

What works

in supporting Children
and Youth who live in low income
communities in Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil

Credits

Project coordinator
Irene Rizzini

Research coordinators
Alexandre B. Soares
Jorge Barros - *In memoriam*

Researchers
Marcelo Princeswal
Renata Tavares

English version
Mariana Menezes Neumann
Neide Cassaniga

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What works in supporting Children and Youth who live in low income communities in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

ELOS Research Project

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2006

In memoriam

Jorge Barros was an important friend and collaborator for more than two decades and we have learned a lot from him. Last year, we invited Jorge to coordinate this study and he was responsible for its initial stages. Sadly, however, he passed away unexpectedly before the completion of the study. It was a very difficult and challenging moment for us all, but his inner strength and insatiable thirst for social justice was an inspiration for us to carry on with this study. We would like to dedicate to Jorge the results of this study in his loving memory.

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The CIESPI research team

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CIESPI

CIESPI is registered as an independent, non-profit research centre dedicated to applied research, policy analysis and training about the needs of children, particularly disadvantaged children and their families. CIESPI is located at, and works in collaboration, with the Pontifical Catholic University (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 the 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.

In the last few years CIESPI has been developing and carrying out some social projects in different neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro. These are projects which seek to strengthen the support available in the communities so that children and youth remain there and have greater opportunities for a full and healthy development.

In 1998 CIESPI started a project called the *ELOS Project* with the aim of carrying out interdisciplinary research to identify, promote and strengthen the connections within the family and with the community as a way to create more opportunities for the full development of these children and youth¹.

¹ ELOS Project, with the support of UNICEF, Instituto C&A de Desenvolvimento Social, Grupo Lorentzen and Grupo Lachmann.

Introduction

This exploratory study was requested by a group of individuals who live in Norway and have financially supported initiatives which help vulnerable children and youth in Brazil. During the last two years they have been supporting part of CIESPI's work.

In 2005 they asked CIESPI for some guidance and information as to what works in supporting children and youth who live in low income communities, so that they could better direct the use of their resources. In common with many other funders, they were affected by the visibility and the great needs of street children.

However, their views are in line with CIESPI's publications² and the ELOS project which advocate the need to invest in support for children and youth while they are still connected to their families or extended families and communities, as it is much easier to develop and nurture a sense of belonging and identification with the community and its values while they are still living there.

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We stress the need to support children, youth and their families in their own communities and increase their access to assistance, especially, in times of crisis or acute need. In this way, one can help to avoid family break down, which can in some cases result in children leaving their families either to be placed in institutions or by slowly drifting away and sleeping on the streets.



A small grant was made available for an exploratory study to look at what is working in supporting children and youth who live in low income communities and what the challenges and gaps are. CIESPI decided to interview key professionals from funding agencies, independent professionals and non governmental organizations working at community and street level in the City of Rio the Janeiro and neighbouring towns. The views and suggestions of mothers and youth are also included here.

This study reports on our findings which are based on the work carried out in the City of Rio the Janeiro, but we believe that it could also be applicable to other low income communities in Brazil and in other countries with children and youth in similar conditions of need and vulnerability.

We hope that this publication will be helpful, not only to the people who requested it, but also to others concerned about optimizing the use of any funds that they invest in projects in Brazil. We believe that the results of this study will help to indicate some directions as to what works and where the gaps and the challenges in the services offered to children and youth are. Furthermore, we hope that this study will create new channels for discussions with our partners in Brazil and abroad, and especially through the research network Childwatch International and other networks for the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

²CIESPI (1999), RIZZINI, I.; BARKER, G. et al (2006); RIZZINI, I.; BARKER, G. and CASSANIGA, N. (2000, 2002); SOUSA, S. RIZZINI, I. (2001).

The context of Brazil

The population of Brazil is estimated at 170 million inhabitants, which is largest population in Latin America and ranks sixth in the world. 37.9 percent of its population is under the age of 20 (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE, Censo Demográfico, 2000).

Whilst school enrollment in Brazil is very high (97 per cent enrollment in primary school), the educational challenge is to maintain the attendance of these children once enrolled, as 9.7 percent of children between the ages of 5 – 17 are not enrolled at school, and 10.9 percent of the population above the age of 10 is illiterate (PNAD/IBGE, 2002).

Furthermore, social and racial inequalities are still major issues that plague Brazilian society. There are 34 million people aged between 12 and 17 years old, 12.2 percent of whom live in families with a per capita income of less than 50 percent of the Brazilian minimum monthly wage. It is important to note that 71 percent of this segment of the population is black and 73 percent of the illiterate youth population in Brazil is also black (PNAD/IBGE, 2002)

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Public schools in Brazil face a great variety of challenges such as shortage of funding, low salaries for the teachers and staff and invariably over crowded classrooms. It is worth noting that in Brazil, schools operate on a half-day basis, as children either attend school in the mornings or in the afternoons. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for working parents to ensure that their children are not left alone or wandering the streets. There is insufficient provision of services to look after children before or after the time of day in which they attend school. As a result, inter alia NGOs and church based organizations operating at community level play a crucial role in providing a safe place and as far as possible a stimulating environment for such children.



In the last few decades in Brazil, the social movements headed by numerous non-governmental organizations (NGO) and of Non Governmental Individuals (NGI)³ have played a central role in fighting for the rights of different social groups.

These organisations and individuals became prominent in the 1990s and are responsible for raising public awareness and providing services that often were not offered by the State. One important contribution of NGOs and NGIs was their persistence in fighting for the rights of children and youth who work and/on live on the streets to be treated as children and not criminals.

The participation of these NGOs and NGIs was pivotal in the adoption of the Statute of Children and Adolescent, a law that whilst not yet fully respected in practice, has nevertheless radically changed children's rights in Brazil and has become a strong basis for most organizations working for and on behalf of children and youth (SILVA; MOTTI, org., 2001).

These organizations and individuals, particularly when operating in different networks, have also played a significant part in raising awareness regarding child labour, child prostitution, domestic violence, racial and social discrimination⁴. Some have worked to change policies and practices, whilst others have started to offer support in relation to the above areas.

³ This term is used in Brazil to refer to people that are not attached to any organization but carry out important social projects in communities, such as homework tutors who also help to look after children.

⁴ Some of the most important groups are the Council for the Rights of Children and Youth and the Forum for the Defense of Rights of Children and Youth.

The Study

Between March 2005 and January 2006, CIESPI carried out an exploratory study which sought to identify the key factors that make projects⁵ successful in helping children and youth in low income communities in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, it identified the main gaps and challenges for the people working with this segment of the population.

This study focused on collecting the views of not only very experienced NGOs and professionals working for NGOs and funding agencies in Rio de Janeiro but also youth and their families.

We believe that in general, the views of these very experienced people are not taken into consideration by public policy makers in Brazil. We consider that it constitutes an invaluable source of information and needs to be listened to and documented.

We hope to contribute to the discussion about what works when seeking to support children and youth from low income communities and where there are still gaps and challenges. In the course of this study, we were unable to consult the views of the people working for governmental organizations due to time and resource constraints. The views of such people would be an important contribution in complementing the opinions presented in this study and we hope that it can be done in the future.



⁵ Although the interviewees used different terms to describe the services carried out with children and youth, such as projects, programmes and initiatives, for the purpose of this study we will only use the term “project” to describe such activities.

Objectives:

- To identify the key factors which make a project successful in helping children and youth living in low income communities;
- To identify the gaps and challenges in supporting children and youth from low income communities.

Methodology:

CIESPI identified and interviewed 21 key individuals and it carried out two focus groups with 17 members of the community. Two key questions guided these interviews and focus groups:

- What support to children and youth is working?
- What are the gaps and the challenges in supporting children and youth?

The interviewees came from the following groups:

- 13 NGO coordinators and 2 educators, with more than 10 years of experience working with either children and youth on the streets or with those living in low income communities in the city of Rio de Janeiro (who are very respected in their area of expertise);
- 3 coordinators of institutions and foundations that funds different types of prevention or intervention support;
- 3 individuals (NGI) (who are developing different projects inside their own community).
- There were 2 focus groups (one with 11 youths and another with 6 mothers) totalling 17 community members.

Based on the views of the key individuals as to what works and who is currently providing services of good quality, we visited and interviewed employees and volunteers at some of these projects.

Scope of the Study

The key individuals work either for projects or funding agencies that have adopted or supported the prevention and/or intervention approach in their work with children and youth. They work in different areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro and the neighbouring municipalities.

- 11 work for projects that focus mainly on prevention work.

For the purposes of this study, the term “prevention projects” or “prevention approach” refers to the work that is carried out in low income communities with a view to strengthening the family and community ties of children and youth and providing general support services in order to promote their well being.

- 3 work for projects that focus on intervention with children or youth.

For the purposes of this study, the term “intervention projects” or “intervention approach” refers to the work directed at very vulnerable groups and which seeks to address the specific needs of these groups (e.g. street children, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy).

- 3 work for projects that focused both on prevention and on intervention.



The findings

Although they are interconnected, the results of this study are divided into 2 main sections.

The **first section** will cover the key factors that make a project successful in supporting children and youth living in low income communities. It is divided into the following 3 sub-sections:

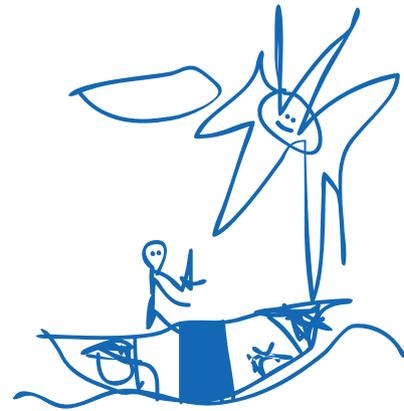
- Services
- Organizational issues
- Processes

The **second section** will cover the major challenges and gaps that remain for the services aimed at children and youth from low income communities in Brazil.

Section 1

The key factors
that make a project
successful in supporting
children and youth living in
low income communities

Services



Two main aspects are addressed in this section:

Firstly, the methodologies that have been successfully used in projects and secondly, the importance of strengthening family and community ties in the lives of children and youth.

Art-education is the methodology most mentioned by the people that were interviewed. The importance of building positive relationships and emotional connections between the children and youth and their families, the community and the schools is stressed. Lastly, this study will address the specific needs of the children whose ties with their family are breaking down or no longer exist and how to develop the relationships of children and youth who spend all or the majority of their time on the streets or have been in care.

Art-Education methodologies

Most projects emphasized the important role played by “art-education” which is a term used in Brazil to describe different methods used in social projects in a variety of ways and contexts. These projects offer activities that involve art, games and sports such as drama, circus skills, story telling/ reading. The level of skills of the educators is crucial in determining the success of this methodology.

Coordinators of art-education projects stressed that the main objective is to create new opportunities for children and youth to become familiar with different forms of artistic expression. They also believed that art, in a broad sense, can help develop new values and strengthen their understanding of citizenship. However, as one of our interviewees pointed out, there are limits to it as well:

“There are many artistic projects that are beautiful and that truly help community members that are already involved with art in some way. It really helps to expand their horizons. But it doesn’t mean that you are taking that person out of the social exclusion he/she lives in. That is a totally different matter”.

(NGO representative)

Art education is important when used to encourage children, youth and their communities to discuss and critically examine their living conditions and their rights. It also helps them to make suggestions as to action that should be taken to improve these living conditions. Consequently, “art-education” is used to encourage political action and is not an end in itself.

Art-education is also important in order to create a collective space either on the street (for street and working children) or in the community for the exchange of information and ideas.

Interviewees emphasized the fact that the Brazilian law “The Statute of the Child and Adolescent” acknowledges the importance of art-education for the developmental process of the child⁶.

Art-education is offered mainly to children up to the age of 12. Thereafter, art is mainly used for teaching skills that can lead to the generation of income such as making jewellery or greeting cards. This was strongly criticized by the professionals interviewed in this study.

Many interviewees suggested that art-education projects can play an important role in helping local artists and other members of the community who have artistic skills to have their skills appreciated by others in their communities. It can help these people to realize that their work or skills are not inferior to the mainstream cultural expressions and makes them feel valued and motivated to teach their skills to other community members.

⁶ Statute of the Child and Adolescent, July 1990. Chapter IV. On the Right to Education, Culture, Sport and Leisure.

Strengthening the ties between children and youth and their family and the community

According to the majority of interviewees, it is fundamental that projects that aim to support children and youth, understand, value and work to strengthen the ties between the child/youth and his or her family or other responsible adults and with others such as friends, peer groups and professionals within the community where the child or youth comes from.

The interviewees believed that working with the people who have emotional ties with the children and youth will have a greater impact when these children or youth are still living at home, rather than when they are spending the majority of their time on the streets.

All the interviewees favoured approaches that try to involve the families in all phases of the projects, creating space for discussion that help parents to understand many of the problems that they face while raising their children. Very often the exchange of information and support between parents help them to deal with their own children.

When community members discuss common difficulties, they are more able to collectively request action from the State. As a result, the project stops aspiring to make changes and becomes a channel for a dialogue so that these families take the leading role in the fight to guarantee their own rights.

An interviewee told us the story of a project that together with a group of mothers and young people and the local Neighbourhood Association, managed to get the authorities to build a foot bridge that now safely connects the community to a local secondary school.

The interviewees suggested that the first step is to identify the people who are key members in the community, in order to join forces and discuss the priorities of that community.

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Therefore, social projects should not centralize the decision making or the management of the activities. They should not be the only ones to propose and be responsible for actions that will affect the lives of children and youth, but they should encourage the participation of the various people who are committed to supporting and improving the opportunities of children and youth. The next three aspects of services look at how ties can be strengthened with the family, the schools and how they can be pursued in the services offered to children and youth who spend the majority of their time on the streets or in care.

Involving Families and the Community

The prospects of success of a project are greatly increased when family members are included throughout all the stages of preventative projects as family and community are important sources of support for children and youth.

Nonetheless it is not an easy task to engage families in projects, especially because a great deal of the parents' and family's energy is required for guaranteeing survival in their very hard and difficult lives. Moreover, there is a strong belief that the education of poor children should be geared towards preparing them for work (AMAS, 1995).

“Families are always invited to attend presentations but they are usually at work while other families say to the child or youth that they should not be wasting their time being involved in the project because it will not help them to secure a good job in the future”.

(NGO representative)

According to one of the families interviewed:

“Many of the parents are addicted to drugs and have no money left to feed their child. So when the child wants a sweet or something to eat she or he will ask someone from the drug trade to buy it for them. The same happens when they want some new clothes. Slowly they are drawn into the drug trade in order to be able to have money and status”.

Many parents do not see any reason why their son or daughter should be involved in a specific project in the first place:

“Why should my daughter learn how to speak English when she barely knows how to speak Portuguese?”

(Interview with family member)

There may be a lack of interest and motivation on the part of parents to allow their children to participate in community projects due to the need to focus on survival, difficulties in their relationship with their children and doubts as to the effectiveness of community projects to assist the young boy or girl to find a job.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that prevention projects work only because the family guarantees the participation of the child/youth. In many cases the project is considered to be a safe place where they can spend part of the day when they are not at school and while their parents are at work.

A participant from a funding agency that also works directly with children and youth stated that the most successful methodologies are those that value school attendance and the proximity of the family during the whole process. However, it is not always easy to convince the families to be involved in the projects since they feel that in many cases, their child (especially girls) should be helping them with domestic chores or studying.

Nonetheless, when a project or initiative truly seeks to involve the parents or responsible adult, and share with them the children’s difficulties and successes, a relationship of mutual trust is built, and the barriers for children’s participation are lowered. Therefore, projects must acknowledge the important role played by parents or responsible adults in allowing and encouraging children and youth to participate in projects.

Partnership with schools

Public schools in Brazil today face a great variety of challenges such as shortage of funding, low salaries for the teachers and staff and invariably over crowded classrooms. Nevertheless according to most of our interviewees, there is a fundamental need to emphasize the importance of the school as the main public space in which children and youth can learn and obtain support.

However, research previously carried out by CIESPI and the Instituto Promundo has revealed that on a whole, schools are not perceived as such a relevant support base for children and youth. (Bases of Support project report⁷ (2000-2001).

“Even though there are public schools and health centres near to the community there aren’t any public institutions designed to defend children’s rights. Another issue is the sporadic governmental funding due to new elections and change of staff at the municipal and state levels”.⁸

(CESPI/USU-Instituto PROMUNDO, 2001:15)

Almost all the projects interviewed, believed that school attendance should be a pre-condition for children or youth to be allowed to attend projects and some of the projects develop partnerships with nearby schools. According to the interviews, the partnerships should look for complementary alternatives and not compete with existing activities.

Catering for more vulnerable groups (Intervention)

When children and youth have been placed into care, or have been spending a great deal of time on the streets, their ties with their families and community tend to become weaker, or even become lost. In this case, as children move away from home, new ties are created with other people such as peer groups, carers, street educators and other professionals and these bonds can be just as important in encouraging them to trust relationships.

It takes a long time to help a child to leave behind life on the streets, and to reconnect them to their families. Sometimes the pain and hurt are so deep that they are unable to reconnect with their family. Children and youth who have been either placed into care (foster homes, shelters or institutional care) or detention centres for youth need help in developing attachments with positive role models with whom they have contact.

It does not mean that the particular need (e.g. fears, skills, expectations, frustrations) of each child or youth who lives on the streets, or shelters should be ignored, but that the importance of the ties that they develop in the spaces in which they live has to be acknowledged.

⁷ According to Rizzini, Barker, Cassaniga (2000:5): “by developmental supports or bases of support” we refer to community and family resources that offer young people safety; caring relationships; opportunities to develop skills, friendship and self-confidence; and activities and services that contribute to the cognitive, social, creative, cultural, vocational and emotional development of children and youth. While some of these supports may be provided in the formal education and health sectors, developmental supports generally refer to community supports and resources available outside the public school and public health systems”.

⁸ Rizzini; Barker et al, 2001.

The interviewees believed that intervention projects should try to make contact with the group of people with whom the child or youth shares experiences such as the street educator or a family or community member. Most express the view that working in isolation with the individual child/youth has no significant impact, and it makes the process of leaving life on the streets even more difficult.

According to Brazilian law (Statute of Children and Adolescent), children and youth should only be placed in care when no other option is available and only temporarily, in order to avoid the breaking of the ties with their families and community. However, as there is inadequate infrastructure to comply with the law, very often children and youth stay in care for longer than they should and they move to and from these places and the street, an example of which is give by the testimony set out below⁹:

“One day I was taken to the Guardianship Council*. From there I was taken into a shelter. I stayed in the shelter for a week but I did not like it. Then I ran away from there and stayed for a long while on the streets of Copacabana. One day I decided to go to a shelter. I really wanted to go. I wanted to get out of the streets because it was really boring, and it was raining and I didn’t want to be cold. In the shelter I could eat, take a shower and then run away again. I stayed there for a couple of nights and then went back to the streets. Just like that”.

(Girl living on the streets, 2002b)

* The Guardianship Council is an entity responsible for the protection of the rights of Children.

⁹ Interview conducted as part of a research project carried out by CIESPI (Rizzini et al, 2002a, 2002b).

According to NGO coordinators, the NGO invariably becomes the main body responsible for taking the child off the street. However, instead, they should network with other people and organizations that have legal responsibility for and interest in the welfare of children and youth.

“It is important to encourage the relationship between the child and the various local structures of power such as priest, neighbourhood association and the bakery. When this is not done, the NGO assumes the entire responsibility for that child. NGOs have to involve the local people, the power structures or if possible, the community to join forces for the protection of the rights of that child. Both political and practical action have become the responsibility of the NGOs, and communities have become less involved”.

(NGO representative)

The creation of a multi-disciplinary open space for children and youth who spend all or most of their time on the streets is very important to enable them to meet people from different backgrounds and expertises and to encourage them to make other contacts which could assist them to identify new possibilities and life choices:

“From what I have seen while dealing with children living on the streets is that it really helps to bring together a group of professionals with different backgrounds (doctors, psychologists, teachers, photographers and etc). That way they feel comfortable to say what they think and need (...) it is important to have these professionals working together”.

(Educator)

Organizational issues

Organizations working with children and youth in Brazil often operate in very difficult conditions with very few educational resources, inadequate infrastructure and no training for its staff who earn very low wages. There is very little or no technical and emotional support for them to deal with difficult issues that arise on a daily basis.

An understanding of the social and economic contexts in which the project takes place and an awareness of the services already available would help staff to address the problems more accurately and promptly.

This section discusses the three main areas where investment can make a real difference in the performance of a project.

Funding resources

When a NGOs or a community project depends entirely on one source of funding, it may end up having to close down when the funding ceases.

Most of the interviewees believed that by diversifying the sources of funding it will guarantee the continuity of the projects and also the quality of the services provided. At a community level, the dependence on one service provider can also be very problematic as was illustrated by a mother:

“In the community where I live, various projects (sport and dance lessons, etc) were financed by a local factory that is going bankrupt. And now the children do not have other options”.

The termination of funding usually limits the number of staff in the project team. Therefore, a person will have different duties that she or he may not be fully able to perform. The motivation to continue working on the project and the results may be affected.

Many communities are suspicious of social projects, because in all likelihood some have already appeared and been discontinued in their communities. In these situations the people do not believe that the project will last, and it is difficult to get them to engage in discussions and actions to foster real social changes as they fear that the project will be short-lived.

Many social projects that receive financial support from the Brazilian government suffer delays in or interruption of their funding every time there is a change in the political party in power. This lasts until the new government gets to know better the projects, the people running them and the community.

Businesses tend to provide financial support to nearby projects which can make a contribution to the marketing of the business. The interviewees recognized that international funders tend to be more consistent in their support, but noted that there has been a re-direction in the last few years in where they want to invest, towards countries in Asia and Africa that are considered poorer than Brazil.

The interviewees considered that it is very difficult to get funding for inter alia more staff, the systematic development of their skills, premises and operational costs. It is worth noting that most agencies provide funding for projects to develop specific activities, but do not finance the everyday running costs of the organizations. It is especially difficult, therefore, for very small organizations, and projects which often provide a crucial service to the community but lack the skills to apply for and secure funding.

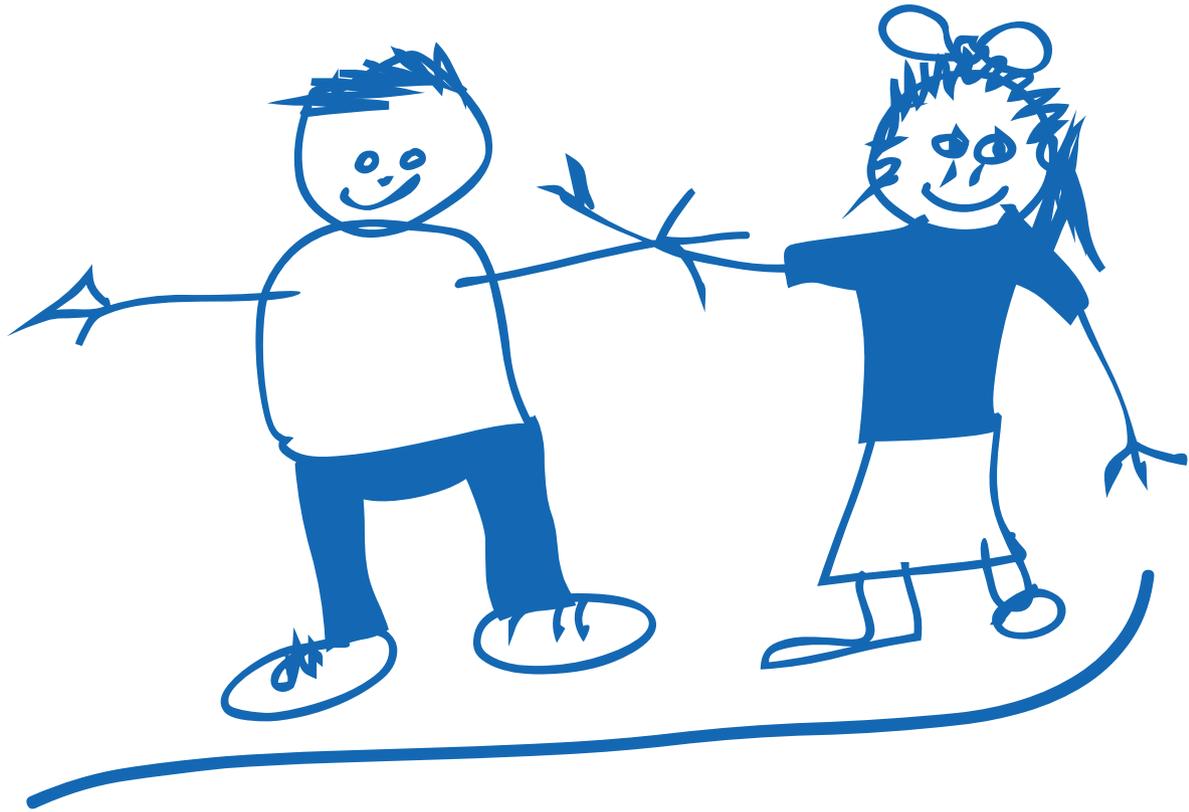
Staff

When a project is unable to afford to pay for a whole team to cover all its needs, it has to rotate the staff available to cover the gaps. Therefore, it is not uncommon for an educator to have to carry out administrative tasks for which she/he is not trained and as a consequence, the children and youth will receive less attention.

Infrastructure

The difficulties to access financial resources which can be used to strengthen the infrastructure and the management of organizations that run social projects are a barrier for its development and sustainability. This is especially true for projects such as those included in this study based in very poor communities and organized by individuals with a limited scope to obtain resources outside their own sphere. These people have little power to influence those who decide about who to fund, and many are not educated enough to be able to write a project proposal.

Projects that are very committed to the welfare of the children are often very informal and do not have an NGO structure. Therefore, it is harder to convince funding agencies to support their work. However, the absence of formal structures makes it harder for funding agencies to ensure that the funds will be used to benefit the children who are the ultimate beneficiaries.



Processes



Capacity building

Capacity building of the project team is seen as a basic first step in order to develop a project. When the project team has the opportunity to attend seminars and courses, there is a great increase in their ability to evaluate daily activities and outcomes. Moreover, the exchange of information with different professionals helps them to learn other methodologies and techniques.

“The continuous capacity building of the team helps them in the activities evaluation process and their role in the project...

This is a major part of the work”.

(NGO representative)

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It is important to emphasise that developing the capacity of the people working in a project is an ongoing process. Therefore, isolated training opportunities are not enough. What is required is the opportunity to continuously reflect on and improve the services provided.

Recently CIESPI¹⁰ carried out research on behalf of UNICEF, by interviewing 100 professionals in 8 Brazilian States and 15 municipalities where it examined the programmes designed to take into care vulnerable or at risk children and youths, whilst at the same time respecting their right to live within a family and a community. One important conclusion of this research was that:

¹⁰ Rizzini; Rizzini; Naiff; Baptista, 2006.

“The various professionals who gave their views with regard to what are the necessary tools to enable the projects to function well, indicated that the key was to create spaces for dialogue and exchange of experiences. Almost all pointed out that the best way to achieve this is by continuous training, whereby they are able to critically analyse their daily work. The support to create conditions for systematic discussion between different sectors, is fundamental for the democratic management of the policies, based on the participation of the different persons or entities involved in the planning and implementation of the activities”.

(Rizzini; Rizzini; Naiff; Baptista, 2006:96)

Networking

The interviewees indicated that networking contributes to the success of projects. When two or more groups or institutions work together towards the same goals they can maximize the results of their work, become more prominent and avoid replication of services. In the last few years the concept of “networks” has widened considerably. Although the concept can vary, it can be defined as

“Strategies for social intervention developed through partnerships, with the main objective of organizing activities that will take place in a specific community or neighbourhood”¹¹.

¹¹ The Brazilian website www.cmvalongo.net was used as a reference to define *network*.

In order for a network to achieve its objectives, each of the participants must know how they are expected to contribute and the way that they will work together needs to be clearly defined. Despite the natural difficulties in involving different agencies and projects, networking was seen by the interviewees, as an opportunity to become less isolated and increase their skills by exchanging information and experiences. Networking also allows them to maximize the use of time, reduce the funds needed for each activity and increase the number of individuals reached by the project.

Planning

Although the planning of activities is considered to be an important aspect of the work carried out with children and youth, it seems to be a new and difficult tool for social projects to use. Strategic planning, especially, is an expensive and complex process and projects feel ill prepared and under pressure to carry it out. Very few interviewees have financial or human resources to carry out their strategic planning.

The interviewees believed that it is important to have a long term plan of activities as it can assist them to identify their organization's limitations and potential. However, many fear that strategic planning can be too strict and inflexible, and as a result can paralyze the spontaneous activities of social projects.

“Planning must be flexible... we are constantly having to adapt our schedule. On the streets things change every hour... All the time!”

(NGO representative)

Nonetheless, despite the lack of resources devoted to planning, to a varied extent all interviewees planned their daily activities in a more or less systematic form.

Evaluation

This process can be divided into two strands. One is the evaluation of the impact of a project and the other relates to the activities that it carries out with children and youth.

Both are considered to be important tools, which can allow a greater understanding of the impact and the results of a project. However, impact evaluation appears to be one of the weakest areas in the projects visited and whose personnel were interviewed. The interviewees considered it to be an expensive and complex methodology and said that it is rarely carried out in Rio de Janeiro.

Very few interviewees felt sufficiently competent to carry out impact evaluations. However, most said that they used “common sense”, and focused on holding periodic meetings with their teams to evaluate their activities.

Some projects focused on promoting critical thinking in their staff about their work with communities and have set up community councils which involve parents and the community in the evaluation and planning of the work of their organizations.

Research and documentation of information

Many interviewees expressed the need to improve the process of documentation, data collection and analysis related to the activities of their projects. They also emphasised the need to listen to the views of children and youth and their families.

Before a project proposes to carry out an activity, it is important to conduct surveys to gather information and ascertain the services available and the socio economic conditions of the inhabitants in order to build a more accurate picture of a community.

The above information should include the demographic composition, income levels, schooling rates, employment/unemployment rates, leisure activities available, state of compliance with the rights of children and youth.

Advocacy and lobbying

Lobbying and campaigning in order to put pressure on the government to change or implement its policies are much more effective if undertaken by networks made up of organizations with different expertises, who can play an important role in policy development.

Prevention and intervention projects should be aware of the importance of participating actively in policy debates. The interviewees indicated that NGOs should not compete with the municipal or state governments but, instead, find ways to pressure the authorities while maintaining a dialogue with them to establish public policies that will respond to local needs.

If the project aims to participate actively in lobbying and campaigning in order to influence the debate and decision regarding public policies, the project team must be appropriately trained.

It is important to encourage the participation of staff and community members in all stages, from the planning of the action, to participating in debates in the councils and other spheres that affect the rights of children, youth and their families. The interviewees particularly emphasised how crucial it is for community members to be included since their interests are at stake.

Lobbying and campaigning are seen as very important in order to monitor the activities of the authorities as to how the resources available are being spent. Some of the areas that these projects can work on are: campaigning for the full respect of children's rights and to guarantee that public day care centres are available; identifying local needs, such as education, housing and safety and campaigning for improvements in relation to the foregoing.

Despite their acknowledgement of its importance, very few of the interviewees have managed to organize a campaign or carry out lobbying actions that have influenced public policies. Only two of the organizations contacted were politically involved at the Municipal Council for Children and Adolescents (CMDCA)¹². In one case the organization's representative was elected president of the CMDCA in 2005.

¹² The Municipal Council for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent was created by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent in order to guarantee the participation of civil society through representative organizations.



Section 2

The Challenges and the Gaps in supporting children and youth who live in low income communities

Projects working in low income communities face numerous difficulties including a shortage of staff, insufficient educational resources to carry out their work and constant exposure to urban violence. There are so many gaps in the services offered to children and youth and also many challenges. This section will focus on those that were constantly mentioned by the interviewees.

Challenges



Dealing with issues regarding racism and prejudice

Interviewees stated that it is imperative to develop strategies and mechanisms to deal with racism and prejudice especially towards black and poor children and youth. Youths who are addicted to drugs and girls who get pregnant also felt discriminated against and found that there are many social barriers:

“Racism and prejudice, are issues that these children face constantly, and it upsets them a lot, because it is real and constant, so when they learn to play baroque music, it is like they were give a passport to a world that is “more white”... to an extent that they like this passport as nobody likes to be excluded or stopped by police”.

(NGO coordinator)

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When young people were asked what they thought projects offered them, in general the response was positive. The projects offered different perspectives on how to deal with challenges in their daily lives and gave them information about the labour market. On the other hand, they mentioned that they suffer prejudice especially when looking for jobs because of their dark skin and because they lived in a slum.

“... Do you remember about that time when the native was burnt to death in the city of Brasilia by a bunch of rich kids? Their excuse was because they didn't know he was an Indian they thought he was just another poor guy sleeping on the street. As if it was okay in that case. That is why we only go to sleep in groups, it is safer that way”.

(Girl living on the street - A Rua no Ar, 2006, 2nd edition)

The interviews revealed a need to formulate strategies to deal with prejudice towards especially more disadvantaged youth. In Brazilian society, racism and prejudice towards these youths are sometimes explicit and other times silent, but either way deny them their rights as citizens.

Much investment is required to train people to be able to deal with prejudice and discrimination. The interviewees believed that in order to change this social reality in Brazil, much more is required than merely having discussions with the youths in their projects. It requires a concerted effort to strengthen the implementation of public policies in order to guarantee that every person can have access to work opportunities, health and leisure irrespective of their colour or neighbourhood in which they live.

Negative image of community projects

Some NGOs and project coordinators said that community residents feel embarrassed to participate in projects developed in their own community.

“One of the participants mentioned that her friends have drawn away from her and are mocking her because she is studying and because she is participating in a project”.

(NGO coordinator)

“...today, in communities there is a failure to value social projects. No one who can afford to pay for a course will attend the same course in their community even though it is free”.

(NGO coordinator)

Financial assistance for children and youth to attend a project or initiative

The opinions of the interviewees were divided as to the advantages and disadvantages of offering financial aid for children and youth to attend a project. Some argued that the financial support is vital to guarantee participation in the projects as it covers expenses in relation to meals and transportation.

“The problem is that the lack of resources limits youths’ involvement since many of them are not working and cannot afford the costs of transportation”.

(Community initiative staff)

Moreover, once they are participating in the project, they will develop skills that can help with employment, which in turn can contribute to family income.

On the other hand, offering financial assistance can reinforce a culture of dependence and can turn the social project into an employer, and when the resources for financial assistance runs out, it may be difficult to motivate the children and youth to carry on attending the project.

Two examples were given where the project team consulted the youths as to whether the project should offer financial aid or not and the results surprised the project staff. The youths decided that no financial support should be offered because they thought that people should be sufficiently motivated to participate in the project itself and not do so merely for the money. Nonetheless, the use of financial assistance to encourage attendance is widespread.

Geographical location

Usually projects tend to be set up where they are more visible and where their work can be recognized, as any media coverage increases the possibility of obtaining more funding. They tend to locate in the *favelas* (slums) or poor communities near to major urban centres.

One of the funders criticized the fact that social projects are working in the same locations as the government (e.g. the northern part and the coastal area in the case of Rio de Janeiro).

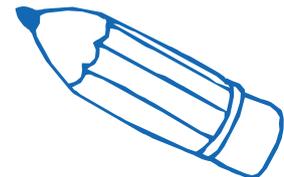
The communities further away from the city centres present low indicators of development even when they are compared to the slums that are closer to major cities, but fewer organizations work in these areas. In the State of Rio de Janeiro, social projects should be focussing on the northern Zone and the poor communities immediately outside the city, called Baixada Fluminense.

Services run by religious groups and political parties

According to the interviewees, projects which serve a particular church or those defending a specific political agenda can be less effective. Projects that are supported by a political candidate tend to last only until the elections. These projects tend to focus on making some improvements that should have been carried out by the Municipal or State Government, such as sewage, building schools, paving pedestrian paths or roads.

Most of the time, however, political parties' social actions tend to concentrate on the distributions of food in exchange for votes. Very often, when the outcome is not what the politician expected s/he will discontinue their activities in that community.

In the case of religious groups, it was agreed that provided that participation is not made conditional on adopting the relevant faith, the project has a good prospect of working effectively. Research conducted by CIESPI in 2000 and 2001 shows that:



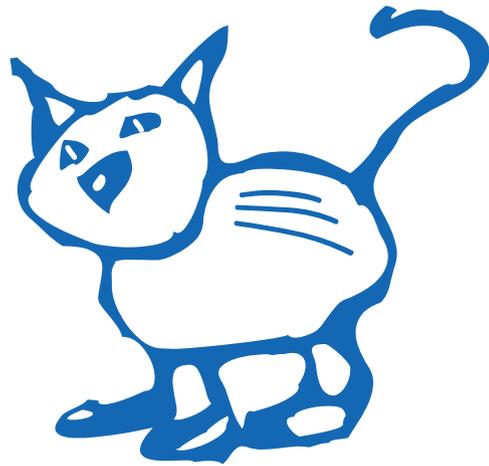
“Religious groups present themselves as important community support when there are no other organizations and institutions (...). since churches and religious groups offer not only services and spiritually related activities but also inter alia special courses and computer lessons.”¹³

Bureaucracy

Most interviewees talked about the harmful effects of the excessive bureaucracy that surrounds the application for funding and the funding agencies’ needs for monitoring and evaluation. Most funding agencies impose conditions such as the completion of complex reports, identifying social indicators, and clearly setting out strategic planning. This bureaucratic process can paralyze the organization with the amount of paperwork that has to deal with.

One of the participants expressed the view that this bureaucracy very rarely gives the opportunity to raise the every day difficulties that the projects face. In general, in the model reports sent by funders, there is no space to include all the unforeseeable events encountered by a project. For example, if one of the predicted outcomes is not accomplished, it may seem that the project has failed, when in fact it may have achieved results that had not been foreseen in the planning stages.

¹³ Final Report Strengthening family and community supports for children and youth Project (2000-2001).



Gaps



Services to cater for specific age groups

Although there is insufficient support in poor communities for children and youth of all age groups, youth and young adults between 15 and 23 have been especially neglected. Projects tend to offer support for children and youth up to the age of 14. Thereafter, the only remaining option is to work, with no support available either from projects or the government.

Several of the organizations interviewed stated that it was very hard to work with youth belonging to this age group. Young men and women may be loath to take part in community projects because of concerns about inter alia employment, marriage and their own children, education and life options outside the community. A youth said that:

“Doubts are natural when you are young and no project can help you with that”.

(Youth)

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And the existing projects focus primarily on training youth in some kind of skill.

“Youth must go out and fight for their survival and that is why projects tend to focus on special training. But it can become a problem when the youth’s participation is not spontaneous and becomes an obligation”.

(Funding agency)

There are also insufficient services to cater for the needs of very young children. The authorities should work more actively to respond to local needs and offer proper schools, kindergartens and health centres:

“The kids have nowhere else to stay. Kindergartens must have flexible hours so the mother would not need to pay someone to take care of her child while she is at some rich lady’s house working. Unfortunately public education is really bad”.

(Family member)

For one of the mothers, the gap in her community is the lack of activities for the children between the ages of 6 and 13. She said that:

“In my community, children between the ages of 6 and 13 spend lots of time on the streets surrounded by the drugs traffickers, then later, after they become involved in the drug trade they change”.

(Mother)

Support for youth in vulnerable situations: the drugs trade and early pregnancies

Most of the projects target both boys and girls, but specific gender requirements tend to be ignored. In Rio de Janeiro, women and young girls are the least assisted group especially regarding important matters such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, breast cancer, menopause and the job market.

According to a survey carried out by IPEA (IBGE) in 2003, 4.1 percent of girls aged 15 in the city of Rio of Janeiro had children (compared with 1.9 percent in 1993). In two studies carried out by CIESPIn it was found that many youths choose motherhood because they see no perspective of a better future and it gives them a higher status in their own community. Many of these youths have already dropped out of school and the few that are still studying face even greater hardship to continue their studies. Very often they are forced to find employment while their own parents (especially mothers) look after their young children.

An NGO coordinator mentioned the positive outcome of activities to raise youth awareness about pregnancy:

“When one of the girls got pregnant the project coordinators started to question if the project was having an important contribution and in the end when 12 of the 140 girls were pregnant they considered that if it wasn’t for the project the number of pregnancies would be much higher”.

(NGO coordinator).

One of the consequences of teenage pregnancy is that the young women tend to leave the project since they feel embarrassed or pressured by family members.

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Considering how much the situation has deteriorated in Rio de Janeiro in the last decade, the implementation of public policies and programmes to support young women has become a matter of urgency. Increased support must be made available in the areas of health and education such as access to free contraceptive pills. There is a need for increased awareness raising through campaigns and education regarding the consequences of having children at such a young age.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro a worrying phenomenon is that children of a very young age are becoming involved in drug trafficking. During armed conflicts between rival gangs and between gangs and the police, the number of child and youth victims is alarming. In the cases of excessive use of drugs, or becoming involved

in drugs trafficking, youths suffer pressure to leave the project and discrimination by the rest of the project participants and community.

There is a need for investment in projects concerning substance abuse among youth on the streets and in providing support for those who leave young offenders institutions. Most projects promote discussion and awareness raising regarding the issues of drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. However, the interviewees believed that a network involving local health workers and schools is required to develop more efficient strategies to help youth when they are in need.



Summary of recommendations:

“It is a duty of the family, community, society in general and public agencies to prioritize the rights to life, health, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, liberty and to live within the family and community”.

Statute of the Child and Adolescent, article 4.

All interviewees strongly believed that successful projects in Brazil must use the “Statute of children and Adolescent” as clear guidelines for their work.

It is necessary to create more open and safe spaces for recreational activities that serve the whole community and also spaces that facilitate and encourage the exchange of information and ideas.

There is a need for investment in projects with youths on the streets who are addicted to chemical substances and to support those who leave young offenders institution.

There is a need for services at community level that will support children once they return home from living on the streets, to guide them about the services available and to offer them more intensive support.

Girls and women need special attention. Although there are fewer of them on the streets, they suffer more violence, even from the boys and youth on the streets, due to the prevailing values of sexism and machismo in Brazilian society. Support is especially required for young single mothers.

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The implementation of public policies and programmes to support young women has become a matter of urgency. Increased support must be made available in the areas of health and education such as access to free contraceptive pills. There is a need for increased awareness raising through campaigns and education regarding the consequences of having children at such a young age.

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable during the transition from childhood to puberty and teenage years to adulthood and at these stages of their life, require additional support. However, there is almost a total absence of such services to address the specific issues that arise during these phases.

There is an urgent need for support for youth and young adults between the ages of 15 and 23 whereas projects tend to only offer support for children and youth up to the age of 14. Thereafter, their only remaining option is to work as neither projects nor the government offers any support to this group. For example, it would be extremely important to offer support to young adults when they need to find employment and there is a paucity of jobs available, especially for those from poor backgrounds who have very little education or professional qualifications and some of whom already have a family to support.

The establishment of networks between organizations, community initiatives, public health professionals and schools may constitute an important contribution to finding new strategies to deal with teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and substance abuse among youth.

Projects should strive to establish partnerships with nearby schools, and should seek to complement each other's work, and not replicate or compete with activities which already exist.

Public policies must urgently address the involvement of children in the drugs trade. Organizations must work together in networks to develop projects and put pressure on the authorities to guarantee *"the right to life and health (...) and to live within the family and community"* (Statute of the Child and Adolescent Article 4)

The interviewees emphasized that financial aid from national or international donors should not be directed to public schools since it is a responsibility of the state and municipal authorities.

The sustainability of projects is a constant worry of all interviewees. There is constant tension when projects do not know if they will find funding that covers the project for its duration. Also, they worry about the interruption of services which may discredit their organization in the future.

The most successful methodologies include the participation of community members throughout the project. Methodologies that emphasize ties between the child/youth, family and the community are more effective.

Substantial and consistent investment is required in the areas of planning, evaluation, research and documentation of information, not only to improve the training of people to carry out these tasks but also to review the requirements of the funding agencies and see whether these requirements are realistic and reasonable.

The complex requirements of funding agencies force projects to use different tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation, which can be extremely difficult to comply with. When the administrative employees are unable to complete the requisite paperwork, this task is left to the more educated staff members responsible for the work with the children and youth, to the detriment of the latter.

Conclusions

This exploratory study has allowed CIESPI to listen to the views of youths, parents and experienced professionals, regarding what works when seeking to support children and youth who live in low income communities and what the challenges and the gaps are.

All the interviewees were very passionate about their work and had many useful suggestions as to how to help children and youth. However, technical and financial resources are insufficient, and the complexities of an inherently unequal and contradictory society makes the work of helping children and youth in Brazil even more challenging.

The views of these people have confirmed some of CIESPI's previous findings about the importance of investing in support for children and youth while they are still connected to their families or extended families and communities. It is much easier to develop and nurture a sense of belonging and identification with the community and its values while they are still living there.

Moreover, if support can be made available to families, especially in times of crises, and children and youth during times of transition when they are more vulnerable, it may be possible to prevent family break down, teenage pregnancy, or involvement with the drug trade.

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We hope that the results of this study can be used as a basis for other research that can examine these topics in greater depth. Moreover, it will hopefully act as an impetus for the improvement of the services available to support children and youth who live in poor communities.

Moreover, it is hoped that the views of the people interviewed can be used to develop or improve work in supporting children and youth who live in poor communities in Brazil.

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