor parents who are trapped in a generational cycle of poverty) need specialised support to be good enough parents. Many times the media contributes to this perception in television programmes and advertisements.

Poor families who have historically been considered incapable of looking after their own children have often been more vulnerable to state intervention,⁵¹ and have had their power as parents undermined. It is acknowledged that there is a fine line between offering support to



⁵¹ For detailed discussion see: Irene Rizzini, Irma Rizzini, Luciene Naiff, Rachel Baptista (2007).

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families and interfering with their private lives⁵² and great care must, therefore, be taken in the design of policies.

There is a need to strengthen the ties between family members:

Professionals working with families note that family ties will be strengthened when they are accepted as they are- with their weaknesses and limitations. Some professionals want to see a public demystification of the “perfect family” depicted in some television programmes or advertisements.

Difficulty in imposing limits and setting boundaries: This is an issue that was raised by family members and professional as representing a great difficulty for parenting in general. The decrease in the size of families and family network support available has resulted in families feeling isolated. Most low income families are working very long hours to guarantee their survival. There are fewer clear references to parents as to how they should bring up their children. Very often they find it difficult to impose limits on the behaviour of their children and youth. They tend to adopt a very permissive way by not fixing regular times for eating or sleeping and they also find it difficult to say no to their children when necessary.

“It is very difficult for many complex reasons; people don't have the time. When they need to set boundaries they don't know how to do so. You cannot impose limits on children's behaviour by merely telling them what to do, but instead you need to build a relationship.... So, many times there is an expectation that the child will be able to do certain things without anyone ever having to tell her/him how to...” (NGO which offers support on interpersonal relationships)

Lack of communication between parents: The lack of communication between parents has a negative impact on the children according to some interviewees. Parents are not sharing decision about how to manage children's behaviour nor respecting each others' way of managing it. This in turn leaves children confused who also try to play one parent against the other.

⁵² See Vasconcelos 2005, Ghate Deborah (2005) Moran, Patricia, Ghate, Deborah, Van der Merwe, Amelia (2004).

“...very often we see the parents contradicting each other. One punishes the child and the other cancels the punishment. It is important to get them to understand that they can think differently, and can have different opinions, but they need to agree on how they treat the children...” (NGO which offers support on interpersonal relationships)

“This is a gender issue, because the men feel that this (talking) is not their responsibility. Their responsibility is to bring the money in and the women's is to look after the children...” (NGO which offers support on interpersonal relationships)

“A complaint that I hear a lot here, especially from women is that their partners don't talk to them about the children. Obviously they have their own difficulty in talking, but it is the women who bring up this subject. They say that the men don't sit down to talk...” (NGO which offers support on interpersonal relationships)

Weakening of hierarchy in the family: According to the services we interviewed, there is often a distortion in the family's hierarchy. Sometimes it can be caused by the absence of a father figure, other times by the large number of family members responsible for looking after the children such as mothers and aunts for example. Sometimes there is no clear authority figure in the family.

Lack of sufficient services to support families in the communities: There is insufficient provision of services to meet the needs of the communities. The few families that have access to support may not be able to benefit from it because it is too far from their homes, which can cause them to discontinue attendance. Sometimes the service offered to a family is located in an area controlled by a *comando* different from that in which they live and they are not allowed to enter or there may be risks involved in entering the area.

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“We have another referral...where there is a mother who has to walk a very long distance, but we know that she is not going to carry on doing it for long and she is going to give it up. This is horrendous; support needs to be offered closer to where they live”. (NGO which offers psychological support to children and their families)

“...the girl was ruling the roost and telling everyone what to do, the mother was going crazy. The mother sells beauty products and the girl throws all the products on the floor, completely out of control. She is a typical child that can be helped by our services, but the mother is not going to go down one hill and up another with a young baby and the girl, she is really not going to do that”. (NGO which offers psychological support to children and their families)

Sexual and reproductive health awareness: Sexually active young people cannot always understand the information that is given to them about contraceptive methods, and they may feel uncomfortable to make relevant enquiries. There are also some cultural issues that play a part in the right of young woman to have children, with pressure coming from all directions.

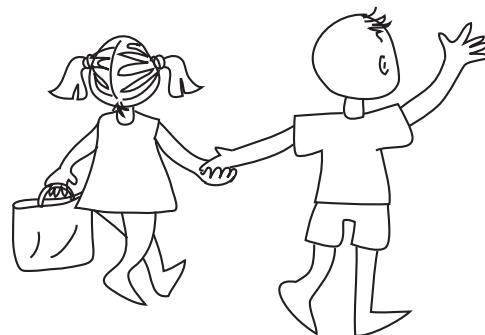
According to some of the professionals we interviewed, some young mothers who already have teenage daughters cannot understand the information given to them about sexual health. They say that it is not enough to tell these women about the use of contraceptive methods, because they may not understand how they work and how to use them. Another thorny issue, for organizations that advise on sexual and reproductive health is abortion which is illegal in Brazil may be contrary to the religion and values of families.

“It is very difficult for a woman to choose for example between employment and a child, or a teenager who is studying and gets pregnant having to interrupt their studies. Family planning is not a panacea, but is a tool that allows a person to control something very intimate that is her sexuality.” (NGO which advises on sexual and reproductive health)

“When a person has to work in the area that I call an “intimate sphere” and has to make a decision alone, it is very difficult. Sometimes you hear teenage girls who are pregnant saying that they wanted to have an abortion but that their boyfriend didn’t let them because he wanted a child. He wishes to reaffirm his sexuality and show that he is a “man” although he is not going to worry about the milk needed to feed the child.” (NGO which advises on sexual and reproductive health)

Difficulties of projects to juggle work load, families' needs and the constantly changing Government policies: Organizations that receive some Governmental funding feel under pressure to set up and offer the programmes introduced by the Government. They complain about the centralised and top-down nature of policy for families in Brazil. They argue that the views and experience of professionals working on the ground and the views of families to whom policies and services are aimed are not taken into consideration.

The independent sector works with very limited resources and tends to cover only a small group of people. There is a lack of presence of the state in poor communities, and the existing services are insufficient to cover the needs and tend to be set up without properly consulting the community. Therefore, they often are irrelevant to families' real needs. Most services available tend to work in isolation and are often discontinued or offered intermittently.



Conclusions

Violence in the communities generated by several factors such as lack of opportunities, poor living conditions and by the effects of the drug trafficking trade has had a devastating impact on the lives of families and their children in the past few years. Apart from common concerns regarding the future of their children in relation to having a good job, keeping good company and being healthy, the families interviewed fear that they or their children may be killed as result of being caught in the cross fire between police and armed drugs traffickers. They are also concerned about the risk of their children getting involved with criminal activities.

Families feel that they can only rely on their informal network of extended family members and friends to support them in their efforts to guarantee their survival. This network of solidarity which is sometimes precarious is not always sufficient to prevent family break down. Policies and programmes must concentrate on improving families' living conditions and finding ways to offer them places where children can be left in safety while their parents work.

For a very long time in Brazil there has been a belief that if a person cannot find employment it is their own fault. Nowadays, unemployment in Brazil affects generations of people who have never been employed and in all likelihood never will be. When we consider the social changes required to improve the conditions of people living in low income communities, it is necessary to take this into consideration, the options and the support required to introduce people who have never worked into the formal employment market. Also, it is important to assess how the informal market can be supported and developed in order to create decent alternative income generating activities.

Education alone cannot solve all social problems experienced by low income communities, but a high quality public education accessible to all children could be an important starting point. Research evidence suggests that education is pivotal in breaking the generational cycles of

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poverty and social exclusion. The education system could play a more fundamental role in supporting families especially if it could provide a more relevant curriculum and an adequate and safe place for children while the parents are at work.

CIESPI's studies have revealed that parents want more support to raise their children and that children can benefit greatly if their parents feel more able to cope and manage their responsibilities and challenges of parenting. However, in order to be effective, any support provided, must respect the parents own views of what they need and must be appropriate to the age of their children.

As discussed in this study, vulnerable and needy families that do not conform to the nuclear family model can often be victimized even further and blamed for their personal conditions and difficulties. Families need spaces where they can be listened to and can find advice and support on bringing up their children. The social services and social public policies in Brazil are still very fragmented and ineffective. Programmes that offer financial assistance to families in extreme situation of poverty are very welcome in Brazil but are also very new and constitute an isolated intervention that alone cannot stop the cycles of intergenerational poverty and exclusion.

We hope that the reflections presented in this study will contribute to the debate and inspire others to carry out further research to deepen the understanding of many of the issues raised in this study.

Annex 1

Brief Description of Ladeira dos Tabajaras

ANNEX 1

Ladeira dos Tabajaras is the name given by its inhabitants to a slum which is officially called “Morro dos Cabritos” (the Goats Hill). It is located in the southern part of Rio de Janeiro between the middle class districts of Copacabana and Botafogo. The favela has three main communities: Ladeira dos Tabajaras, Mangueira do Botafogo and Morro dos Cabritos and it occupies an area of 85,268m² (Pereira Passos Institute). According to a survey conducted in 2000 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) there were 2,040 inhabitants, out of which 761 were children and youth under the age of 20.

At the bottom of the hill of Ladeira dos Tabajaras the buildings and residences can be described as “middle class” as they are more spacious and made with appropriate building material. Further up the hill, the housing conditions become more precarious and sometimes more than one family share the same small dwelling. Although a large part of the population has water, electricity, sanitation and rubbish collection many residents still do not have access to these services.

There are no schools in the community and only two nurseries for children under the age of 4. There are no health services, public transport and public spaces for leisure in Ladeira dos Tabajaras. Many residents complain about the difficulties involved in having to send their children to schools that are far from home which mean choosing between either sending the children by themselves or having problems managing working hours and childcare. For most people there is no choice and the children have to make their way to school by themselves. There is no public transport, and the only means of transport within this community are vans and motorcycles run by private individuals which are considered very expensive by the families. Residents have alleged that these transport services are run by the drug trafficking *comandos*. The only places where children

can play are the beach of Copacabana or the public square in Ladeira dos Tabajaras.

Like most slums, there is a certain social and economic diversity and the adults tend to work for low wages (lacking educational qualifications) as domestic workers, street sellers, factory workers and with an average income between one and two minimum wages (between 130 and 260 dollars per month). There is considerable unemployment and many of the people work in the informal sector doing sporadic jobs.

As with like many other slums in Rio de Janeiro Ladeira dos Tabajaras faces ongoing violence between police and armed drug trafficking groups known as the *comandos*. According to the "Institute Pereira Passos" most residents of slums in Rio de Janeiro cannot enjoy some of their fundamental rights due to the domination of the area by criminal groups.

"The power of the criminal armed groups imposes serious restrictions on the movement of people, their freedom of expression, and their right to meet and organize groups. Moreover these armed groups coerce residents to do what they are told however illegal or unethical their requests may be".⁵³

Until recently these conflicts between the police and the *comandos* in Ladeira dos Tabajaras were infrequent, but now a new *comando* has been established and the conflicts have intensified. In order to survive in this climate of violence, most residents obey what is known as the "law of silence" by communicating as little as possible with the police and with the *comandos*. This law of silence has other implications including permitting domestic violence to go unreported to the relevant authorities. Very often, the *comandos* take the place of the State imposing a code of behaviour and resolving the private disputes of the residents.

⁵³ Sergio Besserman, Director of Institute Pereira Passos, Town Hall, Rio de Janeiro in Instituto Pereira Passos (December 2006).

Annex 2

Details About Interviewees from
the Community of Ladeira dos
Tabajaras:

ROLE IN THE FAMILY	AGE	SCHOOLING	OCCUPATION	CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE FAMILY
Father, Uncle	18	7 th grade primary education	Unemployed	son, aged 2 niece, aged 3
Grandmother	62	4 th grade primary education	Retired	grandson, aged 12 granddaughter, aged 11 grandson, aged 7
Mother	23	Did not comment	Domestic worker	daughter, aged 7 son, 14 months old
Father	22	1 st year secondary education	Carpenter	daughter, aged 3
Mother	29	4 th grade primary education	Unemployed	son, aged 13 daughter, aged 8
Father	31	Secondary education	Security guard	daughter, aged 3
Mother, Auntie	36	Secondary education	Teacher	son, aged 9 niece, aged 15
Father	29	4 th grade primary education	Unemployed	daughter, aged 11 son, aged 9 daughter, aged 6 son, aged 5
Mother	26	Secondary education	Nursery teacher	daughter, aged 5
Mother	37	Secondary education	Street market seller	son, aged 8 son, aged 3

Annex 3

Brief Description of Social Assistance Policy in Brazil⁵⁴

Since 2003 Brazil has been going through an important transition with the new political agenda which created the “Sistema Unico de Assistencia Social - SUAS” (Unified System of Social Assistance). This system offers a range of free decentralised and participatory public services. It aims to reorganize social services and decentralize decisions in order to take into account the local needs of families and communities. The system undertakes to respect the cultural, social economic and political diversity of the different regions of Brazil. Civil society has been consulted during the process of drawing up these social policies and changes are being adopted nationally by integrating the three levels of government (federal, state and municipal).

Parallel to the implementation of these new national policies was a process of discussion and elaboration of the “*National Plan⁵⁵ for the Promotion, Protection and Defence of the Rights of Children and Adolescents to Family and Community Life*” published in December 2006. This new document aims to contribute to the establishment of a conceptual model that should guide the design of new policies to ensure that the rights of children and youth are respected.

An innovative aspect of SUAS is the way in which families are prioritized. For the purpose of this publication we will only describe briefly the most important⁵⁶ programmes or projects directed at one aspect of the SUAS policy namely “basic social protection”.

Basic social protection aims to strengthen family ties, social connections, the sense of belonging and to improve the material and social wellbeing of low income families. These programmes focus on the development of the potential of the individuals; supplementing their income; and strengthening ties in the family and community. Basic social protection services are delivered by the municipal community centres and are located in areas identified as socially deprived. They are now called: Centros de Referência da Assistência Social - CRAS and were formerly (during our study) known as CEMASI - Municipal Centre for Social and Integrated Assistance.

⁵⁴ *There is not yet any assessment of these policies and the information and data gathered here was taken from the various governmental state and national web sites: www.mds.gov.br; www.brasil.gov.br; <http://www.governo.rj.gov.br>; <http://www.rio.rj.gov.br>.*

⁵⁵ *Plano Nacional de Promoção, Proteção e Defesa do Direito de Crianças e Adolescentes à Convivência Familiar e Comunitária.*

⁵⁶ *There are many other programmes and projects aimed at basic social protection, some are national programmes, some are state based and others are implemented by the municipality.*

ANNEX 3

Programa Bolsa Família (Programme Family Income Support) - This is the main programme for the transfer of income. Families with income per capita between R\$60.00 and R\$120.00 (US\$ 40.00) - (US\$ 80.00) are eligible to receive financial support if they have children under the age of 15 or if the mother is pregnant. All extremely poor families with income per capita of up to R\$60.00 per month are eligible to receive assistance irrespective of whether they meet the aforementioned conditions. The families enrolled in this programme undertake to ensure that their children attend school, and have received all compulsory vaccinations and that pregnant mothers attend pre-natal and post-natal classes. Until the beginning of 2007, this programme assisted 11.1 million families throughout Brazil. In April 2006, there were 347, 872 families receiving income transfers in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Projeto Agente Jovem de Desenvolvimento (Project Youth Agent of Development) - This programme caters for youth aged between 15 and 24, and aims to strengthen youth initiatives and ties with their family and community. It places a particular emphasis on aspects of education and work. Priority is given to youth who are neither enrolled in educational courses nor currently involved or have been involved in other social programmes. It caters for vulnerable and at risk youth. 10% of the places are reserved for youth who have disabilities. In December 2006, 112,536 youth were being helped by this programme in the whole country and 10,030 in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil PETI (Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour) - This programme offers income transfer to families of children and adolescents who work. It provides social educational services to these children and ensures that they attend school. In 2006, 1.97 million children and youth benefited from this programme in the country 23,885 of whom were in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Programa de Atenção Integral à Família PAIF (Programme Integral Attention to Families) - This programme was created in 2004 and it is the main programme for basic social protection of the SUAS. It develops basic and continuous services to vulnerable families. This programme is delivered in the CRAS (Centers of Social Assistance). The most important service run by the PAIF is the Programme for Family Health described below.

Programa Saúde da Família (Programme for Family Health) - This programme which was introduced in 1994, started to set up health centers to cover all the families within a geographical area. It is run by teams of multidisciplinary professionals responsible for the promotion, prevention and maintenance of health in the community, providing treatment for all the common illnesses. In 2005 there were 24,600 teams dedicated to family health throughout Brazil, covering 44.4% of the population, corresponding to approximately 78.6 million inhabitants. In 2005 there were 1,185 family health teams operating in the state of Rio de Janeiro. All of the families receiving the Programa Bolsa Família must be assisted by one of the teams of the Programme for Family Health.

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