Children at Risk in Brazil

A socio-political profile of the circumstances that put children at risk in Brazil’s urban centres

Angelika Berndt
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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The **Action for Brazil’s Children Trust (ABC)** is a UK charity dedicated to helping the most vulnerable children and young people in Brazil. By raising awareness and funding we support the work of local, community-led organisations which give children the education, support and inspiration they need to transform their lives and reclaim their future.

For over ten years the **ABC Trust** has witnessed the immense power of local people in tackling the problems faced by children and young people within their communities all over Brazil. Over the years the **ABC Trust** has built up strong partnerships with 20 projects in Brazil benefitting over 3,000 children and their families every day – bringing shelter, food, medical care, counselling, legal aid, education and vocational training to some of Brazil’s poorest and most vulnerable children and their families.

Many of the community projects the **ABC Trust** supports are centred on meeting the children’s basic needs as well as providing education and vocational training. This is often done by working through cultural and art-based activities such as dance, film, drama and music to help the children develop their sense of self-awareness and confidence. At the same time the **ABC Trust** also takes a preventative approach and supports community-led projects that work with families and whole communities so they can provide at least the basic elements of a secure and happy childhood. The **ABC Trust** aims to build a future where no child need ever resort to a life on the streets of Brazil.
Introduction

This study aims to draw a profile of the wider socio-political context in urban centres and the combination of circumstances that form the reality in which children continue to live, in difficult, often dangerous and traumatic circumstances. In this scenario well motivated NGOs develop social projects as the only means to change the destiny of these children. Bearing in mind ABC Trust’s focus, the questions that mostly guided our research were focused on the circumstances in which children of poor families grow up in the most neglected neighbourhoods.

In Brazil seeing small children alone or in groups in the streets is part of the daily reality in most urban centres. These children might be in the streets temporarily or permanently and over the years various studies have been written about the many aspects that contribute to putting children at risk and the reality children face when living in the streets.

By acknowledging the underlying push and pull factors in Brazilian society today we can take the first steps to adopting a more holistic approach and initiate a wider discussion about the social and political factors that continue to foster and encourage an unequal society where children take to the streets because this seems the best option for their survival.

One of the characteristics of working with the Brazilian reality is that information is not always straightforward, and different reports often present different findings. Numbers are not easy to come by in a country where many individuals are not registered at birth or live in a place without an address. Working with these uncertainties is part of the Brazilian reality, so this study reflects this and, where possible, presents the different findings.

When we talk about Brazil today we seem to be talking about two different countries. One country has a much praised economic structure and is frequently quoted in the media as a successful developed society with a strong presence in international forums and conventions. The other country is quoted on international human rights forums as being desperately poor, and ruled by violence and crime. And while both realities seemingly exist next to each other they are also interwoven, they create each other, one is the reason the other exists.

Bearing in mind that each issue raised has its own complexity, this study aims to motivate a fundamental discussion rather than provide solid answers. To create a safer future for Brazil’s children we need to include the perspectives from the wider society and state politics, and to build a dialogue which will allow us to develop sustainable solutions.
The street as a last resort

Children do not give up their homes easily. Only once a child perceives a home as unbearable will he or she take to the streets. Children are driven from their home and into the streets for many reasons and each child has their very personal and sad story. Those working with children directly in the streets usually name miserable living conditions, dysfunctional families or physical and sexual abuse as the main factors that drive children to abandon their homes and seek refuge in the streets. Most of the children who live permanently in the streets and can be identified as homeless are orphans. The parent(s) or step parent might have succumbed to a fatal illness or may have been murdered. Other children take to the streets because they were suffering such bad abuse at home that taking to the streets seemed the safer option even though at least one parent was still alive.

Living conditions in the street often mirror the poverty in which the children lived at home; there was no furniture and the children slept on the dirt floor, there was no electricity or running water, food was scarce, the children had no change of clothes and were surrounded by the constant threat of violence. But even when living in miserable conditions, it still takes a strong push to force a child to abandon their family home permanently. The difficulty suffered at home must by far outweigh the dangers and violence suffered in the street, and once in the street, the children will have lost their legal identity along with their home and family. They are left without protection or civilian rights.

During the 90s the plight of Brazil’s street children made sad international headlines when so-called extermination groups massacred children in the streets by night. At the time international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Jubilee Action Group published several reports about the children’s plight. The outcry about these violations triggered increased interest and several studies were published which researched the different attachment levels and relationships children on the streets had to their families, and what kind of intervention could help rehabilitate the children once they had taken to the streets permanently.

In the reports the researchers defined street children in relation to their attachment with their families, and agreed on three categories: children on the streets, children of the streets and children in the streets. Children on the streets were identified as children who work on the streets but have a family home to which they return on a regular basis. Children of the streets described children who live semi-permanently in the streets. These children were already alienated from their families; they were runaways and were no longer maintaining normal family ties. Children belonging to this category might have suffered physical and/or sexual abuse. In other cases the street was the children’s work-place and they would spend several days sleeping in the street before returning home because they could not afford the bus fare or because they were not welcome home unless they had earned enough money. In either case they were forced to remain sleeping in the
streets over longer periods. The third category was described as *children in the streets* and referred to children who were homeless and lived in the streets. In their case the street had become their permanent home.

Of the children living in the street the main cause for losing all attachment with their home was that they had been abandoned or that they had been orphaned. In some cases the parents were simply unable to look after their children because of the family’s harsh living conditions.

Another dilemma is the social reintegration of those children who were already born in the streets and do not know any other reality. The children of street children have never known a home, the only reality they are familiar with is a life in the streets.

Once in the streets, the children adapt to the constant cycle of violence and survival. Violence is exercised by other street children and adults alike. Corrupt policemen take advantage of the children’s vulnerability and make the children ‘work’ for them. This ‘work’ can be stealing or prostituting themselves and passing the goods and gains to the policeman. In other cases policemen have been known to abuse the street children physically and sexually.

Reports continue to circulate that street children who are taken into detention are often abused, raped or tortured by police. Some are never seen again. And while reports about extermination continue to circulate, there is little proof at hand that backs up the anecdotal evidence.

Although the threat of violence and death is omnipresent the children learn to live with the harsh conditions on the street and become used to the companionship of the other children, the economic independence, drugs, sex and a feeling of freedom. Street children are very resourceful in looking after their needs, and find many ways to access money or food with activities such as begging, washing or looking after parked cars, cleaning windscreens at street lights, or selling goods in the streets. Others take to crime and make a living mugging and stealing from the public and surrounding shops. Many girls, referred to as second shift children, make a living by working as prostitutes. Brazil is believed to have the highest rate of child prostitution in Latin America.

Once in the streets the children lose their sense of belonging to wider society and become increasingly marginalised and excluded as they slip into a lifestyle of mere survival. The longer the children live in the streets the more difficult it becomes to rehabilitate them and reintegrate them back into society. In addition the lack of schooling and professional training makes it almost impossible for them to secure a permanent job which would allow them to come off the streets.
ACER (Association of Support for Children at Risk)

ACER is based in a city called Diadema which has 400,000 inhabitants living in the second highest population density in Brazil – an estimated 14,000 people per km². Based on the outskirts of São Paulo city, Diadema is one of 39 municipalities which make up the greater São Paulo. Originally Diadema was built around the car industry, a city of working class and industrial production. Over the past years the city of São Paulo operated several ‘cleansing’ operations which pushed the poorest of the poor out of the city and into surrounding urban areas. In some cases whole favelas were cleared, and the inhabitants had no choice but to move to another location close by. There was a strong influx of population into Eldorado, a neighbourhood in the South of Diadema. As a consequence Eldorado’s population increased considerably, to around 80,000, and conditions have become even more desperate. Today Eldorado is the poorest area of Diadema and, until recently, the most dangerous place in town. Today the problem of public violence has mostly been overcome thanks, in part at least, to ACER’s continued effort to change the perception of the community and their outlook to a more dignified life. One of the major challenges faced by Eldorado today is massive unemployment and under-employment which means that the community as a whole, and especially the young people, do not believe they have any positive future prospects.

According to Veruska Galdini, Coordinator for Training and Researcher at ACER, people living in Eldorado are considered ‘lixo humano’ (human waste) and there is little political will to improve the precarious situation of the neighbourhood. Without investment into local infrastructure, schools are hopelessly over-subscribed and many children do not have access to schooling. Most of the teachers working in the local schools are young and inexperienced, and do not stay for long. The situation of the local health centre/post is not much different. It is heavily underfunded, does not have enough resources and patients have to endure long waiting times, even for emergency services.

ACER work to promote change in the community of Eldorado from within. ACER’s work focuses mainly on children and young people and the overall aim of the project is to promote change through building an understanding of citizenship and self-worth. Since many of the children in Eldorado are black or of mixed origin, ACER uses dance and music of African origin to build a cultural identity and sense of belonging. The activities are designed for children of all ages. Some of the children are as young as five. As part of their programme ACER teach children what it means to
be a child, to play, to have friends and to feel safe.

One of ACER’s activities is to build and maintain a library which allows children to borrow books. The concept of a library where the children could borrow books was something so unheard of in the neighbourhood, Veruska explained, that parents used to send their children back to the Centre to give the books back because they thought that their children had stolen them. The library and the idea of borrowing had a huge impact on the neighbourhood because it introduced the concept of knowledge through reading, as well as a concept of trust and taking responsibility.

All of ACER’s activities are built around acknowledging and establishing a concept of identity, self-worth and citizenship. ACER’s social workers and educators work directly with the children and their families to foster permanent and sustainable change of self-perceptions within the community of Eldorado.

Alcohol abuse is a major problem in Eldorado across all ages. Offering alcohol to children is so widespread that it is not uncommon to see a parent dip a dummy into beer or cachaça and push it back into the baby’s mouth ‘to calm it down’. Alcohol abuse is such a problem in Eldorado that bars were forced by law to be shut by 23.00 hours, a very important measure, according to ACER. Closing bars early has had a positive impact and halted aggressive and anti-social behaviour and helped to cut the murder rate by almost 75% over the last seven years.

As a counterweight to the engrained culture of abuse ACER try to show alternative ways of thinking: it is possible to have fun without using drugs. Every Saturday is ‘sabadão’ - dance night at ACER. The dance night is especially designed for teenagers between 15 and 17 and has a strict policy of no alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. Veruska explained that sabadão was set up to teach teenagers what it means to be young and to have fun and friends. The evening is entirely organised and run by the young people themselves as part of the youth community agent programme which involves 50 teenagers who receive capacity building workshops and develop their own projects within the community.

The success of sabadão has been such that many teenagers are rediscovering what it means to be a teenager and that they do have a choice not to take part in the drug trade or gangs. For the young people of Eldorado this was a completely new concept, and Veruska remembered a little boy saying ‘When I’m 15, I will be a teenager’.

According to Veruska teaching the children this different perspective also impacted on the omnipresent readiness to engage in violence and helped to open children’s attitudes to a different approach to conflict.

One of the biggest challenges ACER faces is how to deal with the abuse of children from within their own family. Veruska explained that calling the authorities was not really an option in Brazil and although Brazil had legislation in place to protect children against abuse, this did not mean there were effective and practical measures in place to protect children. Calling
in the authorities meant that children were taken away to children’s homes where they often were subject to further, often worse, abuse from the other children or adults. Given this reality ACER thought that the better solution was to intervene within the family context. Veruska pointed out that ACER now has ample evidence to show that meaningful professional intervention and mediation could bring lasting improvements in a family environment. However in the cases where this was not an option, ACER took the approach to look at the extended family for a solution and tried to re-allocate the child within the extended family. As this could mean an extra financial burden onto the ‘new’ family and extra financial commitments, ACER also included it in their programme to provide financial support for the increased costs to the household, where this was needed.

The other major challenge in Eldorado was increasing the access to jobs or professional training. In many families poverty was handed down through generations and many adults needed training before they could get access to paid work. One problem Veruska pointed out was that the training centres were in the city centre and many people in Eldorado were so poor, they could not afford the bus fare. ACER had also observed that unemployment was often at the heart of alcohol and drug abuse as well as violence within the families. In a bid to break this cycle ACER thought the best intervention was to change the situation of poverty and dependency, and to help turn the situation around, ACER provided financial support to pay for the travel to the training facility.

To build more opportunities ACER are now supporting individuals and informal groups within the neighbourhood to develop their own community improvement projects. ACER are also leading a two year community economic development project to promote long term sustainable development and lasting change for the future prospects for Eldorado.

1 In recent years the city of São Paulo has seen several police operations to force poor and destitute people out of the city centre. Other measures included destroying all illegal dwellings under bridges and on public land to force the inhabitants to keep moving out of the city boundaries.
2 Brazilian drink similar to rum
3 In Brazil pubs are often open until late hours and early morning. Having pubs close that early is rather unusual.
4 ‘Big Saturday’
How many children live in the streets?

The exact number of street children in the cities of Brazil is unknown. Most of the children seen on Brazil’s streets are ‘roaming vendors’ or child beggars. Whether or how many of these children still have contact with their families is not known, nor are reliable figures available to indicate how many of these children see their families on an irregular basis or how many of these children are orphans and out in the street permanently.

Regularly quoted estimates speak of 200,000 to 8 million street children in Brazil. Other organizations, however, are concerned that the highest of these figures are exaggerated and that the real figure is much lower. When the government sent researchers out in an effort to establish a more reliable picture. The researchers who tried to actually count the children sleeping in the streets found that their numbers in the major urban centres were more in the hundreds than the thousands. For example in the big metropolitan areas like São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro less than a thousand children were found to be sleeping rough.


Information published in 2007 about the situation of children in Recife in the state of Pernambuco showed that the number of children and adolescents at risk and in the streets had increased by 300% over the previous four years. In 1999 researchers had found 460 children living in the street or at risk of moving to the street permanently and by 2003 researchers found that the number had increased to 1781 children.

In the latest research published about the situation of street children in Rio Grande do Sul researchers found that 383 children were living in the streets in Porto Alegre. In comparison to earlier figures the research found that, on a positive note the overall number of children living in the street in Porto Alegre had declined by 40% over the last four years. The researchers observed that the children they found in the street were now younger. According to the researchers’ findings the number of children aged between 0 and 6 years had more than doubled, from 8.3% in 2004 to 19.7% in 2007.
About Brazil

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world with approximately 190 million inhabitants. And although the majority of Brazil’s population can be defined as mixed origin, in the government’s 2000 census 53.7% responded that they defined themselves as white, and only 38.5% defined themselves as mulatto (mixed race between white and black), 6.2% thought they were black, 0.9% marked that they were of other origin such as Japanese, Arabic or Amerindian, 0.7% did not specify themselves.

Today Brazil is the world’s 11th largest economy with a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate was of approximately 3.7%, that is approximately US$ 6,938 per head in 2007. At the same time Brazilian society is considered the 8th most unequal society in the world following in the footsteps of nations such as Namibia, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Guatemala. The gap between rich and poor in Brazil is one of the most extreme in the world, with the wealthiest 10% enjoying more of the national income than the poorest 50%. Less than 3% of the population controls two thirds of the country’s land available for the production of food crops, and although 48 million rural people are landless, 60% of farm land remains idle. Approximately 31% of Brazil’s population live in poverty, that is, an estimated 54 million Brazilians live below the poverty line and approximately 17 million inhabitants qualify as living in misery, according to UN standards.

On the other end of the scale are Brazil’s many millionaires who promote the idea that the country’s economy is quickly progressing. Today it is not uncommon to see one of the 420 private helicopters flying over the city of São Paulo on their way from one heliport to another. Brazil’s billionaires appear on magazine covers and are proudly celebrated for their skills and successes. In 2008 Merrill Lynch claimed that there were 23,000 millionaires in Brazil, and that on average 63 new millionaires were emerging every day.

Recent political and economic developments

Brazil is, next to India and the United States, one of the world’s largest democracies. Following 21 years of dictatorship, Brazil has managed a non-violent transition from a military dictatorship to a thriving democracy. In 1985 the military rule ended peacefully and, after a three year transition period, the new constitution was ratified in 1988 which marked the beginning of democracy.

The newly established democracy has successfully managed to overcome the first challenges, such as political and corruption scandals.
and power struggles between rival parties and presidents. Today the military leadership continues to have a strong influence but is now taking a back seat.

During the last two decades Brazil has also overcome several economic challenges. Under the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) financial measures were put in place to end hyperinflation, and social and political reforms were introduced to liberalize the economy. The current government under the president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has continued to build on economic and political changes introduced by the previous government and managed to successfully consolidate macro-economic stability while stepping up social spending. As a result of stable and more liberalized conditions, Brazil's economic growth increased to a rate of 4.5% on average by 2008. This was the fastest growth rate over the past 20 years.

In 2007 the stock market surged by 44%. The overall growth increased by 5.4%. A strong Real and lower interest rates boosted the purchasing power of the middle class. In 2007/08 the stock of consumer credit increased by more than 25% per year and most stores in shopping malls offered credit to buy luxury consumer goods such as big screen TVs.

Today Brazil seems well placed because the country has overcome the three major challenges which dogged its economy since the slump in the 80s – inflation, debt and democracy. However, widespread corruption remains a constant economic and political impediment. There is evidence that corruption is widespread in state institutions and governments, and corruption scandals continue to make headlines in a striving media environment. During 2008 corruption scandals appeared in the local press on an almost daily basis.

Throughout its two terms president Lula's administration has governed with moderation. They have followed through with most of the innovations and achievements of the previous government and introduced some new government projects of their own. One of the government's major achievements is the Bolsa Familia, a social assistance programme which is directed at the poorest in the country and benefits 11 million families. Part of the Bolsa Familia contract is that the receiving families send their children to school and take them to get vaccinated. The programme is reasonably well administered for a programme of its size and complexity, but is still struggling with administrative difficulties. Overall the programme has made a significant difference to the poor in the country and in 2008 the government started to export its know-how, offering advice to Haiti on a national strategy to alleviate poverty and hunger, and to India on how to replace its rural food subsidies with a similar system.
Children’s rights in Brazil

Brazil’s constitution is said to be one of the most complete and extensive in the world, and it contains ample sections about the rights of children, adolescents and women. In addition Brazil has ratified most of the international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1999 the Brazilian government ratified the ILO’s (International Labour Organisation) convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour, as well as the ILO Convention 138 on a minimum working age.

In 2008 Brazil celebrated the 18th birthday of the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (the legislation for the protection of minors) (ECA). ECA marked a major breakthrough and was the first extensive set of laws put in place in Brazil to protect children’s rights. All previous legislation concerning children were about punishment and did not register children’s rights. ECA was a complex legislation covering every aspect of children’s rights: the right to health, freedom, dignity and respect, family and community life, education, culture, sports and play time, professional education and protection at work.

The previous legislation, the Código de Menores (Code for Minors) was introduced in 1979 and regulated only situations considered as irregular. The Código de Menores only considered the most extreme situations of neglect or abuse, children who were considered to be in mortal danger, children who were deprived of legal representation or legal assistance, children who were responsible for bad conduct or who had broken the law.

The earliest legislation addressing children was a Carta Regia (a Royal Letter) dating back to 1693. In 1921 Medidas Reeducativas (Re-education Measures) addressed the need to regulate the status of abandoned minors and juvenile delinquents. In 1927 the Mello Matos Code was introduced which was the first unified legislation that addressed and protected children and adolescents who had been abandoned or had become involved in criminal activities.

In contrast to this earlier legislation the ECA protects children and regulates the wider circumstances in which children should be raised. In this sense the ECA looks at children as full citizens with personal and social rights which are guaranteed protection by the government and governmental bodies. The introduction of the ECA also challenged local governments to produce public policies that would protect children and adolescents as well as putting in place practical measures.

However, as with most of the legislation in Brazil, there is still a long way to go to ensure that children’s rights are guaranteed in the streets.
AA Criança
(Association for Support of Children)

AA Criança consists of different supportive programmes working with street children and children at risk in São Paulo city. Their programmes are directed at both prevention and rehabilitation.

One of their programmes, Ser Mulher (to be a woman), works with girls who live in precarious circumstances and have often suffered different kinds of abuse. The other programme, Casa 20 (House 20), provides outreach and support projects and focuses on rehabilitating street children. Both programmes are based in focal points in the centre of São Paulo city including Praça da Sé, widely known to be the main area in the city where street children and children from the poor suburbs come to hang out.

The programme Ser Mulher was set up to address the needs of girls at risk – in particular so they can learn about their sexuality and general sexual health and to teach them about pregnancy and reproductive health. Emma Boustead pointed out that girls as young as 12 attend the programme and that some of these girls are already mothers. Ser Mulher is as much a safe space to socialize and make friends, as it is a place where the girls can look after their practical needs. In addition the centre provides a simple lunch which is often the only food the girls attending the programme get on any regular basis.

When a girl first comes to visit Ser Mulher she is attended to by a social worker who will talk to her about her personal circumstances. If the girl is a runaway the social workers might explore with her whether or not there are circumstances under which she may reconnect with her family or if there are other family members in her wider family she could possibly get in touch with.

The project Casa 20 is set up to work with street children on a wider scale. To initiate contact, social workers go out into the streets to meet the children in their own environment. After this effort has been successful, the social workers encourage the children to visit the Casa 20. In the centre the child is met by a social worker who will try to find out more about the child’s history, present circumstances and needs. To forge a more permanent relationship the child is encouraged to visit Casa 20 regularly and to join the regular activities. Casa 20 is also equipped with showers and laundry facilities and children will receive lunch on the days they visit Casa 20. These facilities are extremely important as most children do not have a place where they can attend to their basic needs. For many Casa 20 is the only place where they can attend to their personal hygiene. As they learn to look after themselves they slowly restore some of their lost dignity.

An important component of a successful rehabilitation programme is to get the children off the streets and into a safe and caring environment where they can form attachments, develop trust and learn to respect others as well as gain a sense of citizenship.

In this safe and friendly environment the children form new friendships and develop new skills through the different activities and workshops. The project Casa 20 reaches out to the children to build an empathetic bridge which will facilitate the reintegration of these children back into society. Social workers reach out to the children to build an attachment which
will then allow them to encourage the idea that a life off the streets is possible. And this effort is becoming increasingly urgent; some of the children reached by AA Criança are no older than six.

Most of the children AA Criança work with have endured violent and traumatic experiences and come from dysfunctional families. As a direct consequence of the neglect and abuse suffered in their original homes and later on the streets, the children take to numbing themselves with drugs and many resort to violent behaviour to assert themselves. Once on the street, the children are often used and abused by older homeless children or adults and encouraged to engage in criminal activities. As Emma put it, behind many crimes committed by street children there is a homeless adult who pushed the child to commit the crime.

In Emma’s experience getting children off the streets and into safer and more suitable environments is therefore very important. And since the government introduced measures to keep the schools open over the weekend the educators could see the positive impact. Opening the schools has created a space where children could pursue such activities as sports and play that allow them to be children. For many children the school yard is the only space apart from the street where they can hang out and meet friends.

Emma thinks that one of the main blockers for projects such as AA Criança is a pronounced lack of social education in Brazil. Many perceive street children as sub-human, creatures somewhere between vermin, criminals and drug users. And this attitude aggravates the situation, because it fosters the social exclusion felt by the children and nourishes strong feelings of resentment towards ‘rich’ society.

One point that struck Emma was that there is a lot of potential for support in Brazil but that society did not yet recognise their role in the overall scenario and social discrimination. And while over the recent years there has been some change and individual businesses are waking up to the idea to support and fund small NGO programmes such as AA Criança, there is still not much of a response from the public. Emma thought that if the situation was to change in Brazil, the public needs to more actively assume responsibility for the less privileged and poor populations in Brazil. Emma thought that there was a lot of potential in São Paulo and that it would pay off to include the local society in supporting local campaigns and projects such as AA Criança, to provide a better future for the children and the city.

Personal interview with Emma Boustead, AA Criança, 16 May 2008
Poverty and social discrimination

Brazil suffers from a longstanding tradition of inequality and social discrimination, which is seen in all aspects of life. Discrimination and exclusion is omnipresent between whites, blacks and indigenous peoples, men and women, rural and urban areas and among regions.

The income gap between the rich and the poor is one of the main hindrances to poverty reduction. Notwithstanding the significant improvements made in recent years, the number of poor people in Brazil is estimated to be more than 53 million.

The profound social inequalities contribute to the existing regional disparities and discrimination based on race/ethnicity and gender. Statistics contained in the 2003 World Employment Report indicate that the phenomenon of social exclusion is not limited only to ethnic minorities and those of foreign nationalities; on the contrary, discrimination affects more than 55 million people, the majority of the active working population in Brazil.

The UN reports that of the total population of 192 million, 86% have difficulties entering the labour market and securing decent working conditions such as adequate pay and social protection. These conditions seem to be available almost only to white Brazilian men. This reality is rooted in the cultural and social perceptions ingrained during colonial times when people were identified by sex, race and ethnicity. Brazil’s exclusionary socio-economic model was established at the very beginning of the country’s colonization in the 16th century and has been difficult to overcome ever since. This discrimination and the prejudice that comes with it persists in a considerable part of the Brazilian society today. Employers subconsciously maintain hierarchies of gender and race instead of employing people based on levels of education, technical skill and aptitude.

According to the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) the immense disparity in access to income and resources means that almost one-third (30.1%) of the country’s overall population live in poverty. In their report from 2004, the ILO (International Labour Organisation) state that the average income of the wealthiest 10% is 30 times greater than that of the poorest 40% of the population. As a result of this extreme inequality, the country faces serious food and nutritional problems. The immense contrast between the two Brazils – the developed Brazil and the under-developed Brazil – translates into a complex food and (mal-)nutrition issue.

Poverty also continues to be supported by sexism. Employed men receive on average salaries that are 42% higher than that of employed women. There is a strong occupational segmentation and on average men work primarily in the higher paid sectors – industrial and productive occupations – while women undertake activities related to personal and social services which are associated with lower salaries. In addition Brazilian society suffers from the consequences of the structural adjustment policies which have a more negative effect on the female population. Recent figures suggest that there is a clear trend towards the feminization of poverty.
A sizeable percentage of the population do not have the resources to purchase food and have no access to productive resources to produce food. As a result large parts of the Brazilian population have problems in securing adequate food for themselves\(^3\). In addition access to clean water is another major problem in the country. According to the World Health Organisation, 28,000 Brazilians die every year because they do not have access to unpolluted drinking water and cannot maintain a minimum of personal and environmental hygiene\(^3\).

To ease some of the effects of poverty the current government under president Lula has introduced the *bolsa familia* (family grant), a social assistance programme in the form of financial support which is part of the government’s wider *fome zero* (no hunger) programme. The *fome zero* programme was introduced to end hunger in Brazil and has been much praised around Europe. And while many agree that *bolsa familia* has made a vital contribution and is reaching many families, it is slowly emerging that it has not been successful in stopping overall malnutrition and hunger. According to latest research by IBASE\(^7\) 54% of the families receiving *bolsa familia* do not have access to enough food nor is the food they access varied enough. Only 16.9% of the families receiving *bolsa familia* have a sufficient and varied diet\(^8\).
Family structures

On average, poor households have more children than wealthier households but the parents are less likely to have access to the labour market. The lack of educational opportunities for Brazil’s poor only aggravates the extreme inequality. Often the head of the household is quite young and of those lucky enough to have an income, many work self-employed and do not possess a labour card, which means they have no access to employment rights or protection.

Statistics show that the poorest 25% of the adult population in urban areas have completed less than four years in school. In practical terms this means that one in four people who head a household are illiterate. Half of these might not even have finished primary school. As a result of their lack of education these adults have little or no access to more permanent or better paid jobs.

A recent study about family care by IBGE (the Brazilian Institute for Statistics and Geography) found that income has a big impact on who has access to a creche. In families living on at least three times the minimum wage over 40% of children under the age of three would attend a creche; in families earning half the minimum wage the average was under 10%. In some cases women were able to leave their children with a family member or a friend; however others were forced to lock children in the house for as long as they were out. As a consequence, children were reported to be killed in fires in the home unable to escape.

Another serious problem in Brazil is underage sex and consequently unwanted pregnancy of minors. According to the Ministry of Health 27% of all births in 2000 were by mothers who were younger than 19 and who had fallen pregnant ‘accidentally’. 1% of all births occur in girls between 10 and 14 years, and 18% of girls between 15 and 19 are pregnant or are already mothers. As an example for local statistics, the hospital in Cuiabá reported that more than 2,000 births in 2007 where by child mothers. In addition Brazil has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the Americas; the maternal mortality rate ranges from 110 per 100,000 live births in the south of Brazil to 298 in the north.

In Brazil today about 80,000 children depend on state and private institutions for shelter. In the case of the state of Rio de Janeiro 92% of the 3,732 children who live permanently in state institutions, only 30% do not have any contact with their living parent any more. The other 70% have at least one living parent. In these case the parent(s) live in such desperate social circumstances that they will leave their children permanently in the institution. Some children stay for a year and longer. In 13% of these cases the family does not have enough funds to raise the child. In 14% of these cases children have been badly neglected and in 12% of these cases the child has been abandoned by the parent(s).

Other children are left to roam the streets where they are approached by drug gangs looking for new members; children as young as five are being recruited as aviaozinhos (messenger boys), the lowest rung in the hierarchy of drug factions. These young children are used to run small errands, often for the price of a soft drink.
Crescer e Viver
(Grow and Live)

*Crescer e Viver* uses circus-arts as well as artistic and cultural activities to help children and young people at risk improve their life perspectives. Their activities are many and varied and include courses in capoeira, dance, music, theatre and literature. *Crescer e Viver* was formed by a Samba school in 2000 in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of children’s rights in Brazil.

In 2004 *Crescer e Viver* expanded their activities from their original base in São Gonzalves and settled at Praça Onze near the centre of Rio de Janeiro. Praça Onze is one of the most deprived areas in downtown Rio de Janeiro where many children live on the streets and drug trafficking and violence are common sights.

*Crescer e Viver* offer a great variety of activities which are grouped in different programmes:

- **Art & Street Culture** project which includes activities such as basketball, graffiti and capoeira. There is the **Social Circus** project which extends its classes from circus skills to citizenship classes.

And there is the **Artist’s Life** project which includes all activities and processes that lead to the production of a performance. In addition to the more creative and artistic projects *Crescer e Viver* also provides education and development opportunities as well as access to health care and citizenship.

Junior Perim is the Coordinator of *Crescer e Viver*. He explained that Morro da Providência (Praça Onze) was the first favela in Rio de Janeiro. The neighbourhood was founded by ex-slaves and to this day the vast majority of its inhabitants are direct descendants from the original founders.

Next to Praça Onze is Boca do Lixo, which is a place of social exclusion. Boca do Lixo literally translates into ‘Mouth of the Rubbish Dump’. Boca do Lixo is a neighbourhood with many problems. Drugs such as crack cocaine circulate freely and rival drug gangs compete in the streets. Murder and violence rule the area. To make things worse, this area is heavily overpopulated and the average family shares one room in tiny subdivided houses. The hygienic circumstances are appalling and tuberculosis is omnipresent.

Of the 200 children who attend the projects, 140 live in Boca do Lixo. The children come from a reality where families are struggling to break-out of a never-ending cycle of poverty, where there is little or no access to education or other services. The little that is provided is of poor quality, the health services are precarious and unemployment is high. *Crescer e Viver* reaches out to the children to communicate a feeling of dignity and citizenship, to give the children a sense that a future is possible. And while the inner values are extremely important for the survival and future of the children, *Crescer e Viver* recognise the importance to attend to more immediate physical needs too, and to provide routes to health care, social support, education and training.

On reflection, Junior found that while social politics have noticeably improved over the last few years, access to education and professional training continues to be a major problem in socially deprived areas such as Boca do Lixo. The poor continued to be
socially excluded. Areas like Boca de Lixo have almost not infrastructure and only receive very little support. Junior pointed out that the governmental programmes of income and family support had made some positive impact and had improved the lives of the desperately poor. However, access to education continued to be a major problem, and it was wrong to assume that because more children were registered with schools, that this meant that they were attending the classes or participating in school activities. In general the schools in the area were underfunded and lacked resources. There were not enough teachers or materials which translated into poor schooling and a lack of adequate support for the children. Schools rarely provided recreational activities such as sports, play and arts which were important for the children's development. In addition schooling did not take into account what was needed to move on in real life; the schools did not encourage a more professional development that would allow easier access to employment.

Junior reported that some schools had as many as 60 children in one class which had originally been designed to sit 20 pupils. These circumstances left teachers overworked and frustrated and children uninspired. Not surprisingly many children preferred to hang out in the streets instead of going to school. Junior said that to change the present situation the whole infrastructure needed to be changed. There was a strong need for public politics that actively sought to turn the current social exclusion around by providing good quality schooling and professional training in deprived areas.

Another important step towards a more inclusive society was that social politics needed to consider the families' realities and attend to the more immediate needs of the families. One of the factors Junior pointed out was that the adults in the family needed realistic opportunities to earn an income that could actually sustain the family. This would not only provide for the needs of the family but also bring stability to the family's structure and allow the family to develop as a whole.

Personal interview with Junior Perim, Project Coordinator, Crescer e Viver, 6 June 2008
The impact of poverty on children

In the slums, hunger, malnutrition and disease threaten the survival of children. Poverty in Brazil disproportionately affects the young. These poor households have limited access to clean water and sanitation services with deadly consequences – deaths that weigh on the mortality statistics. Not surprisingly children born into these conditions grow up with little hope for survival or of improving their situation in life⁴⁹.

Some 30 million children are believed to live in conditions that are sub-human and inadequate for their development⁵⁰. Nearly 40% of the urban poor households are found in the Northeast and about one quarter of the children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition⁵¹. Of the estimated population of 19 million of greater São Paulo, 2.5 million people live in favelas. Poverty affects the children’s physical health as much as their mental health, and consequently they suffer from very low self-esteem and life-expectancy⁵².

Poverty drives many children to desperate measures and child prostitution is a serious problem in Brazil. In addition, children are bought and sold as a product. Brazil is considered to have the worst child sex trafficking record after Thailand. According to the recently released Protection Project report, various official sources agree that between 250,000 and 500,000 children live as child prostitutes⁵³. Other sources in Brazil suggest that up to approximately 2 million children aged between 10 and 15 years have been forced into prostitution⁵⁴.
The participation of children in the labour force in Brazil is at least twice as high as in any other country in Latin America and child labour is one of the major reasons why children do not attend school. If they do, they often are too tired and worn out to pay much attention to the classes. According to the ILO (International Labour Organisation) child labour remains widespread in Brazil although working under the age of 14 is illegal in Brazil. According to the findings of the ILO, 5.1 million children between 5 to 17 work in the labour market. Of these, 1.7 million children are between 5 and 10 and 53% work up to 18 hours without ever getting paid.

Research published by IBGE (National Institute for Geography and Statistics) found that 1.2 million children and adolescents between five and 13 years worked in Brazil in 2007. And of the adolescents who were between 16 and 17 and worked as house servants, approximately 90% were not in legal employment. That means their work documents had not been signed and the employer was not paying taxes and employment costs. IBGE also found that most young people worked more than 40 hours per week.

In urban areas child labour can be a strong pull factor and lead children to a life in the streets. Activities such as selling chewing gum, fruit or cheap items at street lights lead the children to busy urban centres, often far from home. The children spend long hours, often days in the streets. On these occasions the often very young children make their first contact with children living in the street and life on streets, and they start forging a bond which grows stronger the longer they spend away from home.
Public education

One of the fundamental problems of the Brazilian education system is that the quality of the education available in state schools is often substandard. Schools are underfunded, classes overcrowded and teachers lack training and motivation. Compared to international standards, only in 64 municipalities do the schools reach the level of schools in developed countries. In all other 5,495 municipalities the school education is far below international standard65.

In practical terms this means that illiteracy continues to be a common problem in Brazil. About 15 million adults do not know how to read or write, and 30 million adults do not understand what they read66. This translates into an average of 17% of people over 15 years of age who cannot read or write but in some regions of the country this figure can be as high as 50%. Of all the children who attend school, only 40% complete their primary education, and 4 million children who are of the legal school age are not attending school. For those children who are enrolled in a school regular attendance presents a major challenge67: 14.6% of the students who make it into secondary schools are illiterate and another 29% are far below average school level68.

A recent study by UNESCO which compared the education systems available in Latin America found that the students in Brazil were far behind in the subjects of reading and mathematics69. However, there have been some improvements over the last years. In 1992 82% of the children between 7 and 14 attended a school, in 2004 this figure had risen to 95%; and while in 1995 only 65% of non-white children attended school. In 2003 this figure had risen to 75%. Government statistics from 2002 confirm that more than 35 million children between 7 and 14 were registered with a school, which, according to the government was proof that practically every child had access to a school65.

Unfortunately this does not mean that all these children are really attending school. Some parents register their children to be eligible for government support, but the children continue to work or do not attend classes because there is nobody at home encouraging them to study. Another major problem is the lack of investment into educational infrastructure. Simply encouraging more children to attend school without the necessary investment now translates into heavily overcrowded classes with 50 or more pupils to a class. And many schools do not have the resources, space and staff to cope with the increased demand66. These circumstances lead to a high drop-out rate for children from poor backgrounds and while 59% do not finish their primary education, 24% are up to two years behind educational standards67.

UNICEF’s findings show that figures stating 98% of the children in Brazil have access to a school, need to be put in context. According to UNICEF racism still plays a major role in Brazil and skin colour has a great impact on who has access to good education – and consequently jobs – and who does not. According to UNICEF’s findings more than two thirds of the children who have no access to adequate school education are of African origin66. At the same time UNESCO point out that positive efforts have been made in Brazil to work towards a more inclusive society. As an example UNESCO mention that African culture and history are now by law part of the Brazilian curriculum69.
Social discrimination is also a factor that has negative impacts on the quality of education provided in or near poorer neighbourhoods. Teachers often come from a different community, and live a different reality. They do not necessarily want or have the time to familiarise themselves with the school’s surroundings and the circumstances in which their students live. This creates gaps as the teachers simply cannot understand where the children are coming from or what problems they face in their everyday lives. This distance between teachers and students impacts on how the children perceive their teachers and schools.

The reality of the provision of education for children and young people also leaves the teachers struggling. Most teachers are unprepared to deal with this reality; they lack training, motivation and are paid low salaries. In Brazil schools have three attendance cycles, the morning school, the afternoon school and the night school. In order to earn more, many teachers work in different schools from early morning to late at night. This routine leaves little or no time to prepare classes or attend to the special needs of the children. In addition teachers are mainly trained on the subject matter and have little or no understanding of the education process. And children from deprived homes often need special attention and motivation to cope with the learning process. These needs are even more pronounced among teenagers and there is very little a teacher can achieve in classes filled with 50 students. To cope with the reality of overfilled, understaffed schools, teachers resort to reading their subjects to the children and demanding the children to simply repeat what they said. Children are not encouraged to debate or process the information intellectually. In deprived neighbourhoods where children do not get much, if any, support from their parents, this lack of assistance drives many children out of school.

Making matters worse employers are increasingly demanding good educational backgrounds, and those who have no access to good school education and professional training, find it difficult to access jobs. The rate for unemployment and underemployment amongst young people between 19 and 24 years of age is rising. Between 1995 and 2003 unemployment within this age group rose from 13.7% to 25% which translates into a 100,000 young people being unemployed. Salaries for young people between 10 and 25 years have gone down from an average of R$1007 in 1995 to R$872 in 2003. Those who find a job usually end up underemployed and with no prospect of a better future.
Cinema Nosso
(Our Cinema)

Cinema Nosso is a project directed at young people from poor and deprived neighbourhoods in the centre of Rio de Janeiro.

Cinema Nosso approach social exclusion through cinematography and film making. The adolescents and young people participating in the project are encouraged to discuss and process the problems arising in their lives, due to violence and drug abuse, through film making and the audiovisual arts. Through the process of film making and photography Cinema Nosso motivate the young people to construct their own artistic and cultural expression. For most of the young people this is a unique opportunity and Luis Nascimento, Director of Cinema Nosso pointed out, that these skills are not offered in public schools in Brazil and are normally only accessible to children from richer and more privileged families. Apart from teaching new technical skills, the media also inspires young people to contemplate and reflect upon life and society – a skill they would not learn anywhere else.

Cinema Nosso is directed at young people aged between 14 and 25 who come from very deprived homes. At Cinema Nosso they find a safe place, for many the first time in their lives, where they can explore their needs and aspirations through using their creativity while developing their potential to work with photography and film. The process also helps young people to develop a sense of self-worth as they discover that they can master the technical as well as intellectual challenges of film-making and producing good quality products.

Another important aspect of the project is the opportunity for young people to make films about their personal situations and show the viewer how they interpret their own reality. As Luis points out, movies are traditionally made by members of the middle and upper classes who portray the reality of the poor as they imagine it to be, or as it fits the script. At Cinema Nosso this situation has been turned around and those who live the reality of social exclusion in Brazil can tell their own stories and make films drawing on their own experiences. To develop the production skills
the young people participate in a process that allows them to approach their reality with a critical, questioning perspective. This allows the adolescents to develop a new sense of being, in which they reflect upon their lives and, consequently, assume responsibility for their own destinies.

One of the many advantages of the skill training received at Cinema Nosso is that quite a few of the young people find work in the audiovisual sector of cinema and photography. And while this is not the objective of the courses, it is a much welcomed side effect as it provides young people with job opportunities and a more positive future.

Luís pointed out that Cinema Nosso is not meant to promote professional training or to substitute schooling which is the responsibility of the state. The courses at Cinema Nosso work independently and in addition to the education provided by the state system. Cinema Nosso act as a catalyst for creative and critical thinking with the photography or film making as a means to inspire a different way of looking at the world and at life.

On reflection Luís thinks that NGOs should add value to the state services and not take over the role or responsibilities of the state. Luís is concerned that a trend is developing and that the Brazilian government is increasingly passing on their responsibilities to NGOs which are not equipped or prepared enough and in no position to take on the government’s role. For Luís, employment, education, health and safety are and must remain the responsibility of the government; NGOs are developed by civil society to challenge the government and to add value to society.

For Cinema Nosso, as for many NGOs in Brazil, the main challenge consists in securing permanent and reliable funding sources which enable the project to provide a stable and safe space within which the process of creative challenges can develop. This lack of permanent funding has already forced Cinema Nosso to shut down once for a whole month. And this insecurity impacted on the projects and the participants. It also means that Cinema Nosso cannot develop a strategy for mid-term planning. Luís pointed out that what they needed was to secure donors that commit to three year cycles, so that the need for funding does not interfere with their activities and project development.
Violence in Brazil

In 2005 UNESCO statistics showed that Brazil came second only to Venezuela with regard to who had the highest rate of violent deaths caused by fire arms. A statistic from UNESCO showed that 21.72 per 100,000 people are killed in Brazil per year by fire arms. More recent studies suggest that Brazil’s murder rate has fallen slightly putting the country in fourth place just after Venezuela, Russia and Columbia.

According to the World Bank, Brazil’s high homicide rates are mainly due to drug-related violence in the poor urban areas. Those unfortunate enough to live in these deprived urban areas have to deal with theft, vandalism, muggings, sexual abuse, gang fights, murders, and organised crime on a daily basis. Violence is omnipresent in all aspects of the Brazilian society and government institutions, and often the police are reported taking an extremely violent approach. And while the available statistics already draw a bleak picture of a very violent country, many acts of violence go unreported and are never followed up.

In December 2007 Rio de Janeiro state and municipal authorities announced they were investigating reports that up to 92 poor communities had come under the control of paramilitary-style militias. According to reports the militias were formed by police officers working with the support of local politicians and community leaders. These militias were reported to be providing “security” for communities. However, residents reported the extensive use of violence and the extortion of protection money. Some communities claimed they had suffered violent retaliation from drug factions as soon as the members of the militias withdrew from their communities.

In rural regions, violence and land conflicts are on-going and many poor locals are driven off their traditional lands and into urban areas as the only refuge available. Those engaged in helping the poor or promoting human rights are under constant attack and openly threatened; they suffer attacks from both the local authorities as well as hired gunmen. Death lists are openly circulated and murder is a continuous common practice to ‘do away with unwanted interference’.

And while the Brazilian government has made an effort to redress human rights abuses, those responsible for the violations are rarely held accountable and enjoy almost total impunity.
**ISMEP**
*(Social Institute of the Mediators for Peace)*

**ISMEP** is a social organisation run by catholic nuns. The organisation works in the neighbourhood called Pina in Recife, in the Northeast of Brazil. Pina extends over the Pina river and is a very poor neighbourhood built entirely on stilts. It is a very poor neighbourhood with very little access to anything. Traditionally the few families that work are engaged in fishing and collecting shell fish – which in any case generates very little income. The area does not get much political attention and services are very basic. In Pina infant mortality is a serious problem. Children are subject to a high level of disease caused by the general lack of hygiene, malnutrition and neglect. **ISMEP** has set up various activities to support the local population and try to provide services across all generations. Through their various projects **ISMEP** work to bring sustainable development to this poor and deprived neighbourhood.

One of **ISMEP**’s projects, **PRAIAR** (project to support children and young people in difficult and in vulnerable situations), attends to children and young people between 7 and 16 years of age and provides education, therapeutic intervention and recreational activities such as sports, capoeira and games. The children who attend **PRAIAR** come from poor and dysfunctional families. In many cases the fathers no longer live with the family or have migrated and no longer support the family, and it is also not uncommon that the mother is a drug user. As many households are unable to look after their children and malnutrition is such a serious problem, the **PRAIAR** programme provides children with two meals a day.

As Pina has a long standing tradition of living off fishing and collecting shellfish **ISMEP** also encourage the community to develop new skills and look for new sources of income. The project **Mãe Maré** provides training for a variety of alternative professional skills and encourages young people especially to train...
and develop new skills and to seek new job opportunities which will provide a sustainable source of income.

**ISMEP** support the idea of integration and that each part of the community needs to be addressed for the whole community to change for the better. In this spirit **ISMEP** also attend to the need of the older population and provide recreational activities that include the elders. The project ‘**Living**’ at Senhora Medianeira also provides occupational workshops for the elderly.

Although **ISMEP** provide basic and much needed community services they do not receive much support from the local government. The local authorities stopped funding the projects three years ago, though at one stage the Ministry for Social Development supported **ISMEP**’s project for alternative income and paid for the professional training programmes.

Today the only government support **ISMEP** receive is through the government’s **PETI** programme (**PETI** is the federal government’s programme to eradicate child labour). This situation has left the centre with very little regular funding and increasingly dependent on donations from other sources and individual support. At the moment the project is not in a very stable position and **ISMEP** are concerned that this will impact on their activities and the wider goals they are trying to achieve.

**Personal interview with Sister Francisca Graça de Jesus, Director, ISMEP, 26 May 2008**

\[1 \text{ ‘Mother High Tide’} \]
The widespread use of violence in Brazil is not a recent phenomenon and goes back to the country’s colonial origins. Various findings indicate that in order to try to understand violence in Brazil today it is important to understand how the country was built and what circumstances formed today’s society.

Modern Brazil has in large part developed out of European colonisation since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500. Much of the current Brazilian social system was built by a Portuguese elite who established and maintained vast plantations first by subduing and enslaving the local population and subsequently by introducing slaves brought across the Atlantic from Africa. Evidence indicates that more than four million Africans were brought to the country as slaves.

In many ways this practice dominated the local economy and established an economic system that built a society of rich and poor, and people and non-people. In addition, building the country’s economy on slavery had deep consequences for the social-political development of Brazil’s society. As the black slaves outnumbered white colonists by far, the slave owners introduced a system which meant performing extreme acts of violence against individual slaves to keep their slave workforce obedient and under control. As such this experience of slavery in Brazil helped create a system of extreme and extensive violence which became something of a norm.

Brazil’s elite was so dependent on slavery as a means to drive its agricultural production that Brazil became the last country to officially abolish the transatlantic slave trade after long and continued international pressure. Following the official abolition of slavery in 1888 Brazil pursued a policy of inviting European immigration. Poor Southern European immigrants soon substituted the workforce of the former slaves and were subjected to similarly abusive treatment and working conditions. With the changing profile of society, social discrimination became more pronounced and added to racial discrimination. Increasingly the police took over the role of former bondsmen. The police worked for the country’s elite and had to keep the poor immigrants and coloured migrants under control using the old methods of brutal force.

Even today Brazilian society is still marked by this system and some members of society benefit from almost total impunity while coercion, non-payment and physical punishment continue to be practiced in remote areas of the country, as do kidnappings and killings. And while enslavement and coercion is illegal in Brazil and the federal government is making efforts to uproot its practice, various forms of modern slavery as recognised by the UN and ILO remain widespread in Brazil today.
Police violence

Brazil continues to face major problems in the area of public security. The country’s metropolitan areas, especially their low-income neighbourhoods, are plagued by widespread violence, perpetrated by criminal gangs, abusive police, and, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, militias which are reportedly linked to the police. Every year, roughly 50,000 people are murdered in Brazil and the poorest communities are bearing the burden of these tens of thousands of gun-related deaths. Most of these violent deaths are not followed up and in many cases perpetrators get away with impunity.

Those who work in the field, such as Amnesty International, report recurring problems of abuse and violence within the public security, prison and judicial systems. Systematic human rights violations remain a serious problem in all of Brazil today as is torture. This widespread abuse is fuelled because many crimes are not followed up and lack of accountability remains a serious problem.

The federal government’s National Campaign against Torture reported that they received 1,336 complaints of torture between October 2001 and July 2003. There have been credible reports of police and prison guards torturing people in their custody as a form of punishment, intimidation and extortion. Police have also allegedly used torture as a means of obtaining information or coercing confessions from criminal suspects. At the same time abusive police officers are rarely sanctioned, and abuses are sometimes justified by authorities as an inevitable by-product of efforts to combat Brazil’s very high crime rates.

Open police violence, especially against the country’s poor, continues to be one of the country’s biggest human rights problems. In response to the high levels of violent crime, especially in urban centres, some police resort to abusive practices rather than pursuing sound policing policies. While it can be hard to get hold of solid proof, anecdotal evidence suggests that the overall police strategy is built on aggressive repression. Police interventions are harsh, aggressive and violent, often endangering the innocent or hurting bystanders. The overall approach is to squash crime rather than prevent it and that it is better to kill the perceived criminal than being killed. As a result the local population see police as a threat rather than a protective state institution.

According to official figures police killed 694 people in the first six months of 2007 in Rio de Janeiro in situations described as “resistance followed by death”. This figure represents an increase of 33.5% in comparison to 2006. Of the overall number of persons killed by police, 44 people were killed during a two-month police operation aimed at dismantling drug trafficking gangs in Complexo do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro’s poorest neighbourhood. On June 27, 19 people were killed during alleged confrontations with the police but according to residents
and local non-governmental organizations many of the killings were summary executions. In October, at least 12 people were killed during a police incursion in Favela da Coréia - amongst those killed was a 4-year-old boy92.

Many of these confrontations with the police were incidents classified as “resistance followed by death”. However, the situations surrounding many cases suggested excessive use of force or extrajudicial executions. The official approach in Rio de Janeiro became increasingly militarized tactics in an attempt to combat drug gangs which dominate most of the city’s shanty towns. Bystanders have been killed by military police officers shooting indiscriminately from caveirões (armed vehicles)93.

In March 2007 the army deployed troops and tanks on the streets of Rio de Janeiro’s shanty towns in an effort to track down stolen guns. And although federal prosecutors challenged the legality of the operation, neither the state nor federal governments questioned the army’s decision to operate in the city’s streets94.

Police violence was also reported from the state of São Paulo, where, according to official data, officers killed 201 people in the first half of 2007. Fifteen officers were killed during the same period95.

In May 2007 the state of São Paulo was shaken by violence: between 12 and 20 May members of Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) (First Order of the Capital), a criminal gang formed in the state’s prison system, took to the streets in a massive display of organized criminal chaos. They killed over 40 law enforcement officers, burned more than 80 buses, attacked police stations, banks and a metro station, and co-ordinated revolts and hostage-taking in around half of the state’s prisons. In response police killed over 100 “suspects”. In several incidents in poor communities across the state of São Paulo, people were killed by masked men in situations suggesting extrajudicial executions or “death-squad”-style revenge killings. State authorities only provided details of those killed by the police following a threat of legal action by the Public Prosecutor’s office. At the height of the violence, 117 people died in firearms-related incidents in a single day96.

Death squads

In the north-eastern states of Bahia, Pernambuco and Sergipe reports about “death squad”-style killings continue to circulate. Following reports of several killings and disappearances, members of the government’s Human Rights Commission expressed concerns that the “death squads” might be returning.

In Mosqueiro in the state of Pará an incident was reported in April 2008 after three teenagers were taken in by members of the elite unit of the military police. This incident was witnessed by 50 people of the community. Later it was reported that one of the boys had allegedly been tortured until he collapsed. He later regained consciousness and found himself abandoned in a wood. The other two boys were reported as missing since the incident. Neither of the other two has reappeared97.
Another incident was reported from Recife in the state of Pernambuco. Members of the military police detained a group of 14 teenagers who had been attending the local carnival. It was reported that the boys had been tortured by the police and then the police had taken them to a bridge and forced them to jump into the river. Two days after the incident the bodies of two of the boys were found - one boy was aged 15 and the other 17 years. Following the publicity the incident was investigated and five police officers were charged with homicide and torture. In June, after he testified against the police, one of the boys was shot dead.

In the state of Sergipe the Secretary of Public Security and the head of the Military Police were positively identified as two men who had been members of the death squad called A Missão (the Mission). A Missão was a notorious and well known death squad which was active in the state of Sergipe during the 1990s.

Arms, drug trade and children

The number of young children with arms involved in gangs and drug trafficking, and the evident readiness with which children use violence to get food and clothing, are concrete indications of the violence that breeds in such brutal socio-economic conditions.

In Rio de Janeiro alone an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 children are armed and statistics show that 4,000 children under the age of 18 were killed in the past 14 years. Of the total of Rio de Janeiro's 650 recognised favelas, 50 are identified as having a level of violence similar to a war zone where gangs and drugs rule the scene and many of the inhabitants claim that they have long been abandoned by the authorities.

The ILO report that violent crimes committed by children and related to drug abuse and trafficking in Rio de Janeiro has increased since the 1990's. The ILO reports that the children drawn to crime are becoming much younger, and while in 2000 12 year old children were drawn into gangs and drug wars, today they are six years old and younger. Other research shows that the children involved in this type of violence belong to the poorest families in the favelas and that they have less than six years of schooling.
Renascer
(Reborn)

Renascer is a community project set up in support of the community of Renascer III, a favela, situated on the outskirts of João Pessoa, in the state of Paraiba. Renascer III is the poorest and most violent area in town and most people would prefer to leave the area but cannot afford to move somewhere else. To make a meagre living, many people in Renascer III live from collecting recyclable waste from the city’s rubbish dumps, bins and the streets and sell it to the Council which earns them a few reais.

The project Renascer was launched in 1998 to attend to the needs of the children who live in this favela and to provide much needed access to schooling and training opportunities.

Renascer provide support for the children of the poorest families in the favela. The children attend the project from the age of six years. Most of the children attending the project come from dysfunctional families, and approximately half of the children no longer have a father in their lives. Many of the men have left the area to seek work further south and can either not afford to come back to their family or have lost the contact with the family because they have been gone for too long.

As an underlying philosophy Renascer believe that the family is the most important nucleus for a child and that the good functioning of the family is at the heart of the well-being of a child. In this spirit Renascer attend to the wellbeing of the whole family and make regular home visits to help establish a better relationship with the family.

According to Andrew Santos Barlow, the founder of Renascer, the government’s project bolsa escola...
has had a positive impact on the lives of people in Renascer III. *Bolsa escola* was introduced by the Lula government as a means of social income for poor families who would commit to sending their children to attend school on a regular basis. Andrew pointed out that while *bolsa escola* provided a very basic financial support and it was an important first step in the right direction, it was not enough to effectively eradicate illiteracy or motivate children to attend school. For Andrew the problem of illiteracy and poverty lies much deeper. In Renascer III many parents are themselves illiterate and do not consider education a priority for their children; they prefer to send their children to work in the streets to find ways to contribute to the meagre income of the family.

Andrew thought that the omnipresent threat of violence was one of the biggest problems in the favela. Between violent drug dealers and violent police officers the young people did not have the chance to develop a positive outlook for the future.

Andrew experienced encounters with the police as usually violent and he affirmed that deaths of innocent bystanders were a common sight. Violence in the *favela* was such a permanent threat that those living in the *favela* did not take any chances. Safety was paramount and one of the safety measures in the neighbourhood was to be home by 11pm at the latest. After 11pm the streets were considered to be unsafe. During the night gunshots could be usually be heard in the *favela* but those who got involved were on their own, the ambulance did not enter the favela and few people dared to come out of their houses in the middle of the night.

1 Brazilian currency
Prison conditions

In Brazil it is widely perceived that prisons are made for the poor, black and prostitutes. Countrywide prison conditions are abysmal and heavy overcrowding is regularly quoted in the newspapers. The average prison population also reflects the underlying racism as in many places most of the prison population are of African origin.\(^\text{106}\)

Research undertaken by the [UN Committee Against Torture](https://www.un.org/). shows evidence that the living conditions in most Brazilian prisons are inhuman and that conditions in the heavily overcrowded cells are extremely unhygienic. In addition the cells become overheated and there is hardly any light. The UN further reported that torture remained common practice in prisons throughout Brazil.\(^\text{107}\)

During 2007, the prison population has doubled, from 217,000 in 2007 to 422,000 in 2008. Most prisons are overcrowded by 41%. According to the official figures of the Ministry of Justice, prisons in the state of Rio Grande do Sul are overcrowded by 54%.\(^\text{108}\) This reality fosters a high level of violence amongst fellow inmates, police officers and wardens alike. As a result abuse in prisons is common and without consequences for the perpetrators.\(^\text{109}\)

In the heavily overcrowded prisons, torture continues to be used as a legitimate means to keep order and extract information from inmates. Whilst it is common knowledge that this goes on, cases are hardly ever followed up and impunity remains a widespread problem.\(^\text{110}\)
The Consortium of Street Children

In an effort to better understand the problems children at risk and street children face in their everyday lives, the Consortium of Street Children (CSC) published a global report about street children and violence. The CSC based their report on evidence collected from partners working with street children across the world and found that there was strong emphasis on the overshadowing role violence played in the lives of children from desolate and poor neighbourhoods.

As a result of their research the CSC found that while poverty continued to play a significant role in creating the circumstances that allowed violence to thrive it was no longer the major push factor. CSC found that violence had become the most significant factor that drove children into the streets and that prevented children from returning home. According to the CSC’s findings economic migration, extreme poverty and the death of HIV+ parents were all major causes of children ending up on the streets, however millions of children would not return home because they were too scared to do so after suffering violence and abuse from their families. Often children were faced with daily violence and abuse from the police, sex tourists or each other. With more focus in developing countries on preventing violence and abuse at home, and in the street, and by reaching out to children already on the streets and providing them with rehabilitation, the education and the safety they so desperately needed, the vast number of children living and working on the streets could be significantly reduced.

The CSC looked critically at the involvement of governments and charities and warned that government’s neglect and apathy had often resulted in the use of violent tactics to cover-up the ‘problem’ of street children or to pretend there were no children living on the streets. The CSC pointed out that, once in the street, working with the children became extremely difficult because the children who had taken to the streets were seriously scarred by injuries they had received from the public, the police or other children.

The CSC recommended that the authorities needed to concentrate more on providing legal protection for children, and foster a culture of respect for children within institutional services and public spaces. Governments needed to ensure that the juvenile justice and welfare systems were sensitive to street children’s needs and were able to keep them safe from violence.
Since the 1990s, crack has circulated amongst street children and has substituted sniffing glue or smoking marijuana. Founded in 2005 in Salvador, Bahia state, **Viva a Vida** provide a residential in-house detox programme for street children who have become addicted to crack. **Viva a Vida** attend to addicts as young as 10 years old. The programme at **Viva a Vida** takes the children off the streets for six months and includes shelter, therapy and training for the duration of the full six months the individual child is included in the programme. The programme can accommodate up to 20 children at a time.

Gisella Hanley is the founder and director of **Viva a Vida**. In general Gisella thinks that projects that try to rehabilitate street children faced a major challenge when it came to providing a perspective for the children's future. What came after rehabilitation? Once the children and adolescents came off the drug they faced little or no options for a future outside their circles of drug dealing and crime. They continued to be excluded from 'the system' because they did not have an education or professional training that would allow them to find jobs and generate an income. They did not have enough schooling to join a professional training course, and they were either too old or too badly adapted to successfully join local schools. Many of the children attending the centre came off the streets and had nowhere to go to once the rehabilitation programme ended. For many the way back into mainstream society seemed impossible while the old paths – rejoining the drug trade – remained open and accessible, and held the promise of quick money and access to much desired consumer goods and status symbols such as expensive clothing, cosmetics and accessories. And the living example for possible success was there, in front of them, the drug barons had money, nice consumer goods and girls. The drug barons had everything the boys ever dreamed of.

To take street children into rehabilitation is quite a new approach in Brazil and has been struggling to find acceptance and funding. However Gisella thought that the government was slowly changing their attitude and were now starting to pick up on the subject. The government had just renewed their offer to continue funding **Viva a Vida**. One setback was that the government were often slow to react and insisted on very old fashioned
approaches. The other setback was that the Brazilian government were notorious for delivering payments very late and *Viva a Vida* were still waiting for payments from the last funding agreement which were by now over a year late. With so much insecurity it was difficult to run an ongoing project and provide the stable and safe environment the children needed so badly.

Gisella confirmed that the overall opinion about street children of both the media and public was that they were a nuisance and needed to be exterminated like vermin. Unfortunately this threat was more than simple words and exterminations were known to continue to be commonplace in Salvador. According to the rumours extermination groups targeted children and adolescents from poor areas in the city and operated on the general prejudice that boys and young men from poor areas were all (potential) criminals. These days, usually, there are no bodies to be found which could point to the murders. Rumour had it that all bodies were thrown into the nearby furnace to do away with the evidence of the murder. However, Gisella pointed out that it was a well-known secret in Salvador, and all social workers operating in the streets knew about it.

More evident is an increase of beatings of children. As the crack addiction created constant demand for money the children turned to petty crime, theft and assaults. Gisella explained that a crack high lasted for about five minutes and was followed by a period of extreme craving. To satisfy the craving the children needed money and would do anything to get the cash for the next ‘pedra’ (crack crystal). Fed up with the thefts and assaults the public was increasingly taking the law into their own hands and there had been cases of children being caught by angry members of the public and beaten up. Gisella knew of one occasion where several people had teamed up, caught the thief and battered him to death.

At the time of finalising this report *Viva a Vida* had just adjusted their programme to provide residential in-house rehabilitation programme and shelter. For this purpose *Viva a Vida* had just acquired a property and were reforming the house to become a suitable shelter in which the children undergoing the treatment can stay for up to two years even after successfully finishing the rehabilitation programme.
Conclusion

In recent years Brazil has established itself in the international arena as an economic power and a stable economy and gained much international respect. After overcoming a military dictatorship, hyperinflation and recession, Brazil has followed strict financial policies which have allowed the country to stabilize its economy and with it, its politics. As a consequence the country has been able to introduce social measures geared at relieving the plight of its 54 million poor. The Lula government has voiced strong commitment to eradicate the hunger and illiteracy which continue to be fundamental problems in Brazilian society today.

As part of the *fome zero* programme the government has introduced basic social assistance to alleviate the impacts of poverty and has introduced a financial assistance to encourage families to have the basic means to send their children to school. And while there is a continued struggle to improve infrastructure and availability of state services such as education, health and safety, those working on the ground in deprived areas report that this initial government effort has improved the lives of many and that *bolsa familia* has made a tangible difference. However, illiteracy remains a common problem in Brazil and while a lot more children are now enrolled in schools, on average only 40% complete their primary education. In addition a high illiteracy rate amongst the adult population means that parents are often ill equipped to support their children through a school education.

Child labour is another key factor both keeping the children out of school and putting them on the streets. Brazil has the highest rate of child labour in all of Latin America. Even young children often carry the responsibility to contribute to the family’s income, meaning that they do not have time to study or play. For many children in urban centres this means spending most of the day away from home and not finding the time to attend school. For those who manage to attend school it means that they are too tired and worn out to pay much attention or follow the studies.

The ever present violence affects many of the well-meant endeavours to lead the Brazilian society towards a more inclusive nation. The young democracy is deeply challenged by institutional and criminal violence; and social as much as racial discrimination remain deeply embedded in Brazil’s society today. As a direct result of this on-going marginalisation and lack of opportunity for Brazil’s poor, urban centres continue to foster social ghettos in which the daily violence closely resembles conditions of civil war; drug traffickers and police are in constant conflict and murder is a daily reality. Violence is part of the Brazilian reality, the criminal violence, the violence employed by the drug trade and a desperately violent police.

Projects working directly within the marginalised communities and with the most vulnerable children report that traditional family structures are breaking down. There is an increased need to support young mothers. In families where the fathers are absent the often young mother is left struggling to raise the children while trying to secure a job in an ever more competitive labour market. In a reality where there are few or no crèches and schools are poorly staffed and underfunded this leaves many children to fend for
themselves in the streets. In this scenario the drug trade appear to offer a readily
available social group, attracting ever younger children into the cycle of violence.

This is the environment in which engaged community leaders and NGOs are striving to
make a difference and to engage with those who are most vulnerable. Projects supported
by the ABC Trust each focus on a different aspect of this scenario and use different
methods to change the presented reality of historically engrained social discrimination.
And regardless of their different approaches they all strive towards the same aim: to
provide a stable, safe space where children’s essential needs for empathetic attention,
food and stability can be met. And while some of the projects work with the whole
community and intervene directly providing health care and education and supporting the
family to rebuild fundamental unity, others focus on supporting the children through
cultural and art projects which allow the children to rebuild their personal beliefs from
within. Providing a stable and safe space is key in an environment where chaos, physical
threat and a lack of the most primary needs is a daily reality. And the key to a sustainable
future lies within strengthening the family and community in which the most vulnerable
children live. Through these s efforts these projects ensure that Brazil's poor children will
become part of the nation and can look towards a better future.

Brazil today is considered a country in development and Brazilian NGOs are increasingly
struggling to access international funding as this is being withdrawn from the area. The
Third Sector in Brazil is quite young and many projects are still struggling to stabilize
themselves. Most local projects run on a tight survival basis which has not allowed them
to establish a longer term perspective or consistent internal administrative structures.
Another problem faced by local NGOs is isolation. Many projects run on such tight
budgets that the day to day running is the sole priority of the NGO and there is little or no
time left to network with other projects in the country, attend informative meetings and
conferences, and to pursue regular lobbying or local campaigning.

One of the major challenges faced by the NGOs working in Brazil today is the struggle to
integrate the excluded poor into Brazil's wider society and to inspire an integrative and
accepting society - to unify what has been separated for so long. Only when these two
main poles of society accept each other, the nation can start healing and those who have
been separated over the centuries because of social, racial and sexual discrimination can
start to form one whole society.

For the international community the challenge now consists in supporting the young and
emerging Third Sector in Brazil to grow into a sustainable and strong civil society which
can develop and lead their own projects and turn the traditionally embedded
discrimination around into a more inclusive and just society.

The emerging role for the international community is to provide the skill, knowledge and
financial support needed to foster the dynamics of a forum which can promote change to
challenge the Brazilian middle and upper classes to recognise that it is their responsibility
to turn around the reality presented in this study and to take up the challenge that the
future of the nation belongs to all children, including the poor.
Endnotes

1 Note: Charities use these terms interchangeably and that the Brazilian term Ômeninos da ruaÕ covers both, children of the street as well as children in the street.

2 As a means to ÔescapeÕ and cope with the hardship of the streets, children turn to drugs such as sniffing glue, smoking hashish or crack.

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11 Zero Hora (Rio Grande do Sul), 26/06/2008, Brazil

12 Please note that figures about BrazilÕs population vary between 170-190 million according to source and date of article.

13 From the internet: Worldpress.org; http://www.worldpress.org/profiles2/Brazil.cfm

14 The Economist, Brazil Country Profile, 2007, UK

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17 Action Aid, from the internet: www.actionaid.org.uk, 2008, UK

18 Note: According to the UN definition, the poverty line is the minimum level of income deemed necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living in a given country. These standards vary from country to country.

19 The Guardian: Tom Phillips, 20/06/2008, UK

20 Note: Millionaires are defined as: People who have more than one million US$ in assets, not including their home

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22 The Economist, from the internet, 2008, UK

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29 Note: Poverty was defined by the UN as people earning less than a US$1 per day.
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90 Personal interview: Veruska Galdini, ACER, Research Coordinator, 01/07/08, Brazil
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100 Personal interview: Jonathan Hannay, Secretário Geral, ACER, Eldorado, Brazil
101 Emilia R. Pfannl, The Other War Zone Poverty and Violence in the Slums of Brazil, May, 2004, UK
102 Note: The word ‘favela’ defines a poor and low income neighbourhood which has no or only very limited access to public services. Favelas usually start as illegal urban settlements with no infrastructure. Many of the makeshift dwellings are unsafe and break down during challenging weather conditions. Favelas are often translated as ‘shanty towns’.
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