THE URBAN CHILD
in difficult circumstances

BRAZIL:
The Fight for Childhood in the City

by Anthony Swift

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INTERNATIONAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The UNICEF International Child Development Centre, often referred to as the *Innocenti Centre*, was established in Florence in 1988 to undertake and promote policy analysis and applied research; to provide a forum for international professional exchanges of experience; and to advocate and disseminate ideas and policies towards achieving the goals of child survival, protection and development. On a very selective basis, in areas of programme relevance, the Centre also provides training and capacity strengthening opportunities for UNICEF staff, concerned government officials, and the staff of other institutions with which UNICEF co-operates. The centre is housed within the *Spedale degli Innocenti*, a foundling hospital that has been serving abandoned or needy children since 1445. Designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, the *Spedale* is one of the outstanding architectural works of the early European Renaissance.

This publication is one of a series designed to bring to a non-specialist audience some aspects of the data and conclusions of technical case studies on *The Urban Child and Family in Especially Difficult Circumstances* undertaken in Brazil, India, Kenya, Italy, and Philippines under the auspices of the International Child Development Centre

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Anthony Swift is a writer on social and development issues, and co-author of *Broken Promise: the World of Endangered Children*. The views expressed in this publication are his own, and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.

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Note: Throughout this publication, the Cz $1 is converted at the rate of Cz $100 to US $1, as in October 1990.

PREFACE

THIS publication represents the second report, tailored to a non-specialist audience, resulting from an extensive case study on Brazil, one of five country case studies selected as the first project of the Urban Child Programme of the UNICEF International Child Development Centre (ICDC). Anthony Swift, a journalist and author of a recent book on children, *Broken Promise: the World of Endangered Children* (ISBN 0-340-50906-6) travelled to Brazil in October 1990 after having been briefed about the project by the ICDC Urban Programme team. He visited street children projects in Goiania, São Paolo, Rio de Janeiro and Recife. There he met with local government authorities, interviewed representatives of government and non-governmental organizations and spent time with street educators, children, and in urban communities. In Brasilia he discussed key issues with UNICEF officers and with selected researchers, thus acquainting himself with the initial results of the larger case study. A subsequent publication, designed for the professional and academic community, will report more fully on the results of this project in Brazil.

Responding to needs expressed by UNICEF Country Offices for understanding better the rising phenomenon of urban children in especially difficult circumstances, and for analyzing existing programme approaches and policies, this first ICDC urban child project launched studies in the Philippines, Brazil, India, Kenya and Italy. The first three countries were chosen for their innovative programmes on urban children and communities. Kenya exemplifies the growing problem of children living in the proliferating urban slums of Africa. Italy represents the project's "conscience" by reminding us that economic growth alone provides no assured safeguard for children. Children need to become much more central in the concerns of policy-makers before real progress can be made even in high-income settings.

Each technical country case study in this urban child project has selected a particular focus, which will be partly reflected in the reports for non-specialist audiences. The Philippines and Brazil studies, for example, focus explicitly on street children and how they relate to the community. Studies in India, Kenya and Italy focus more on disadvantaged children in the community and their relationship to work, education and the street. They all discuss the problems of institutionalization, and include a concern for the problems faced by young girls, highlighting differences from those faced by boys.

The first aim of the project is to develop a fuller understanding of the current problems facing children from birth till age 18, by analyzing various levels of causes for their abuse, abandonment, mistreatment and neglect. This objective required going back to the children's families and family histories to trace the paths of deterioration that led to their present situation at home, in the streets or in institutions. It also required understanding what led people within such families to move apart, lose family connections and become socially isolated. Which factors led to loss of self-esteem by parents and children and to the downward spirals of severe distress? Which combination of factors seemed to lead certain families or certain children in those families along this path?

Low income is obviously part of the story, especially in slums in developing countries. But poverty is compounded by a sense of powerlessness, of exclusion, of lack of a rightful place that accompanies the failure of some of their expectations and their lack of access to resources they need or consider their rights. Lack of employment, for example, even if other members of the family are earning enough for survival, may be extremely damaging to male self-esteem and lead to heavy drinking, drug addiction and the abuse of others. The effects on children of single-headed households with heavy loads of adult work and responsibilities vary according to the social context and the number of children involved. It may lead to the serious social isolation of single children in Western countries or to the obligation of children to start working at early ages in developing countries.

Families in cities obviously live in close contact with one another. The extent, however, to which they actually interact constructively and have their own effective support systems in moments of crisis, be they extended family or friends, makes a considerable difference in the quality of their life, and of the lives of their children. Community cohesiveness and community spirit provide an important safety-net for children. In many of today's cities, this safety-net is failing.

In order to establish fully the connection between urban children in especially difficult circumstances, their families and the problems they are encountering, one also needs to address the effects of social change on families and individuals. This ranges from understanding the qualitative deterioration of family ties in different parts of the world to identifying changes in expectations, personal roles and attitudes that are common in many countries. The project, furthermore, while not strictly a comparative analysis, has sought to identify and highlight common problems such as

overcrowding, pollution, the growing presence of drugs and AIDS, urban violence, national and international migration, and the lack of a sense of belonging, that transcend the North-South divide.

While analyzing the problems with a concern for identifying urban children, families and communities at greatest risk, the project has also been engaged in assessing existing, and considering possible, interventions aimed at reaching disadvantaged children more preventively in the future. One form of prevention is obviously to support and strengthen the families that most need help before their situation gets out of hand. An essential step may be to provide them, and their communities with a stronger voice both in identifying and helping to solve their own problems, but without letting the government off the hook. Pressure needs to be put on both national and municipal governments to enable them to realize the important advantages, politically and cost-wise, of supporting families for the sake of their children rather than having, later on, to institutionalize those same children and thus take full responsibility for their upbringing and often poor social reintegration.

The Philippines presents a good example of how an urban community participatory approach can offer preventive solutions by specifically involving children and families in difficult circumstances. Another preventive approach, illustrated by the Brazil case, is to identify the strategy that will facilitate a shift in the existing vision of the role of children in cities and in the nation as a whole.

Both Brazil and the Philippines illustrate the potentially creative interaction that can be established among children, families, communities and policy-makers – but which needs to be closely supported to avoid tokenism or misutilization. The Brazil case shows how the public image of children can be significantly transformed and subsequently translated within the government in concrete technical support. The case raises important issues of long-term implementation.

From the beginning the project has been concerned about children as full participating actors in these processes. This means involving them in the analysis of their own and their families' difficulties and needs, in discovering how they use their time and how they view and use the city where they live. By so doing one gives them a stronger sense of personal esteem and responsibility that helps them become effective citizens.

We hope this series of popular publications will help illustrate the real everyday lives of urban children and their families, showing not only the deteriorating quality of their lives but also the clarity of their observations, the ingenuity and courage with which they face the most adverse circumstances, and the potential for action that they offer to planners and policy-makers facing the dramatic demands of the cities of the future.

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April 1991

STREET LIFE IN BRAZIL

REINALDO Moreira is 18. His experience of street life spans much of the decade in which the "problem of the children" became the rallying point of a remarkable social movement in Brazil. The initial reaction of the authorities to the spillage of poor children onto city streets was to intern them in repressive boarding institutions. Innovative non-governmental programmes sprang up and united into a national political force, in which children themselves came to play a prominent role.

With the country's shift towards democracy and the election of a President declaring support for children's rights, the social movement has helped produce unprecedented legislative and constitutional change. The Child and Adolescent Statute redefines the status and rights of the child, overturns established public policy, and provides a framework in which government and the voluntary sector can together fashion better responses to the needs of the country's children.

Reinaldo's story reflects some of the problems the children face. In his case, effective assistance has come from a state programme that anticipated the new legislation, throwing out the old practices and adapting approaches pioneered by non-governmental organizations.

Reinaldo's story

"I have been on the streets since I was 10. We were seven children and my father died when I was four. My mother wasn't interested in me. I lived with my grandmother in Goiania. I liked her but I was too much of a responsibility for her. She would send me to my mother, who would send me to my aunts. They would beat me and I would run away to my grandmothers. And so it went on.

"I was nine when I ran away for the first time. I had already been hanging around on the street and I found the street children were not as violent as people said. They treated me well. I thought: 'They treat me much better than my aunts.' So I decided to stay, but I was hit by a car and the judge gave me back to my aunts. For three months I was well treated. But then everything began again. It was easy to go back to the streets – I already knew the way."

Reinaldo sports imposing Pierre Cardin sunglasses – not his own, borrowed. He holds himself erect as he tells his story and delivers himself in the fluent, forthright way of Brazilians, conscious of telling a piece of history. But he also makes sudden, compulsive movements, perhaps a legacy of taking drugs.

Why did he go on the streets when his brothers didn't?

"We are not different. A child mistreated at home only stays at home because he doesn't know the street children, he is afraid of them because of what people say. If he gets to know them he will feel much better staying on the streets than at home. When I went there, at the age I was then, it was a paradise compared to being with the family.

"The strongest thing was the friendship, the group. Nobody mistreated you, nobody beat you up, except the police when they arrested you. It was nice there. If I thought of going home it had to be to my grandmother's house. I could never think of going back to my mother's or aunts. When I was 11 my mother married a military policeman and this guy would scowl at me and threaten me, so I moved further away from my mother.

"I also liked the drugs. We had to rob to get them. We did pickpocketing and breaking into stores at night – sometimes even into drug stores. To me it was paradise. I didn't know the world.

"When I was 12, I met an 18-year-old prostitute in Goiania and I liked her. I broke into a house with her. She said the police were after me so she took me to São Paulo, hitching rides. Near São Paulo, she went off with some other guy and I was left alone. I stopped ripping off and got work in a five-star hotel, the St. Raphael. But after nine months I started feeling very lonely. So I got a ride to Brasilia. There I had no place to go. So the only people I made friends with were street children.

"At that time I was already very experienced so it was easy to be in this group. So I started all over again, sniffing glue, cocaine, shooting drugs and taking pills, all kinds. Robbery. I did this for three years. I was arrested many times. The police would beat me. Every time I would feel so much hate and anger in my heart that I wanted to do worse things. My fantasy was to have very strong weapons

"I also liked the drugs. We had to rob to get them. We did pickpocketing and breaking into stores"

to destroy the police. I didn't think. I was very much addicted and every time I was beaten up I became more angry at my life.

"At some point I moved into a friend's house – he had been a real bandit but he was a nice person. He had stopped robbing. His mother treated me very well – she had eight kids, though. But I got some experience in my life of not

using any drugs.

"When I was 15, I started feeling very lonely again and decided I had to come back to Goiania. My grandmother had moved away from her house. Again the only friends I could find were street thieves. So I moved back into the life of drugs and robbery. Some of the drugs were killing me but I really wanted them. I had stopped injecting – it was marijuana and pills and herbal mixtures. The next morning I remembered nothing. The pills make you speed – very nervous and fast.

"My experience on the street was one I don't wish for any child. I didn't know that before, but now I know"

"I was arrested several times. In the cell I would sing. I started to think about my life. I hadn't done that before. I had been in several government boarding homes. It was very difficult to help me there. I would fall into the drug thing and they would think I had no possible salvation. Then I would run away."

The turning point for Reinaldo came when the authorities in Goiania turned the old institution into an open access centre for street children.

"When this centre was opened up I started coming here. I got my ideas better organised. I was either going to drop out of the kind of life I was leading, or I was going to start it all over again. I had to make a choice.

"I was still doing robberies when I came here. The first director was a real good friend. I used to do a lot of robbing but she was very nice to me. They understood that I was under drug effects and really helped me to gain strength and I stopped sniffing glue and using drugs and just kept to cigarettes and marijuana. As time went by I said: I'm going to study now. I asked for school. They gave me school. I even stopped going to the street. Then they trusted me and got me a job in the bakery. I stayed there for a while – they liked me a lot there.

"Well it's no use working and studying and still using drugs. It would be very easy for me to go back to my old life – so I decided to stop taking marijuana. It was very difficult – it was so available. I also stopped smoking and even drinking beer for a while. That was difficult for my friends to accept. In the beginning they would fight me. But today they accept and respect me. Two or three try to follow me. I can now say that I won't go back into drugs."

One of the great advantages of the centre for Reinaldo is that it has helped him to make progress while staying close to the people he most values: the other adolescents – his "colleagues".

"We discuss everything together. I lived on the street for so long that these people are my brothers and family." Reinaldo also values the change in attitude of the staff. "Everyone here treats me so well today."

Another important advantage is the openness of the centre. "Being able to go to a school outside of here is very good. I go at night regularly, just like anybody else, and I am now at the end of the first grade."

Reinaldo is now one of a five-member representative council elected by the adolescents at the centre to represent their views to the administration. "Before any decision is made affecting us, the director of this place meets with us to decide what to do. In the past, for instance, the staff of other programmes would use the soccer pitch when they wanted. Now we manage its use."

Reinaldo has moved on from the bakery to a job as general office assistant for an independent street children's movement. "They trust me. I open the office and am responsible for it for much of the day.

"Right now we are working on the new Child and Adolescent Statute. We are getting all the children on the streets – working and street children – and those in private and state schools to come to the stadium for a special celebration. We are going to disseminate the statute to all the children."

What did he think of the statute?

"I think it will be very difficult for the rights in the statute to be complied with. If there is a change in government, it may not happen. But there is a lot of strength in demonstrations. If we make it, it will be great."

Looking back, Reinaldo sees the street "paradise" in a different light.

"My experience on the street was one I don't wish for any child. I didn't know that before, but now I know. I don't know anyone who hasn't been arrested. Many of my friends have died – been shot, or run over by cars. Others caught diseases on the streets. One is disabled, some are in detention, others are totally useless for life."

And what about his own future?

"Now I want to rent a room for myself and be independent. Many people say I am going to suffer. But I want to be a person who lives by himself, supports himself – I want to have food, clothes, buy my own things. It's an experience I must face – other people do, I can do it. I want to finish my studies. I want to get to know other places. It's not that I dislike Goiania – I like it. But I want to grow, improve. There will always be a little discrimination here so I want to start in a different place."

Does he see his grandmother still?

"Yes, but I haven't got the courage to go back home to my mother. I see my grandmother every two months. I like her very much – she was very good to me but it was too much for her. She just couldn't cope."

Poverty and family crisis

The crisis of unprotected children and adolescents in Brazil has developed within a process of rapid industrialization and, in the past decade, great economic instability.

The country is the world's eighth economic power in terms of GNP. But the distribution of wealth has been strongly skewed in favour of a powerful minority, leaving half the population with only 14 per cent of total income. Crises in the country's economy, to which the poor are

particularly vulnerable, are reinforced by a foreign debt of US$115 billion and marked by bouts of giddy inflation. The current inflation level is 18 per cent a month despite a programme of economic stringency.

In 1987, 41 per cent of families, including 30 million children, were living below the poverty line; the situation has since worsened. There are huge regional imbalances: in the north-east, the percentage rises to 63 and more than 16 million children are growing up in impoverishment. Though poverty in rural areas is more acute, the greatest concentrations of poor children are in the cities.

A problem defined as urban has roots in rural poverty, neglect, and the enforced, even violent, displacement of large numbers of families from the land. Between 1960 and 1980, 40 million farming and rural labouring families either abandoned or were expelled from their land, migrating to urban centres. Whereas 75 per cent of Brazilians lived in the rural areas 30 years ago, the same percentage now live in the cities.

Most of the rural migrants have joined the ranks of the urban poor, producing a rapid proliferation of squatter and slum communities, the more settled of which are known as *favelas*. They are still growing, but now at a slower rate. Valdemar de Oliveira Neto of the Luis Frere Centre in the country's north-east describes life in the urban slums as being for many people ". . . the final stage in a process of destruction of the very important ties in an individual's life – cultural, social and psychological ties. Often the family is destroyed, the community is destroyed, the relationship with the land in the interior has been destroyed. The whole process is very destructive."

Indian and black migrants from the north and interior can experience the transfer to the cities as a particularly severe onslaught on their cultural identity.

The impact of this process on children only began to be reflected in systematic studies at the very end of the 1970s. During the 1980s, an increasing preoccupation with street children has produced more academic research into their predicament. But according to Irma and Irene Rizzini, of CESME at Santa Úrsula University in Rio de Janeiro, there has been a conspicuous absence of studies of rural children. Irene Rizzini offers as explanation the fact that children in the rural areas present no problem to the rest of society.

"We know from the statistics that the situation of working children in rural areas is more terrible than in the cities. But there, children are part of production – working with their families, though gaining no salaries or education. In the cities they become a problem – they are out in the community and not in their families any more. They become violent and criminalized. Some are killed. People are anxious about what they will do when they grow up."

In rural areas children work with their families. In the cities they are out in the community and become a problem

Both the experience of community workers and academic studies show that the majority of children on the streets in Brazil are workers and see themselves that way. They help their mothers and siblings by following one of the common street occupations: petty trading, paper-picking, car washing and watching, shoe shining, or begging. Many return to their families at night, or at least

with some frequency, and hand over much of their earnings. The numbers of children dislocated from their families and living, as Reinaldo did, in the sub-culture of the street is a minority, though a considerable and highly visible one.

While there are no accurate numbers, relevant statistics indicate the scale of the problem. As already noted, at least 41 per cent of Brazilian families live below the poverty line. Currently some 3,800,000 children between the ages of 10 and 17 are not in school; of these, 14 per cent neither work nor have household responsibilities.

The families of children on the streets

Despite a considerable number of studies of children on the street, there has been no academic inquiry into why some children either abandon, or are abandoned by, their families, or take up formal or informal employment. A case study undertaken by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Rio de Janeiro (FLACSO) for UNICEF as part of a five-country examination of the Urban Child and Family in Especially Difficult Circumstances is a first step in remedying this situation.

The quantitative part of the FLACSO/UNICEF study, conducted by sociologist Alda Alves in the city of Goiania, distinguishes between children who *live* on the streets and have very little or no contact with their families: "street children"; and children who *work* on the streets: "working children". The latter are categorized by occupation, and a further distinction made between those who work as market porters and bus terminal traders, and those who wash cars, shine shoes and collect paper. The latter are seen as leading a lifestyle akin to "street children" and were therefore identified as "borderline".

The study identified 42 children living on the streets and 86 in street occupations, both in the city centre and in the suburbs. The researchers traced their families to secure responses to questionnaires by children and parents.

All of the families were poor, with an average monthly income of around Cz$2,500 (US$25) per head – half the monthly minimum wage; all also lived in very cramped conditions, with a third living in less than 20 square metres.

The number of mothers who had never had a stable relationship was higher among the families of street and borderline children

The study found that the families of "street children" had the highest number of illiterate members and members without any schooling; and the greatest number of unemployed fathers and male siblings who had never worked. These families were generally smaller than those of "working children" – a fact explained by there usually being more than one child living on the streets.

Three quarters of all the families interviewed were migrants. Among those of the "borderline" group, all were migrant and among those of the "street children", 73 per cent. Unemployment was higher among migrant than non-migrant families.

The study found that the large majority of the mothers had been or were in stable relationships with their partners and 51 per cent were married; but the number of mothers who had never had a stable relationship was higher among those of the "street" and "borderline" children. Where children were from broken families, in most cases the head of family was a single mother.

In the families of "working children", the father was generally the main breadwinner; in those of "street children", the mother. Here again the "borderline" workers were closer to the profile of the "street children".

While few of the street children contributed anything to their families, most working children were regular contributors, accounting for up to 30 per cent of family income.

The child and family relationships

Wilson Moura, who conducted psycho-social aspects of the FLACSO/UNICEF study, interviewing families in-depth, considers the contributions of working children to their families to be expressions of solidarity. Children saw themselves as helping their families or helping their mothers.

The working children in the study sample were aged from six to 18 but in many poor families children start generating income from as young as four. "This enables families to maintain their structure – without it the children of millions of impoverished families would be street children. The link is that they consider themselves stronger as a family," says Moura. Child workers who do not contribute from their earnings to their families don't feel solidarity, and are most likely to become "street children". But the pooling of income is just one expression of solidarity – "it is the fruit of several investments – personal, emotional and material".

It is worth noting that the feeling of solidarity of some children with the family can withstand the most adverse onslaughts of poverty. As the economic crisis in Brazil bites ever deeper, street educators in Rio are seeing an increasing number of whole families living on the streets. Such is the case of Margaret and her family (see Case I) who could not afford even the most miserable slum house.

In looking at relationships within families, the FLACSO/UNICEF study detected a lack of structure in many of the families of street children, as well as those in borderline occupations.

In both working and street children's families, the mother was seen as the most important member of the family; in most street children families the mothers made all the decisions. Generally the mother was seen by the children as the person they could trust most, talk to most, rely on most to help them, whereas fathers were seen as neither talking with their children, nor helping them, nor

Case I:
Margaret – Living on the streets

Margaret's family took to the streets of Rio de Janeiro 10 years ago after her father left home. "My mother had no way to support us. We were four girls. We sold sweets on the streets. One day we didn't have enough money to get home and my mother decided we should sleep where we were. We stayed for a while to make more money, and when we did go home we found the house broken into. We stayed on the streets after that.

"Then my mother gave birth on the streets to another girl. She didn't take care of herself in the 40 days after the birth and got a problem in her head. She went away with the baby for three years leaving me to look after my younger sisters. Then she came back to us."

Margaret experienced many of the hazards of street life, including the insults of passers-by, arrest, violence and extortion at the hands of the police. She describes street life as an environment of violence. "Being hungry is violent, sleeping on the cold ground, prejudice from society – there are many ways a child can be subjected to violence. On the street I would approach a person to sell sweets and they would spit at me. Not being able to fight back on the street, that is violence. The fact that I'm black made it worse." She resorted to prostitution: "I had to fight to support my younger sisters and there is always a man offering money for sex".

Despite her mother's prolonged absence she ascribes having been spared some of the worst experiences of street life to her mother's presence. "Some colleagues of mine were raped by the police. It never happened to me because I am not a street girl. The best thing is to be next to your mother. We can be hungry or cold but if we're near our mother we are protected.

"The worst things happen to children whose mothers are far away or who have no mother. Many children on the street don't even have mothers – their mothers have died. They leave home to find a way to help a hungry brother or sister – they try to get money in the street, and then they become street kids."

Margaret was six when her family took to the streets. At 12 she learned about a street programme, the Associação Beneficente São Martinho, part of the Catholic Church's Pastoral of the Minors. "I discovered there was a group which gave lunch at the cathedral. Then I started to get along with the people from the Pastoral. They decided to put me in the course of preparation for the working world. I wanted to be helped. I struggled to win their attention and assistance. On the streets there was nothing nice. I only got to know what nice was when I got to know São Martinho."

Margaret prospered in the programme. Now at 16 she is training to work with street children and has been helped to acquire a slum house, where she lives with her mother and sisters.

to be trusted and as punishing them a lot.

The study probed the children's relationship not only with parents, but with siblings, neighbours and other children. Street children had more difficulties in relating in general but the relationship with the father was the most problematical. Nine out of the 42 street children questioned thought their father was to be trusted.

In a culture where the father traditionally has a very prominent and powerful family role and is an important role model, fathers of street children were in many cases absent and even unknown to the child. Where the father was part of the household he was likely to be unemployed and never to have worked, also to be illiterate. Not only was he mistrusted but even despised by the child.

A social worker attributes the failure of fathers to attract their children's esteem to the demoralization associated with the impact of urban poverty on traditional family roles and relationships. The father's status as the main breadwinner and head of the family may be lost as he finds himself under- or unemployed or working in the insecure and poorly-paid informal market. He works long hours but can afford little. The wife also has to go out to work. Both may travel long distances to work, leaving the children unprotected and unsupervised. Unable to fulfil his responsibilities the man may abandon the home, increasing the need for the children to contribute to the family income.

The vulnerability of the families of the street children was further indicated in the study by their listing as their priority concerns security, relationships in the family and health, whereas the families of working children cited the more positive concerns of education and work.

The families of the street children generally had no less access to education, in terms of the availability of school places, or to work. It seems, rather, that they did not see education or work as means to overcome their difficulties. It is commonly assumed that street children abandon school when they go to the streets, but all the children in the study who took to the streets were already out of school by the time they did so.

THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

THE growth in the numbers of children living or working on the street reflect the longstanding failure of Brazilian social policies to serve the poor.

Policies to assist children and adolescents introduced during this century fall into two main groups. One comprises the basic social services of health and education, which it was the duty of the state to provide, and to which all children should have had right of access.

In fact a great number of children in the urban peripheries and the poorest rural areas have always been excluded from their benefits. The failure was not just that of parents failing to send their children to school. Many poor, particularly poor migrant, children were denied admission to school on grounds such as not having birth certificates (for which a fee had to be paid), or not applying at the official starting age.

The second type of social policy dealt with poor citizens not as having rights but as being deserving of charity and compassion from the dominant élites. The delivery of this compensatory assistance was highly centralized and unrelated to local needs. It was often used to manipulate political support and reward political loyalty.

The shortcomings of service provision was reflected in high infant mortality and child malnutrition rates. In the mid-1970s, when the economy was growing, 53 per cent of Brazilian children suffered some form of malnutrition. In the north-east, the levels reached 61 per cent in the cities and 71 per cent in the rural areas, 22 per cent of the latter in moderate or severe form.

The reverse side of the coin of inadequate compensatory policies was a harsh repression of poor children and adolescents whose behaviour was seen as divergent from legal and moral standards. The poor, grossly exploited and left to survive on the margins of the economy, were offered token social assistance. Anyone, including children, who rebelled, or resorted to crime was severely punished.

Cold charity: the years of oppression

Violence towards poor children in Brazil has not been limited to the state; it has been liberally meted out by anyone who has felt threatened by them.

During the years of military rule between 1965 and 1985, two laws were elaborated concerning the rights of children and youth, underpinning the twin approaches of assistance and repression. The first, enforcing the National Policy for Child Welfare, provided for assistance to needy children and was very repressive in relation to delinquent adolescents. And in 1979, the International Year of the Child, the Minors' Code was enforced, completing the legal framework for the National Policy of Child Welfare. The laws regarded children not as people, nor as citizens, but as objects of intervention on the part of the state.

The structure for dealing with children over the age of seven and who were in irregular circumstances – anything from being abandoned to committing homicide – was a central policy-making body know as FUNABEM (the National Foundation for Children's Welfare). In turn, FUNABEM funded and dictated the practices of state-level foundations called FEBEM. To complicate matters FUNABEM also ran its own institutions in some places, notably in Rio de Janeiro.

Identification of children in irregular circumstances fell largely to the police, although any adult could deliver a child to FEBEM, and decisions over their fate were made by children's judges. The outcome was wholesale classification of unprotected children according to a scale of negatives – labelling them as needy, abandoned, offenders, exhibiting either mild or severe anti-social behaviour – and their consignment to places of compulsory internment.

Referred to as boarding schools, these institutions were often barrack-like, underfunded, lacking in basic equipment and poorly staffed. They rapidly developed a reputation for the systematic violation of human rights, and the criminalization of children.

The whole system was inherently corrupt and violent towards the child. Police officers arresting children often beat and even tortured them, and children were commonly held temporarily in cells with adults. Inefficient processing of their cases resulted in their being held in antiquated, overcrowded, prison-like screening centres, in some cases for as long as a year or more. They had no legal or other representation. Many adolescents – usually the more adventurous or street-wise – escaped or bribed their way to freedom, only to be picked up in the streets again at some later date. Rising levels of criminality were met with increasing public intolerance and violence towards street

The outcome was wholesale classification of unprotected children according to a scale of negatives

children, and the emergence of extermination groups.

The killing of children and adolescents became the focus of numerous independent studies in the country in 1988. A year earlier a public radio station in São Paulo broadcast an item in which shooting was recommended as a solution to the threat posed by street children. Killings were – and continue to be – attributed to so-called "justice committees" – groups variously said to be composed of off-duty policemen or security guards working for local businessmen in a bid to contain crime levels.

In 1988 João de Deus do Nascimento, a street educator in a São Paulo suburb, said one of his greatest concerns was to get a safe house where children on the death lists of local justice committees could be housed until the heat had worn off. Whereas he usually did everything to keep a child out of a FEBEM institution, on occasion he was all too keen to leave one inside, for reasons of safety.

Children have also been shot by the police investigating offences, as well as killed by gangs involving them in drugs-running. A criminalized boy of 13 interviewed in 1988 responded to the question of what he thought he would be doing in 10 years' time by saying matter-of-factly: "I think I will be dead". Within months he very nearly did die in a gang attack upon his home. Another boy was later shot dead by police, who caught him in the act of stealing a coconut from a palm tree.

The low value placed on the lives of children of the poor has historical roots in attitudes towards African slaves, according to Ivanir Dos Santos, executive secretary of the human rights organization, the Centre of Co-ordination of Marginalized Peoples (CEAP). "There were cases of slave owners cutting umbilical cords and letting children die so that the mothers could be hired out as wet-nurses," he says, adding: "The majority of children dying now are black."

People who work with street children say that the children come to identify strongly with the violence they experience. A simple illustration: the emblem used on the squad cars of one city police force – bayonetted rifles rammed diagonally through a human skull – was imitated in the graffiti of street children on institutional walls.

Despite the reputation of FEBEMs, many children

Killings were – and continue to be – attributed to so-called "justice committees"

were lodged in them at the insistence not of the courts but of their own parents. Irene Rizzini worked for six years in public and private institutions for children and adolescents in Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s. "I saw mothers – desperate mothers – saying 'I can't give my child food or milk, please take her. Even if it is not so good, it's better than being with me.' There were also those who tried to take their children in because they could not control them, but

those children would run away. So we are talking about poor children who, by and large, were in institutions because parents could not take care of them."

In 1987, 680,000 children and adolescents were in the care of entities linked to FUNABEM.

The growth of alternatives

From the end of the 1970s, the failure of the programmes of the military regime saw the rapid development of a wide variety of non-governmental projects trying to assist the growing numbers of children jostling for a living on the streets.

The early 1980s brought change. The regime began to show signs of weakness. In the urban peripheries and poor rural areas many movements arose around the issues of land, housing and women's rights. In the unions, which were controlled by the military regime, real opposition started to appear. The middle and intellectual layers of society called for democratic freedoms and a national constituent assembly.

Those working on behalf of women and children were equally affected by the atmosphere of change. Movements for day-care centres, together with the pastoral movement in the Catholic Church and in grassroots church and other communities, started focusing on the child as a standard bearer for their struggle.

The pioneers of alternative programmes were motivated by alternative value systems – systems diametrically opposed to the tacit acceptance of poverty and human suffering. Their motivation differed also from that of many professional workers who pursue careers social caring; and to the social engineers who approach child criminality and child labour as wrinkles to be ironed out of the prevailing system.

Many are inspired by a vision of an alternative society, one in which human life has a value in itself and justice and compassion are fundamental guiding principles, they derive their sense of purpose by actively applying such principles in their everyday lives. Their philosophy is, in a non-violent sense, revolutionary. Street educator João de Deus refers to his "militant life", indicating a life choice related to the poverty in his country, of which his concern for and work with endangered children is a central expression.

The work of these pioneers is essentially experiential and non-dogmatic. It counters children's feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness by offering a sustained experience of trust and friendship. It also helps the child to see that the experience of poverty, far from being shameful, can be a valuable insight into the nature of a society that chooses to present itself through glittering images of material success. A street child in an alternative programme in Rio, asked whether there was anything he valued about street life, replied: "Yes, the suffering we go through on the street. When I am an adult I will know about that suffering."

Another key component is to give the children the experience of being able to work in solidarity with others to change society for the better. It is a kind of alchemy, which offers to transform deprivation into an advantage, despair into hope and the role of victim into that of activist against injustice.

It is this revolutionary perspective that explains the thoughtfulness, imaginativeness, courage and selflessness of much of the pioneers' work and is almost certainly as crucial to their success as any technique they may employ. Rudimentary as this analysis is, it has obvious relevance to attempts to apply what are seen as the lessons of the alternative programmes on a broader scale.

Many of the pioneers within the popular movement are progressive activists within the churches, particularly the Catholic Church, acting under the umbrella of the Children's Pastoral. But there are also many secular community activists with political or other allegiances. Some are simply concerned individuals.

It helps the child to see that the experience of poverty can be a valuable insight into the nature of society

Sister Adma Cassab Fadel, Roberto José dos Santos and others started the "Meet The Street Children" Programme of the Benevolent Association of São Martinho

in Rio de Janeiro after despairing of working within FUNABEM institutions. "There was nothing we could do there," said Sister Adma, who had joined FUNABEM as a volunteer.

The children in the institution were aged between 13 and 18. "Some were there for trivial offences, like throwing stones on the road, and they were mixed up with others who had committed serious crimes. The building was designed for 200 children but never had less that 500. There was no educational programme. They were spanked constantly.

"In talking to the children, I could see the reference point was the street. None talked of their homes and only one spoke of his parents. So I realized they had a different reality from those in the middle and upper-class schools I had always worked in. We could also see our place was the street, if only to ensure that these children wouldn't come into the institution we had just left."

To begin with, Sister Adma and her colleagues started informally approaching street children in the city centre, with no particular plan or commitment to forming an organization. "We were just worried about there being so many abandoned children. Having created a link with them we felt we couldn't abandon them."

Many of the alternative projects, particularly those responding to street children, started in this very low key, attentive way. Structures created by adults who assumed they knew best having failed, alternative projects started cautiously by seeking ways to understand and work outwards from the child's reality, securing his or her active participation in identifying what was good and bad and developing optional ways forward, in a process intended to be empowering. Only after three years of building a relationship with children on the street did the São Martinho programme begin to develop training and educational programmes.

The approach of the alternative programmes was accomplished through the development of the role of the street educator, based on the teachings of Paulo Freire. "The educator at FUNABEM was the owner of knowledge," says street educator João de Deus. "He taught children what to do and how to do it. But the street educator works together with the child. It is a growing process in which there is an exchange of knowledge, a mutual learning and growing together in a way that liberates the educator as a human being and citizen and also the child."

The street educator tries to recognize what is of value in the child's existing reality, and helps him to discover his or her own moral and behavioural codes. The educator does not introduce sudden change into street children's lives. When the child is no longer satisfied with what he is doing, he is motivated to ask for other activities.

Affirmation is not restricted to the child's capabilities. It is also used to encourage the child to explore his or her general experience, including family and street experience. Many street children in Brazil are black and their cultural identity eclipsed by prejudice and the dominant consumer culture of the city. João de Deus, originally a migrant from the rural north, says: "In the city we have to change our identity, renounce our customs and habits. Here we live a form of American culture, but our spirit is in our own culture. Here the food is different, the music is different, the way of talking is different. We refer to ourselves as foreigners in our own country". He encourages children to explore their cultural origins, to identify with past struggles and achievements, to learn *capoeira* – a dramatic form of dance brought by the slaves from Africa. By contrast, a worker who tried to introduce *capoeira* into a government institution in the mid-1980s was seen as doing something subversive.

> *"In talking to the children, I could see the reference point was the street. None talked of home and only one spoke of his parents"*

The São Martinho "Meet the Street Children" programme's first addition to its street work was to provide a cafeteria for children in the crypt of the Cathedral in Rio's city centre. It later established an open access day-centre with a flexible function. The centre is physically structured so that children gain progressive access to its facilities as they move away from the street-child identity. On an upper floor some education and preparation-for-work activities are offered and only children who have committed themselves to an activity have access to the floor. Each step in the programme is very much at the child's instigation; even the first step to make use of the centre.

"Any child can come into this centre," says Roberto José dos Santos. "But the first impulse of the educator is not to bring the child here. Usually the child discovers this place through other children. Through the street educator, the child experiences a different kind of relationship than what has been available to him. Without the educators saying as much, he begins to discover that the street is not so good for him."

But what do children, who have experienced only rejection and violence from the adult world, make of this contradiction of a street educator trying to befriend them?

"It is long-term work, with the child constantly measuring our capacity to love him truly and testing us in every way he can. First of all he tries our patience – we've had children throwing stones at our car because they say we live off them. They test us, to see if we are clear about the limits we set. Particularly in relation to the police the children are vigilant. By not showing fear or running away, the educator proves to the child that he wants to have a real friendship, different from the other relationships he has had.

"When the child comes to the centre he gets a lot of motivation to start doing other activities. It's the same process that took him to the streets but in reverse. Though

Case II:
Ana – The Passage House

When Ana Vasconcelos first made contact with girls living by prostitution, she found that talking to them on the street in the usual manner of street educators was very difficult "because of the violence of the situation".

The girls would press her for food. "I realized it was very hard to talk when you are hungry. Passers-by would interrupt us to demand rudely, 'Why are you talking to such girls?'

"The girls would say, 'We are all going to die and go to hell.' 'And why,' I would ask, 'are you going to hell?' They replied, 'Because this is the passage to hell. We all are going to hell because we are all bad.' So I suggested we construct a place from where they might go to heaven. Going to heaven means to come back to ourselves, reconstruct ourselves. I said, 'Let's construct our own internal feeling which allows us to go to heaven instead of hell.' They wanted to try. That was the beginning of the Passage House."

Like other open access centres, the Passage House is for some a place of temporary respite from the street, while for others it is the beginning of transition away from street life. Rules are devised with the children's participation and include a ban on bringing any glue, drugs or knives into the House. Food is provided but the girls cook for themselves and do the cleaning. Education is available and there is support, training and placement in a community house in one of the poor areas for those who want to leave street life.

Above all the Passage House creates an opportunity for the girls to reflect and start talking about their lives.

"They don't have to give up street life. But continuity is emphasized – the teacher tries to emphasize the value of finishing what you start. The girls need limits – even limits not to kill themselves.

"Some girls don't even know their physical size. They sprawl, they feel like water spreading over the seats. At first they are very provocative and aggressive. There may be a confrontation – often that is when the real work can begin; it depends on the skill of the educator. Slowly they come to trust us but then they often regress – they suck their thumbs, some wet their beds, they sit in foetal positions and may start talking like babies."

The Passage House provides opportunity for the girls to work through their experience and gain insight into what has happened to them – both in terms of their personal journey and the identity foisted up them by society. "We help the girls transfer guilt from themselves. They are in difficulties because the government does little for children. They understand that prostitution is mostly exploitation.

"If you ask me how many girls really change their thinking in the sense of realising citizenship, it is very few but our programme is very young," says Ana Vasconcelos. "Last year we had 18 girls who really changed and who are now workers. We are working with 60 in an intensive way. Many just come to us for information. Every girl gets something. They learn to take better care of their health, they learn about their bodies, about pregnancy, about safety – we advise them to sleep in groups, not alone. So all the girls change a bit. We believe most of them can change – 70 per cent could, if we had more resources.

"The others – generally the older ones of 17 or 19 – will never become revolutionary women in society. But they will behave differently towards their daughters."

he can come and go as he wants, it's not freedom he finds in our centre because the moment he starts being in a space like this he starts having limitations. He has to be together with others, so his freedom has the limitations of respecting others' freedoms.

"The main attraction is that he is more recognized as a human being here. He left home for the freedom of the streets but, because he lacks the means to buy things, he is looked upon with mistrust by the police and the population in general. All doors in the city are closed to him, except this one. It is a contradiction and we tell the children that it really is a contradiction. As long as they don't feel rejected, they perceive that within this society there are people who are not satisfied with the situation and who try to work, in a non-conformist way, with the rejection and marginalization they suffer, to fight with them against the status quo.

"When we close our centre at the end of the day it is difficult for many of them to go back to the street. I think that has to do with emotional support and that within this space we guarantee for them the basic rights of a child."

Working with street girls

Ana Vasconcelos runs The Passage House, a centre for girls on streets in Recife (see Case II.) She started the work after she realized that street girls were being left out because they were regarded as too difficult to work with. Like Sister Adma, she began by going to the street "to meet the girls and understand what they wanted to say".

For boys, she suggests, taking to the streets is not in odds with all the values associated with masculinity. Boys are meant to be adventurous, and there are plenty of Rambo-like role models in popular fiction for them to

identify with. For the girls, brought up in a society that offers contrasting images of the home-orientated saint and morally destitute whore, taking to the streets is an annihilation of cultural positives. This leaves them with an even lower self-esteem than the boys. In Reçife, girls are excluded from the boys' gangs and exposed to abuse by them. They also see each other as rivals and often clash violently, so are particularly vulnerable.

"They don't know who they are," says Ana. "They repeat the judgements of others. They say, 'We are bad, we are guilty, people don't like us.' So the first thing was to help them to be in touch with what they are saying. I would tell them: "What you are saying? Why are you bad? Look at that boy – he does the same things as you but you don't think him bad. Why not?'"

Ana believes the task of the girls in reconstructing their identity is often complicated by a failure in the relationship between mother and child. This may have been achieved through the oppression of the mother's own mother and grandmother, leaving her identity crushed and defensive. More immediately the failure may be the result of the girl being abandoned or placed in residential domestic work at a young age.

"When the girls at The Passage House draw houses they always draw mothers in the house," says Ana. "One girl draws her mother as a woman without a head, directly symbolising the lack of love, identity, reciprocity. This girl has never met her mother. She looks for her mother in anybody who comes close to her." Ana sees mothers like this girl's as abandoning them in a particular way. "The mother did not help the daughter understand what it means to be a woman. But the mother could not do that because she also didn't know – she was as lost and abandoned as the girl, so she had nothing to teach her.

"So the problem is abandonment – even if you have food or a home you can be abandoned. You can be lost because nobody has helped you find out who you are, what your culture is, or what society is.'" Ana believes that migration can greatly increase the identity crisis of girls, who tend to be more restricted to the home and have nothing to grasp on to.

Even if you have food or a home you can be abandoned. You can be lost because nobody has helped you find out who you are

"Even though at some level the girls understand that their mothers are also lost and have no identity, they tend to regard them as the bad mother who didn't help or teach them anything. They forget the bad mother and fantasize a good mother – one that never abandons their daughters, one that is able to help them to grow up. They live the fantasy of meeting this mother in some way – only this mother is going to give them back to themselves. 'I need

to meet my mother so I will know who I am – because I can only know who I am if my mother teaches me who I am'."

In contrast to the old centrally-planned state programme for children on the street, the alternative non-governmental projects demonstrated the scope for a variety of interventions in the child's trajectory from family to street. Some tried to establish alternative school and health programmes, or worked with very violent children in the slums, or offered support to vulnerable families to stem the flow of children to the workplace and the streets.

> *"We try to hold the flood right at the spring, rather than where the river flows into the sea"*

Some focused on trying to create work opportunities for children. Some chose to work at the point of crisis – with the child already on the street and separated from his or her family.

João de Deus and his wife Gildete have for many years lived and worked in a peripheral area of São Paulo with the kind of children who would normally be candidates for the street. "We try to hold the flood right at the spring, rather than where the river flows into the sea and you can't hold it," says João.

The children in his Community Association of Street Girls and Boys elect office bearers from among themselves and hold regular meetings to discuss issues that bear directly on their daily lives – anything from organizing recreational activities to violence in the home, criminality, work, drugs, the killing of children – and they establish policies and identify courses of action. They have held demonstrations in the city centre against the killing of children. They have also gone on camping trips into the countryside.

The learning process

With most of the children not attending school – or as João would put it, having voted with their feet against official education – they have instead turned to their own slum environment as their classroom, exploring its origins and what goes on in it.

The aim of this learning process is to replace disdain with understanding, and engender in the child an identification with the rest of community. Reaction against the environment yields to the possibility of working within it for change. Changed attitudes and behaviour in the children in turn make possible changes in community attitudes towards them.

While some alternative programmes seek to change the perspective of the child or adolescent, others have tried to mobilize the community around parental concern for their children as the main instrument of change.

A community schools programme in Reçife set out not to substitute for government education but to equip children for admission to state schools. The schools are located in the *favelas*, making attendance easier. The teachers are from the communities, and are given special training by the programme. Their approach is far more reaffirming of the child than that usually found in government schools. Parental and community involvement is actively encouraged. There are outings, events and parties.

One basic hallmark of successful programmes is that children seek them out and introduce other children to them. Margaret, for example, (see Case I) was introduced by another child to the São Martinho Meet the Street Children Project. She heard of the lunch programme at the Cathedral and went along.

A teacher from the alternative schools in Reçife talked of the children's demand for her programme. If she was late for school, the children would come to her home asking, "What's wrong? Is there no school today?" and insist she go with them.

Theresa Penna Firme, a psychologist and educationalist, tells a story that suggests a wide identification of street children with alternative programmes. Some children she had got into conversation with in the centre of Rio asked her where she was going. She said 'The bus terminal', and a boy expressed fear that she might be robbed by other children there.

"So I asked, 'What can I do?' Another boy was called over for his advice. He says, 'Just say you are from the from the Pastoral. Then they won't do anything.' For me that was the best indicator of how he valued the programme.

"Anyway nothing happened to me in Rio. But in São Paulo, some time later, a young boy came to steal my watch. So I said to him, 'Hey how are you? I am from the Pastoral.' He said: 'Oh really?' and threw his arms around me and hugged me."

An important part of the work of the alternative programmes has been to find ways to equip children to earn a living, as an alternative to criminality rather than as an end in itself. Even with training, many youngsters still face a future of underemployment, a replay of the experience of their own parents. The aim is rather to give the children a safer basis for survival so that they can gain an opportunity to develop their role as citizens who, having experienced the failure of society, can work to change it. They are emancipated not so much in terms of a personal escape from poverty but in becoming part of a broad effort to defeat poverty. "Once children have an understanding of the values of life they have no option but to engage in the effort to transform society," says Roberto José dos Santos.

"We are not out to integrate the child; we try to socialize the children -- within a process of struggle, self–esteem, and value for the things he has – to have a critical understanding of the society, and believe that he can work effectively for change," says Roberto.

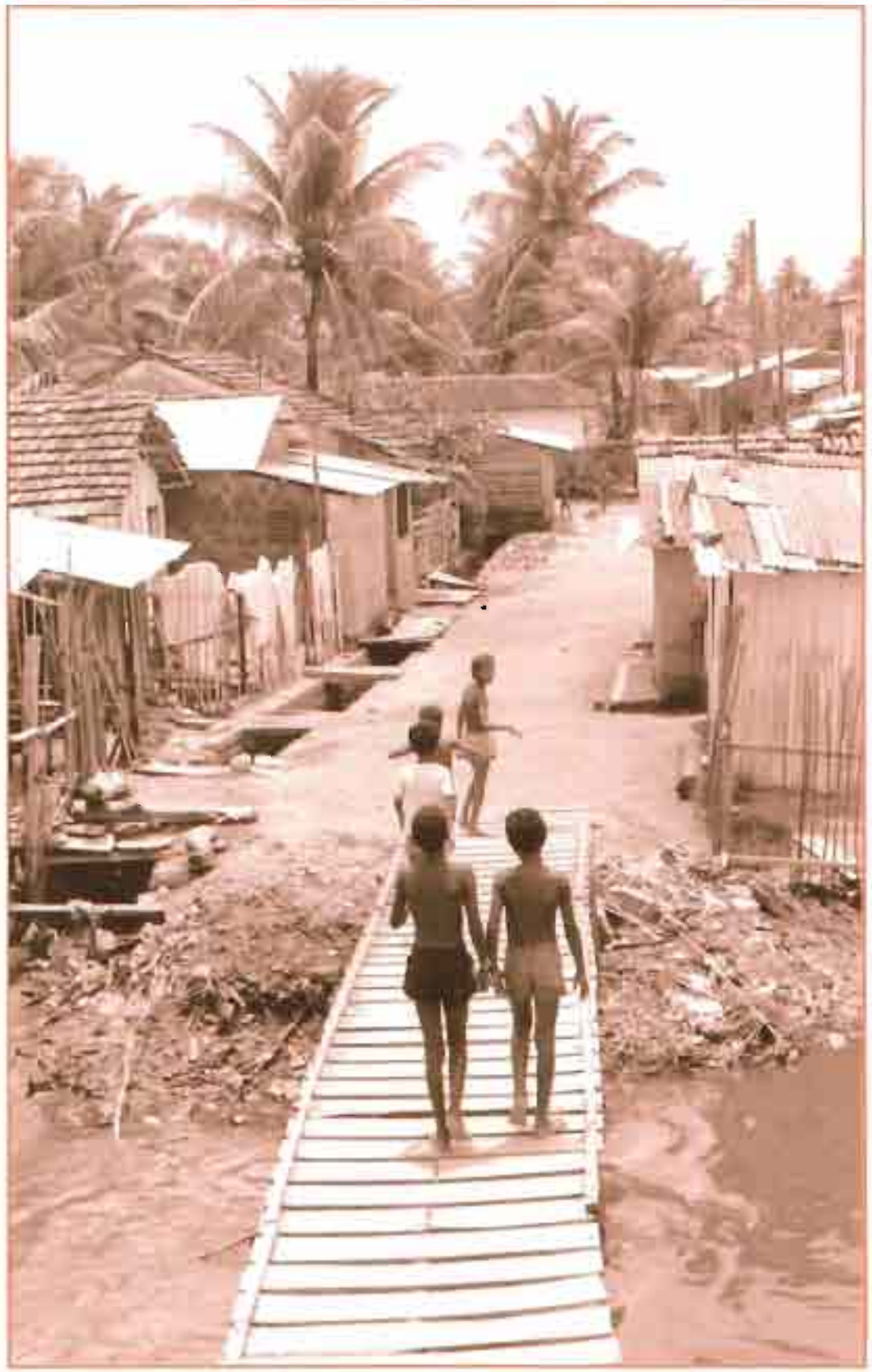
Though at the outset alternative programmes were localized, long-term and intensive in character, they became affiliated to movements such as the Minors' Pastoral and the National Movement of Street Boys and

Girls. They began to enjoy public representation and have enabled children themselves to increase the scope of their social action, with telling consequences in the push for constitutional and statutory reform.

In the 1980s the alternative programmes and the movement that grew out of them not only pioneered new approaches to responding to deprived children but they had a major impact on public opinion.

"One of their great successes was to demonstrate that these kids are susceptible to change in the right direction," says Theresa Penna Firme. "They also pose a challenge to the government school system – by showing what it does and fails to do by excluding children. These programmes have mobilized society very forcefully and shown them that there are children in very bad situations and that something has to be done about it."

Nevertheless, in themselves they do not and cannot constitute an answer. "I think of the non-governmental programmes as candle-points of illumination in the dark," says Ana Vasconcelos. "We can get big results because we work with small groups." If the problem of the children is to be fully tackled, the political and economic circumstances that promote children's dislocation from their families must change. For that, government commitment is needed.



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: FROM MINORS TO CITIZENS

IN the 1979 review of policies – which produced the Minors' Code – the military government had counted on co-operation from UNICEF in programmatic action.

However, the proposed programme of assistance was repudiated by the popular organizations. This rebuff, together with the increasingly apparent failure of centralized programming in a country as complex as Brazil and the successes of alternative projects, prompted UNICEF to assume the role of mediator. Working closely with FUNABEM, UNICEF helped elaborate an "Alternatives for Street Children" Project. The aim of the project was to identify, register, survey, and disseminate the work of successful community-based activities so that existing government programmes could be improved and new ones elaborated.

This could be no easy process. At the time there was little love lost and much suspicion between the authorities and community organizations. "People who wanted to do social and educational work with children, of a kind that was emancipating and based on the notion of citizenship and rights, felt that they had to work in spite of and not because of the law," says Antonio Carlos Gomes da Costa, formerly a manager of public policy and now UNICEF's National Project Officer. But the military regime, running out of conviction and ideas, was beginning to show some tolerance to the stirrings of the popular movement.

Through the Alternatives for Street Children Project, UNICEF gained the government's go-ahead to work with the popular movement. This made it easier for progressive people within the government to learn from the new approaches. Reservations on the part of the popular organizations included reluctance to be entered in a central register to which the military authorities would have access. There were also fears that the ultimate outcome of the project would be one of the government relying on community initiatives as a substitute for developing an effective programme of its own.

UNICEF maintained close contact with the Catholic hierarchy, which was in increasingly open opposition to the dictatorship. This contact grew and embraced other fields of activity, allaying misapprehensions and offering reassurance to the popular organizations that they could trust UNICEF and the Project.

The beginning of a process

Despite difficulties in the period 1982–84, many promising programmes were identified. Their most attractive features were their democratic style of management; their capacity to respond to needs; their low costs compared to the government's programme; and their ability to mobilize local communities for broader changes than mere assistance to the immediate needs of children.

An important achievement was the first meeting of Alternative Communal Assistance to Children in Latin America, an event UNICEF promoted and financed. "The meeting provided the first overview of the network of community organizations working for street children. It was reported widely in the media, and helped make alternative programmes for street children a household concept throughout the country," says Antonio Carlos.

Another important upshot of the meeting was the emergence of a group of religious and community leaders involved in successful programmes. These were an important resource for anyone wanting to work with children and received many invitations to give talks throughout the country.

During this phase the word "minors" began to be dropped from the activist terminology in favour of the phrase "street children".

"The street child assumed a symbolic dimension because the prescence of boys and girls on the street allowed people to question the living conditions of people in the urban peripheries, and this opened up other questions relating to children working in the rural areas. The "street child" began to be seen as a symbol of the contradictions within, and a condemnation of, the Brazilian development model," says Antonio Carlos.

The years 1984–86, with the military withdrawing from government in 1985, saw a general opening up of discussion about unprotected children and a stronger mobilization of the organizations working with them. The

During this phase the word "minors" began to be dropped in favour of the phrase "street children".

emerging leaders were securely linked with grass-roots communities and eager to build up an ability to represent their interests at national level. With its greater experience of power structures and processes, UNICEF provided valuable counselling.

The popular programmes established first local, and then state, commissions. In 1985 the state commissions

organized and elected the first National Commission of the National Movement for Street Boys and Girls.

In May 1986 the first national meeting of street boys and girls was held. It was a triumph for the principle of involving children in social reforms affecting their circumstances. Representatives from street and working children's groups from all over the country assembled in Brasilia for the conference. The event resulted in a blaze of publicity and had a great impact on the consciousness of people working in this area as well as on public opinion.

The event resulted in a blaze of publicity and had a great impact on people working in this area, as well as on public opinion

"Brazilian society was accustomed to looking at these children exclusively as needy, seeing what they did not have, what they did not know, what they were incapable of – a totally negative profile compared to supposed, middle-class, norm," says Antonio Carlos. "The Street Children's Movement presented street children in a positive light, emphasizing what they could do, what they did know, what they could offer the country."

The meeting had another important message: it revealed the existence of a widespread national movement that had grown out of the joint government/UNICEF Alternative Street Children Project. This movement was not allied to any church and was well-diffused throughout the country; it had what the progressives term a "critical and transforming approach to reality".

This movement, now organized and consolidated, was well placed to participate between 1986 and 1988 in the country's firmer shift towards democracy, marked by the inception of a constituent national assembly to draw up a new constitution.

Elections to the assembly installed a very strong and vociferous minority of congressmen committed to the ordinary mass of the people. They worked together with the popular movements in elaborating a methodology for formulating the constitution and were able to introduce an unprecedented measure that allowed direct democratic participation in the drafting process by the population at large. Any citizen was permitted to present a popular amendment for which they had managed to secure 30,000 registered voters' signatures.

The debate begins to open up

In 1984, UNICEF sought government agreement to a joint agenda of realistic goals for the UNICEF-assisted programme of co-operation for children and adolescents in dangerous and difficult circumstances. The agreed target was to reduce the levels of violence to which children were exposed, and to find ways to help Brazil provide better protection than had been the case in the past. As a foundation for this work, UNICEF and the government applied a set of standard social indicators to define more clearly the scale and nature of the problems facing children.

In the view of UNICEF's Representative in Brazil, John Donohue, the redrafting of the constitution, coinciding with the country's political transition towards democracy, provided an ideal opportunity to secure democratic involvement in establishing a framework of children's rights that might underpin improved public policies.

The new consensus, political and programmatic, recognized the need to get away from monolithic top-down, programmes decided at federal level for local implementation. The methods of the past had to be discarded because they did not work; the country was too large for a handful of people to develop meaningful and useful answers to the problems faced in 4,500 municipalities, some of them larger than certain European countries. The emphasis had to be on decentralizing and democratizing the process.

UNICEF's aim was to help open up debate as much as possible. In response to a Brazilian Government request, UNICEF supported the establishment of a National Commission on the Child and the Constitution, for the dissemination of children's rights issues in Brazil. This was made up of the Education Ministry and six others related to social issues, as well as seven national NGOs. UNICEF also used its resources to support publications, meetings and provide other forms of technical assistance.

The breadth and intensity of public concern about children was reflected within Congress by the setting up of an all-party group (*Frente Parlamentar dos Direitos de Criança*) to champion the cause of child and adolescent rights. At government level, a body of progressive leaders in the management of public policy, the National Forum of State Officials of Public Policies for Children and Adolescents, emerged and played an important part in mobilizing state governments and representatives. In the public arena, the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls linked hands with a broad spectrum of professional and other organizations.

The role of the National Commission of the Child and the Constitution was to receive submissions on the problems of the children and work out how a constitution might define their rights in a way that would ensure new and better policies. UNICEF helped the government establish a small secretariat to support its work.

"The Commission itself was a remarkable achievement for a country coming out of 25 years of military control of government with no government tradition of working with organizations representative of society," says John Donohue. Among its non-governmental members were the National Street Children's Movement, the Minors' Pastoral of the National Council of Brazilian Bishops, the National Order of Attorneys, and the Paediatrics Association of Brazil.

While the people who worked in NGO movements were skilled at running projects, they did not know much about change through legislation and legal rights.

Meanwhile the government ministries represented on the Commission had more technical information, but were not able to mobilize society. This they needed to do if they were serious about getting legislation into the constitution that laid the groundwork for real improvements for children. "It was a trying period for the participants in the process," says Donohue. "But each side realized it had to depend on the other to reach the objective of really serious legislation in the constitution which would protect children in the future."

There was a massive mobilization of organizational and public interest in the formulation of the children's section of the constitution, resulting in the presentation for inclusion of two amendments - the one from the popular movements, the other from progressive state officials. These amendments formed the foundation of an alternative draft to the chapter on the Child and Adolescent. This was drawn up by the National Commission with the help of constitutional lawyers committed to children's rights. A first version was supported by petitions signed by 1,300,000 children and adolescents and a subsequent version by 200,000 adults.

John Donohue describes the event of the presentation of the petitions to the national assembly as something he will never forget. He was invited as a courtesy to sit at the table with the people charged to write the constitution. "We went into a hall with just over 400 people in it and by the time we finished we realized we were sitting in a room with more than 1,600,000 Brazilians. For me that was a point in the process that made the clear statement that this was not just a repeat performance of a legislature writing out a constitutional text – the seventh in Brazil's history. This part of the text on children and adolescents had really involved people in ways that no-one would have imagined possible even a year before."

Under the new constitution

Article 227 of the constitution makes it the duty of the family, society and the state to assure with absolute priority the rights of children and adolescents to life, adequate food, education, leisure, occupational training, culture, dignity, respect and freedom; and in addition, to save them from negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression.

The Chapter on the Rights of Children and Adolescents was approved by the Constitution Assembly in May 1988, with a majority of 435 to eight.

In October 1988, the new Brazilian Constitution was promulgated. One of its major features was the strong emphasis on the devolution of power and responsibilities from central government to state, and state to municipal government. Another very important gain was inclusion in the constitution of mechanisms for funding the development of education with the Union obliged to apply at least 18 per cent, and the municipalities 25 per cent, of their tax revenues to this end.

A major disappointment of the constitution, and one

that has great relevance to the problems of disadvantaged children, is that it failed to tackle the thorny issue of land reform, necessary to improving the lot of poor rural families and further reducing the exodus to the cities.

The triumph of the constitution was followed by the even greater triumph of the Child and Adolescent Statute, the enabling legislation needed to ensure that the constitutional changes regarding children are put into practice.

This process ended with the approval of the legislation in both houses of the National Congress with the unanimous

The triumph of the constitution was followed by the even greater triumph of the Child and Adolescent Statute

support of the leaders of all parties. The legislation came into force in October 1990, almost exactly two years after the constitution's passage.

Building on the momentum that helped elaborate the constitution, the popular movements and programmes in favour of children formed a united front – the DCA Forum (The National Forum of Non-governmental Organizations for the Protection of Children and Adolescents). This was the product of a three-day meeting of the 15 main non-government organizations. UNICEF continued to play a facilitating role as before.

Brazilians have extensive experience of progressive constitutional measures not being applied and the DCA Forum was eager to ensure the Child and Adolescent Statue would be an effective instrument for securing the de facto rights of children.

The Forum created a writing group composed of jurists, people from the social movement, educators, social workers, militants of the popular movement, priests and other religious people. The leadership of the group was with the non-jurists, while the jurists sought to interpret the popular interests. The jurists elaborated a skeleton of the new law. Afterwards they composed a legal document providing criteria for the inclusion of suggestions from individuals and organization representing the public. The guiding principle was the Whole Protection Doctrine of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Children.

The first draft of the statute was revised many times in response to suggestions. It was rendered back to the popular movement through many meetings, seminars, congresses and study groups. The writing commission then met again to reintegrate the various versions and present the different final texts to parliament.

Again there was wide participation and representation from the children in the National Movement, who met and discussed the issues within each project and then at regional and state levels, where delegates were selected to go forward to a second national conference in Brasilia.

In Brasilia more than 5,000 children met and some invaded the congress and presented their demands. The key word was citizenship.

João de Deus was one of the organizers of the meeting. "The day the children occupied the senate was the most important day of my life," he recalls. "They ducked under the arms and between the legs of policemen who tried to stop them. The Senate security tried to keep

them out but they got in every way they could. There was a session going on. The children made a statement denouncing the attitude of a judge who had tried to stop them meeting in Brasilia and denouncing the killings of children by justice committees in Reçife. It was very strong. There were congressmen crying who gave up their seats to the children." The children held hands around the senate in a huge circle and hugged the building.

The Catholic Church also staged, among other events, a national congress in Belo Horizonte of the Minors' Pastoral which thousands attended.

There were many other initiatives in support of the statute: a campaign of letter writing to congressmen, petitions, an exhibition in congress of children's drawings, a campaign in which artists, film, television and sports stars spoke out in favour of the statute, and a campaign to secure the backing of businessmen and entrepreneurs. Journalists also played a crucial role, writing articles which broadened understanding of the children's predicament, welcomed the new statute and denounced violations of children's rights.

The draft statute that went before congress for its approval broke with all traditions – it was not the work of jurists but of a very large number of concerned Brazilians. It was adopted unanimously and the new President of the Republic, Fernando Collor, gave it his immediate endorsement.

The President's repeated identification with the children's cause – and he is the first Brazilian president to do so – is seen to augur well for the far more difficult phase of implementing the new statute in the harsh social and economic realities of Brazil.

On coming to office, President Collor undertook a number of responsibilities in the field of children's and adolescents' rights. He promised to support the International Convention. He made a commitment to declare the child a priority in his government and to attend the World Summit for Children at the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The challenge of the new law

The changes in the constitution and law relating to children and adolescents are as unlike other laws in their consequences as they were in their making.

Conventionally, changes in law express changes in practice or are designed by the powerful to underpin the status quo. But these laws originated in a groundswell among the most disadvantaged members of society, the justice of whose cause gained some recognition throughout society. As in the case of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, they are inspired by a progressive vision and represent changes aspired to rather than achieved. But they go further. They not only provide a blueprint of change; they provide some important measures by which it may be accomplished.

Implementation will occur over a period of time, requiring as it does a revolution in many traditional parental, public and official attitudes and responsibilities. Ultimately full implementation demands a redistribution of resources within the country. In the week in which the statute came into effect, newspapers were giving sharp definition to the context in which such changes must take place, with front-page headlines announcing that 52 million people in Brazil were now living below the poverty line.

Meanwhile the new legislation was having an important immediate impact, including the dismantling of established government services for endangered children and youth to make way for totally new structures.

Children and adolescents are no longer defined as passively dependent on parents, society or the state

Before 14 October 1990, it was the child abandoned, or outside school and loitering on the streets, who was regarded as being in an irregular situation. Despite progress in some states, such a child was still most likely to be detained by the police, brought without representation before a judge, and subsequently institutionalized. Under the new law, the only party not in an irregular situation would be the child. All others – starting with the parent (or the failure of the state to give adequate support to the parent), the education system, the police, the judge, the judicial system for not providing legal representation, and finally the institution itself would be failing to meet the requirements of the law.

Children and adolescents are no longer defined as passively dependent on the charitable interventions of parents, society or the state. They are now citizens with clearly stated rights to respect, dignity and freedom. They have nearly all the rights of adults and some additional ones appropriate to their new-won status as "people under peculiar development conditions". As a matter of "absolute priority" they must receive protection and help in any circumstances, be given precedence in any public service or institution and in the planning and execution of public social policies; while programmes related to their protection must be given a privileged status in public funding.

The statute identifies a hierarchy of provisions to secure the rights of children. There are Basic Social Policies, through which it is the state's duty to provide for all children and adolescents' health, education, sports, culture, leisure. There are Assistance Policies for those with a specific need – supplementary feeding, shelter, occupational and work initiation training. There are Special Protection Policies, assisting children and adolescents in specially difficult circumstances as a result of their own behaviour, or the action or omission of adults.

An immediate effect of the legislation is to restrict the role of the police and the courts. Only children and adolescents caught in the act of an offence can be detained and then must be produced before a judicial official within

24 hours. Only those involved in some legal issue – an offence, or adoption, or custody case – can be subject to a judicial investigation.

Both the scope and the power of the judges is reduced, their rulings being open to question by a review body; and an adolescent, accused of an offence for which he could be interned, is guaranteed the right to legal representation. The maximum period of internment for a serious offence is fixed at three years. Alternative measures to internment are introduced, including the repair of damages, performance of community services, medical and psychological or psychiatric treatment and enrolment in a treatment programme for drug addiction or alcoholism.

All children and adolescents endangered for social reasons have to be provided with a proper assessment and assisted in keeping with their new-found rights.

It becomes the legal responsibility of the adult world – parents, community and state – to ensure that the rights of children and adolescents are respected.

The idea of centralized planning for unprotected children, and the government's monopoly in this field, have been scrapped. The main instrument of central control, FUNABEM, has been replaced. The Foundation of Brazilian Centres for the Child and Adolescent (FCBIA), a federal organ with offices in the states, issues general policy guidelines and has a co-ordinating role. The state level executive organs, the FEBEMs, are in the process of being reformulated. The repressive assistance and institutionalizing approach is being dropped in favour of one that promotes the development of children and adolescents and opens up opportunities for them.

The formulation and monitoring of policies and programmes for children and adolescents are subject to new deliberative Councils for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent operating at municipal, state and federal levels. In a radical departure from past practice, these councils will be composed of both government officials from different departments and representatives of organized civil society – effectively community organizations.

Community participation is also secured through the formation of new Guardianship Councils. These are community level bodies of five representatives locally elected for three-year terms of office to deal with the social cases which under the old Minors' Code were referred to the Minors' Judge. Their function is to see that children's rights are respected, with the aim of reducing the displacement of children from their families and community. Candidates must be experts – that is have an established track record of working with children or have qualifications related to child care. The statute requires that all non-governmental organizations working with children are registered with the Councils and meet certain basic requirements.

The accommodation for the children will now have a home environment. No more than 10 children may be housed in a unit

In a 90-day gap between the law's approval and its coming into effect, hundreds of meetings, work-sessions, congresses, seminars and information campaigns concerning its implementation were held all over the country. Even so, D-day found different parts of the country in widely different states of preparedness. While in some states FEBEMs had continued to operate on the model conceived under the military dictatorship, others had tried to assimilate into their programmes certain NGO innovations – for instance, the use of street educators.

Changes go into effect

The screening centre for adolescent offenders in Brasilia was in the process of being refurbished and undergoing a change of identity. The grim, cramped cells, with their built-in concrete beds, had not yet been worked on. The walls were still embellished with the graffiti of the years of oppression – Rambo and pirate figures, weapons, skulls and other images of violence and defiance, chiming with naive expressions of nostalgia for home.

The institution looked curiously empty now that the number of adolescents who could be detained by the police was substantially reduced. A clutch of youngsters brought in the by the police, including one detained for homicide, bore no signs of violence and walked free of the ankle and wrists chains of the recent past – another requirement of the statute. The children in the centre's enclosed courtyard looked far more at ease, if laconically so, than the staff, who were having to undergo major shifts in attitude and practice.

At the office of the Federal District Secretary of Social Welfare Programmes in Brasilia, officials explained that there were two screening centres, one for adolescents, the other for younger children. Both were no longer known as screening centres but as "shelters", being places for young people who had nowhere else immediately to go. "The accommodation for the children will now have to be adequate, with more of a home environment. No more than 10 children may be housed in any unit within the shelter. Kitchens must be created to ensure adequate food is provided. The staff are now to treat the children with respect, not with violence as has happened in the past," said a spokesperson.

All the traditional assistance programmes, according to officials, were in the process of being adapted to the new reality, with an increased emphasis on preventive measures aimed at keeping children in their families and communities and preparing adolescents for work.

One new measure was economic support for at-risk families. A budgetary application had already been made and the aim was to generate some kind of income-producing activity within the family to obviate the need for the child to go out to find work. The criteria by which families would be selected for assistance and how much each would be granted was still very much under dis-

cussion. However some allocations, averaging Cz$30,000 (US $300) – had already been granted, in one instance to buy a sewing machine. The whole idea was still under review, and it will clearly take time for each state to develop a programme that attempts to meet the basic requirements of the law and local conditions.

Nevertheless, several states had already initiated important reforms in the way children and adolescents were dealt with by the FEBEMs, the police, and the courts, while São Paulo and Goiás had already radically revised their policies and programmes for children at risk and were well positioned to adapt to the changes. Without disposing of the old structure, the Secretary of the Minors of the wealthy megalopolis of São Paulo had built up a parallel alternative programme for disadvantaged and endangered children. When the new statute was promulgated, all the children interned in FEBEM were released and either returned to their parents or sent to one of 40 new integrated state projects, marking the ending of an era.

In Goiás, the FEBEM had been dismantled two years before. Using what was best in the government structure, the state drew heavily on the lessons of the alternative projects to create a programme that in many respects anticipated the new statute. This publication has elected to look at the Goiás programme in some depth.

THE GOIÁS PROGRAMME

IN 1986, a small number of experts working within the government's child care programme in Goiania, state capital of Goiás, began to cohere into a multi-disciplinary team. They identified strongly with the programmes of the popular movement and were dissatisfied with major failings in the government system.

The different branches of the government programme – including the Legionary Foundation (which provided for children up to the age of six), the Social Work Secretariat (serving children aged 7–12), FEBEM and a state-controlled enterprise providing occupational training – were working in a fragmented way. There was a high degree of duplication and the problems of disadvantaged children and youth were not being met.

The population of the state at the time was 4.6 million people, a third of whom were between the ages of five and 17. Half a million of these, the majority in urban areas, were from very poor families. So a large number of youngsters were at risk of abandonment, denial of education, or early entry into the labour market.

As elsewhere, the schooling system was failing to incorporate and retain poor children. Sixty-five thousand children between seven and 14 had never gone to school or had been expelled. Only 60 per cent of children entering schools completed fourth grade and almost half of the children aged 7–9 were illiterate. Child labour had been increasing steadily since the beginning of the decade, with over 90 per cent of working children in unregistered employment.

The team seeking changes produced an analysis of the situation which was taken up by a candidate for state governorship. He called for a review of the state's social policy and the elaboration of a new programme in which social assistance would be provided as a citizenship right. On coming to power he gave the team his fullest support.

FEBEM was abolished and its functions were subsumed into the new Social Promotion Foundation of Goiás

Policy guidelines adopted included the integration of government programmes through institutional reform; a move away from institutionalizing children and the provision of alternatives; support for vulnerable families; decentralization of services to municipalities and rural areas; comprehensive educational provision allowing for community participation and involvement of the family.

Deployed in the different branches of the government programme, the team established change groups to work for internal reform and develop co-ordination.

A consultancy and advisory council was established in this period: the State Council for Minors' Policy. It broke new ground in bringing together government representatives, including those from the departments of Education, Health and Justice, with representatives of civil and church organizations, among them the Minors' Pastoral, residents' associations, day-care associations and university and trade associations.

When the institutional reform came, much groundwork had been done. "Nothing stopped. We changed our tyres running," said one of the original team members.

In May 1988, well ahead of the constitutional and statutory change, the Social Promotion Foundation was formed to institute and monitor the Integrated Programme of Support to the Minor. At the same moment, FEBEM was abolished and its functions were subsumed into the new foundation. With the loss of FUNABEM funding, a special fund was set up, drawing money from a variety of sources including a lottery and private donations, to augment state budgetary allowances.

There emerged two major focuses of the new foundation's state programme – "children in need" and "children in a situation of risk".

In the latter case, a distinction was made between "the child on the street" who is working and still in regular contact with his or her family, and the "street child" who has little or no family contact and so is at higher risk. In Goiania alone, 4,000 working children and 170 street children were registered with the Foundation in 1989.

Support for the Street Child

Assistance to street children has two main goals: to provide for immediate basic needs, and to equip them to become integrated into society as citizens and independent workers with a developed critical awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

A major thrust of the new programme was to prevent the institutionalization of street children and instead either reintegrate them with their families or involve them in alternative open projects.

The instruments of the programme are an assessment centre, CETI, a skills training and recreational centre, CFM, and a night shelter, CAM.

CETI – the assessment centre: CETI is the front door to state assistance for children in situations of risk – abandoned children, street children, lost or runaway children, children detained by the police, shoplifters, abused and unwanted children.

Under the new system, the Social Promotion Foundation, determines child and adolescent policy at an executive level; even police action concerning street children is subordinate to their control. No child may be arrested and taken to the Police Department, as in the past, without being taken first to the CETI.

The CETI operates 24 hours a day every day. It opens a record on each child brought in – including a note of his or her condition on arrival – provides immediate assessment of the child's situation and referral elsewhere. It is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of a social worker, psychologist and a lawyer. Children are brought in by police, members of the community or parents and sometimes come of their own accord. Most are from families in conflict "arising from situations of absolute poverty". Parents also come to CETI for advice.

Children and adolescents are brought in for a wide range of offences and predicaments, the most common being alleged theft, breaking-and-entry, loitering and being lost, or running away from home. The cases on hand during a brief visit included a drunken mother picked up by the police for repeatedly allowing her infant to fall to the ground; a youth accused of attempted robbery and another of fighting; and a father whose wife had left him and who wanted his children taken into care.

In the past the vast majority of these children would have gone through the Police/FEBEM/court system. Now only 10 per cent, those accused of serious offences, including robbery, homicide and rape, are referred to the police department. Most of those are subsequently directed by the courts to a programme of "watched liberty" rather than detention. Children and adolescents involved in criminality are no longer referred to as "offenders" but as "minors in conflict with justice" and they receive legal representation. Where an adolescent is sent to the police department, CETI contacts the family.

"At the moment we have 18 children at the police department awaiting the judge's decision. The reasons are robbery, homicide and fighting. For a city like Goiania, with a million and a half inhabitants this is very small number," says Dulce Almeida, CETI's director.

Another achievement of the CETI has been to greatly reduce violence towards children and adolescents by police and others. They accounted for only 0.3 per cent of cases in the first half of 1989. Any signs of violence on youngsters brought to the CETI are questioned and where appropriate the child is referred to a legal-medical institution for medical diagnosis. Formal complaints are made and have led to the sacking of policemen. CETI also has a representative, a physical education teacher, within the police department and provides follow-up psychological assistance to adolescents under police care. In the near future it will maintain 24-hour expert attention for children in police care. Recently the Foundation followed up the death of a child in the cells, said by the police to have committed suicide but found to have been killed by another adolescent.

"We insisted early on that the Minors' police should be humanized. The chief was changed. Also a teacher has been appointed to head the Secretariat of Public Security – someone known to us from the university," says Elne Maranhão de Sá, Director of the child division of the Foundation. The Foundation has tried to institute training

for the police in their work with children and adolescents and has police participation in its own street education work. Working to change police attitudes is seen as long-term. "Let's be very clear that beneath the surface there is competition for possession and assistance of the child – the police through repression and the Foundation through education. And of course we want to win this battle."

The Foundation takes heart from an isolated experience in one of its community-based programmes, the Nucleos de Apoio Comunitarios, in which a community centre managed by a local resident's association and the local police station work in the same complex, with the police taking a good-neighbour approach to their work. "It shows we could have a different police if the state really wants it," says Eline.

> *"Beneath the surface there is competition for possession of the child. And, of course, we want to win this battle."*

In 1989, CETI responded to 5,580 children and adolescents, of which 1,639 were new cases, the balance having registered on one or more previous occasions. The highest proportion (38 per cent) were referred to their families, while 22 per cent went to the CFM/CAM programme for street children, and the rest elsewhere. The Foundation explains the high number of repeats by the fact that the children are referred to open programmes which they are free to leave, and children are still adjusting to the new approach which relies on their voluntary participation and commitment.

"Children drop out and decide to come back and try it again," says Dulce Almeida. "We are not worried about this. We see it as part of the process – we worry if the number of first-time clients grows." Even so, she believes drug addiction contributes to children dropping out of the programmes and that special provision for drugs treatment is greatly needed. There was also a need, she felt, for a centre for the very small minority of children with severe personality disorders.

Night-shelter and day-shelter: The CAM is a nightshelter for street children, while the CFM operates during the day. It was in the latter that Reinaldo Moreira, whose story opened this report, found effective help. Adolescents of between 13 and 18 years get involved in the CFM programme through contact with the Foundation's team of street educators and by referral from the CETI. Staffed by a multi-disciplinary team, it attempts to provide a "whole educational environment" in which the adolescent acquires self-esteem and respect for others, as well as social skills, educational and work skills, and an understanding of his or her rights and social responsibilities.

Relations between staff and the adolescent are generally relaxed and friendly. Educational opportunities range from basic literacy and mathematics to reintegration into regular schooling. Training offered in the centre's workshops is intended to provide both education for work and education through work. The former provides some basic work skills – ceramics, gardening, sewing, broom-making, shoe making, silk-screen or basketry. The latter uses work as a means for developing respect for self and others, as well as for learning about the world of work. The youngsters work in groups of eight and are paid at the rate of half a minimum salary, which is less than they can earn on the streets.

The theory of education for and through work has been elaborated in a paper by Antonio Carlos based on the teachings of Paulo Freire and involves the "principle of the three participations – the participation in the management of work, in the product of work and in the knowledge related to work". Participation in the product of work refers to the return, either in cash or kind. Products of the workshops are of a high quality and the CFM is beginning to sell them, with the profits going to the adolescents. The youngsters are also able to make their own clothes and shoes.

The CFM also offers a range of occupational activities, including handicrafts, library, theatre, dance and physical education and *capoeira*. When educational activities end at 3pm, leisure facilities take over – team sports or just sitting around chatting. Three meals a day are provided. In 1990 about 135 children and adolescents were making use of the CFM's leisure facilities and some 60 were attending on a regular basis.

The adolescents have a say in the rules and activities of the CFM through general assemblies and the election of a representative council. In learning to collaborate with each other and the educators and through discussion, they develop a sense of the rights and duties of citizenship. The centre encourages family contact and in a few cases were obtaining positive results.

Towards the end of 1990, the nightshelter was undergoing renovation and so the CFM building was doubling as a nightshelter. It was also no longer quite so open as it had been at the outset.

Its director, Aurea Alencar, a psychologist, explained that children involved in the programmes couldn't come and go at will. The few who were really trusted – "who respect their own lives and the learning process" – were allowed to go out, say to a cinema, on their own at night and others could go if accompanied by a street educator. All had to be in again by 10pm. Adolescents thought likely to rob people were not allowed out. Weekend trips were often arranged. Sometimes children failed to come back. Those who failed to return on time but turned up later wanting to be admitted would be let in. This increased restriction on the children's coming and going was blamed partly on having to accept more problematical adolescents referred to the CFM by the courts.

Six of children in the CFM attended regular school in the community in the evenings and one was completing second grade, but he was a rarity. A few children also went out regularly to work. Reinaldo Moreira, who has started

working in the CFM's bakery, now went out to the mornings to work and in the evening to study. Employment had been found for him through the Foundation's Pro-Youth programme which establishes work opportunities in the formal work market.

"The child comes in from the streets totally undisciplined and often with an identification with violence," says Aurea Alencar. "Change is gradual and not imposed. The children must come here because they want to. They must experience the change or they will continue on the street. The meaning of discipline here is to learn to respect others, your own work, your own life. The child on the street wants everything at once – new clothes, new shoes – and so robs to get them. Here he goes through change until he sees the need to work to get his own shirt and shoes, or whatever."

Her own estimate of the programme was that it had made a good start "but we have a long way to go". Staff evaluating the CFM's work noted in the course of a year a decrease in the use of drugs and improvement in the children's health status, a decrease in violence and a more realistic attitude to money.

Support for children on the street

Children obliged to work or beg to underpin the survival of their families are often denied an education and the chance to develop work-place disciplines and skills. They risk becoming street children and, as such, are destined for an adulthood of underemployment or street occupations. This process is already compounding the problems of child workers in Brazil and other countries, where those who have grown up continue to compete as adults with the next generation of child work seekers.

There are two main approaches in Goiania to helping children and adolescents on the street. One is an emergency programme to try to improve the conditions of those already working on the streets. The other aims to improve the children's employment prospects by providing education and training. This is achieved through Communal Educational Workshops (CECs), one of the most impressive components in the overall work of the Social Promotion Foundation.

> *"Here, he goes through change until he sees the need to work to get his own shirt and shoes, or whatever."*

The emergency programme: One thrust of the emergency response is essentially preventive and aimed at the large number of children aged between 7 and 14 who drop out of school. Its primary goal is to reintegrate them into school and to strengthen family solidarity. Where a return to formal schooling is not possible, non-formal education and work initiation opportunities are provided.

The work is carried out by multi-disciplinary teams operating from community-based units. They investigate

and respond to the children's schooling problems, family attitudes and capabilities. The teams work with the children, schools, families and, through meetings, with the community. The units aim to provide a range of school and family reinforcement services, including the provision of two meals, access to medical and dental care and a range of occupational, recreational and sports activities which would not otherwise be available to children.

Products of the occupational activities are sold by the children and the proceeds shared among them. The six

The aim of the OEC is to develop children into thoughtful, skilled, economically autonomous citizens

units already in operation in 1989 attended to 950 children, of whom 167 were reintegrated into school and 217 participated in the school reinforcement activities. Nearly 16,000 children received medical or dental care.

A range of programmes has been developed to assist older children, aged 12–17 years, already working on the street. Their aim is to provide some protection and moral support, improve working conditions, offer training and education opportunities and referral to and follow-up in the job market. They operate from a base called the Little Workers' House and again contact with the children is based initially on a team of street educators.

At the street level the educators try to help children to improve the quality of their work, build their self esteem, and encourage them to reflect on their situation in relation to the rest of society and how they might improve on it. They try to help them see that the work they do as children won't serve them as adults and that without preparation for the job market they will remain underemployed.

The Little Workers' House, a day centre, is situated within easy reach of children near the centre of town. It attempts to offer a variety of recreational, informal education and support activities. It provides two meals a day, shower facilities and medical and dental treatment.

In 1989, 863 children and adolescents responded to this programme, 32 benefited from school reinforcement activities, 41 were referred for work-initiation training, 58 to work training and 86 to formal employment.

The Little Workers' House also operates a Pre-Youth programme that seeks to balance work with training and educational activities, either through conventional schools or through one of the Foundation's Community Education Centres, and assists entry into formal employment. The programme contacts families to seek their involvement.

Some attempt has been made to formalize the children's street working role, to dignify it in the minds of both the child and the public and introduce some protection. Children are given uniforms and followed up on the street by the educators. A system of licensing and restricting the numbers of children who may work as traders in the bus station has been instituted. A new occupation has been introduced of Passage Advisor, a paid and uniformed child traffic assistant, who helps regulate city parking and

Case III:
Nei Seitosa – training for a profession

Fourteen-year-old Nei Seitosa attends the OEC regularly and, among other things, is learning to be an electrician. He comes from an industrious family in which all the children work, either full or part time, as do both parents.

"It was my mother who heard about this place. She came here every day at 4 am to get me an opening. It took her a long time to manage it. She wanted me to come here because here we can get qualified for a profession.

"I used to study in the morning in the public school and deliver food for a business during the lunch period. Now my younger brother does that job. My father works as a painter. But still we all have to work to get enough money to live. I work to get some income to help my mother and brothers.

"I liked school. But this place is better. Here we have sports, capoeira, many different things. At school we just study. Here, we travel. We went to a city near here full of mineral waters and waterfalls."

Nei studies at the OEC in the morning. He has his lunch there and heads across town to work as an office boy. He earns Cz$4,000 a month (US$40). "I think that is OK. I give it all to my mother. She buys food for us and all of my brothers do the same."

assists pedestrians.

Children involved in the programme are taken on visits to industries and companies to see how they operate and employers are encouraged to provide them with work opportunities. In 1989 the Pro-Youth programme enjoyed the support of 199 companies. Just under 1,000 children were served by the programme of whom 1,281 received work training, 94 attended Community Education Centre Courses and 70 were found jobs on reaching their majority.

Communal Educational Workshops

The Communal Educational Workshops (OEC) assist both street and working children between the ages of 12 and 18. The criteria for admission are that the family must have an income below three minimum wages, the child must be lagging behind or have dropped out or been expelled from school, and must be in some form of part-time employment. Students are drawn from the local community and referred from the CFM and the Little Worker's House.

The OECs are well-designed, well-equipped spacious structures, each costing US$400,000. Ten are planned of which three have been built, one in an outlying town, one in a poor community of Goiania and one situated near the city bus terminal.

Staff, families and pupils seem to have no doubt about the value of the OECs. Three hundred children attend the OEC in morning and afternoon shifts. Both shifts are provided with two meals. The children are paid half a minimum salary to attend, again not a substitute for what they might earn outside but a facilitating payment. They receive mental and dental care.

There are six workshops: electricity, carpentry, metal work, industrial sewing, beauty and hygiene, and food production. Supplementary education is also provided, taking children over a two-year period to the fourth grade and providing them with a diploma that enables them to enter fifth grade of formal school. In 1989, 231 children attended these classes.

The teachers and educators have been carefully selected. They are paid more than teachers in formal schools and are given additional training in the methodology and aims of the programme. They are backed up by a multi-disciplinary team of social workers and a psychologist who are available to the children and work directly with them in the classrooms and workshops.

The aim of the OEC is not to produce workers to fill jobs but to develop children into thoughtful, skilled, economically autonomous citizens capable of contributing to social change. As in the other centres, the workshop learning is not purely skills focused but uses each skill as a window into the processes and relationships of the working world, employing the principles of education for and through work.

The exploration of issues by the children begins in small workshop classes and graduates to debate in the general assembly, in which all participate. The children have a say in the rules and regulations of the OEC and of their own classroom groups.

Each classroom group elects a representative who meets with the director and multi-disciplinary team members. But there is also plenty of scope for informal contact. In the workshops the children learn about raw materials and their procurement, production processes, tools, the calculation of production costs, market pricing and marketing, work relationships and workers' rights. They receive talks from labour leaders and professional people and are taken on tours of companies.

Products of the workshops are sold in the district markets. The profit goes to a central fund and decisions of how to use the money are arrived at in discussion between the students' representatives, the director and the multi-disciplinary team. The accounting is open "so that children understand that management must be a clear act and money spending must be a clear act too".

As the new Child and Adolescent Statute came into force it was on the agenda for discussion by the children.

Another important area of investigation is the local community, its history and the relationships between its members - between the generations, the sexes, neighbours and with employers and the authorities. "We start from the child's reality and move out from there," said a teacher.

The educational approach requires active participation by the students, their families and the community and the OEC relates to the community in a number of ways.

On the wall of the cookery class, the ingredients of "A Very Nutritious Salad" are spelled out – "Friendship, comradeship, love, unity, seriousness, enthusiasm and respect" and students are enjoined, "Always put affection in everything you cook."

"If the family doesn't have the knowledge to reinforce what we are doing with the child, the work can be jeopardized."

The teacher is from the local community. The children are taught a range of culinary skills, including preparing party fare, something from which they can earn money and even make a living. "Coming to teach here was the best thing that ever happened in my life. And OEC was the best thing that could happen to this community," says the teacher. "The community uses this place in the evening and during holidays for leisure, parties, sports, supplementary education, parents meetings – it's a community centre."

The number of street children referred to the OEC's is small but increasing. Increasing the number is one of the major challenges of the Foundation's programme and it is closely related to another challenge – that of improving the outreach work to the student's families.

Where possible members of the OEC's multi-disciplinary teams visit families and community organizations to secure their participation in the programme. Parents are encouraged to join one of three parent groups which meet regularly and where the work of the OEC is explained and issues discussed.

Another purpose of the groups is to give parents the opportunity to form "survival groups". These make use of the OEC facilities to increase their incomes and so reduce dependence on their children earning. So far two groups operate in this way – a sewing and a baking group.

Nevertheless, the Director of the OEC felt, that while the work inside the centre was very advanced, the outreach work to the families was "far from satisfactory". This was partly to do with lack of resources and partly the difficulty of involving people who were themselves out at work much of their waking time.

Family support for the adolescent in OEC is seen as crucial. "Without it our work can be like putting a knot in a string only to see it undone all the time," said the director. "If the family doesn't come here, or have the knowledge to reinforce what we are doing with the child or a grasp of its value, the work can be jeopardized.

"We have to make the family understand the project is not a favour, not a donation but a victory; one which needs their support."

Outreach work is also important for reaching parents who might not send their children to the OECs in the first place. Otherwise places tend to go to those families where the parents, like Nel's mother are the more resourceful, persistent and well organized, in other words survivor families. (see Cases III & IV).

The OECs' community base means that they could have a valuable preventive role in taking children at before they drop out of school or become fully engaged in street life. Key to their fully realising this potential will be a sustained political will to ensure that they have the resources to improve on their outreach work and build more OECs as planned.

Another acid test of their success will be what happens to the children who complete the course. Until some

Case IV:
Denise – children should know their rights

Denise is studying to be seamstress, like her mother. "I didn't like school very much – this place is much better. The only problem is that you can stay only two years."

Denise particularly values meetings with the OEC's executive staff members and refers to the director and social worker by their first names. "In school they didn't talk to us very much and gave us little support. They would turn their faces the other way when we passed by, but here we can talk to Dilma, the director, and all the others."

Asked what she valued, she said: "Discussing the education of children and children's rights and duties."

What about their rights?

"There are many lost children on the street and they should know every right they have. Sometimes they are starving while other people throw away their food. We should take better care of them, because there is no way they can live on the streets."

Did she know any street children?

"Yes I know many."

Some people say street children are bad.

"Absolutely not! They have no other place to live. They try to understand the adults and the adults don't try to understand them."

students have graduated it is impossible to know whether they will successfully transfer to the job market. Some employers have already expressed strong interest, notably for carpenters. OEC intend to follow up adolescent graduates for at least six months.

The Goiás programme under siege

As the Child and Adolescent Statute came into being in October 1990, the Social Promotion Foundation programme in Goiás was facing a number of challenges, some of them critical and likely to be experienced by other state programmes.

Problems still arose from having had to absorb the staff and adapt buildings of the old government organs of child care. Reinaldo Moreira's criticism of the CFM, housed in the old FEBEM boarding school, is rooted in this predicament. The building is drab, run down and institutional and some facilities, like the swimming pool, have gone out of commission.

"I wish they knew how to make children more welcome here," said Reinaldo. "Sometimes, just as they have this bird in their hands, they let it fly away.

"I wouldn't leave the city centre to stay here in this dull place. It should have more attractive things. They take the children for a trip. But I feel if they were wise they would have lots of leisure here, food, education, movies at the weekends. I think children would be more ready to stay. They would slowly see the best thing for them was not the street. The drugs for them is an illusion and I would want to show them that on the other side, in the real world, there are things that are interesting too.

"Some of the staff here – they look at a child who is making a mistake and their faces tell you they are thinking, 'This child is good for nothing'. So I think they should select employees who work with children very carefully and train them very well.

"I would organize the children to help make the place nice; form them into teams on a roster – one to keep the gardens nice, another to organize the cooking and so on. Children who refused to participate in this work couldn't come here. So they would have responsibilities and make sacrifices, but in return they would also have their leisure."

These criticisms are made in the context of a strong affirmation by Reinaldo of the CFM's achievement, not least in his own case. Furthermore his thoughtfulness, concern and the freedom and clarity of his criticisms, reflect success in terms of the CFM's citizenship goals.

The Foundation decided at the outset that the retraining of staff in the new approaches to working with children was more important than a restructuring of the buildings. Two years later some of the staff had made considerable progress in adapting to the new concept, while others would clearly never change. There was in particular a shortage of staff with the qualities and skills to do the all-important outreach work.

The programme was also facing critical problems as the result of a major cash-flow crisis. None of the Foundation's staff, including the director, Eline Matachão de Sá, had been paid for three months. The teachers at the OEC had staged short strikes, giving the children experience of a work conflict. It says much for their commitment that the staff continued to express enthusiasm. An electronics teacher said: "I'd like to say that the project here is very beautiful. But we have no structure and no maintenance. The government advertises its concern for children but doesn't really maintain the funds. Things continue because we are committed and really love what we do." Only at the end of October did staff receive their August pay.

While the OEC had the food and raw materials to continue, other parts of the programme were more critically hit, notably the Little Worker's House. The project's director and educators said it was becoming very difficult to do crucial follow-up work with the families to gain their support for children in the work-training schemes and

more difficult to attract children to the house. "To make an impact you must see a family quite often," said the director. "But we have no transportation. I was supposed to do eight visits yesterday and managed one."

Even with the most thoroughly equipped programme, working with children already on the street presents great difficulties. The street educators at the Little Workers House conservatively estimated that they were gaining results that satisfied them with just five per cent of the children they established contact with. "We consider it satisfactory when the children get into school, when they become aware that it is necessary to study, when they really become part of their family again, when they try to get into the formal work market, when they achieve the basics for a dignified life. The life of a citizen."

So what is the prognosis for the other 95 per cent?

"Put that way it sounds very dramatic, because we would prefer it if 100 per cent could achieve what we hope for them. But if they are still underemployed when they are 18 years of age, they become underemployed adults."

The cash crisis is part of a wider underfunding problem the state has suffered at the hands of the previous federal government for political reasons. The state government is also criticized for rapidly expanded social care provisions without allowing adequately for maintenance and running costs. Compounding the problems was a crisis in the state bank that meant a number of programmes didn't receive funds due to them.

The Foundation had made several independent applications for funding from international banks and other sources, without success. Various measures were being taken to meet the crisis, and Eline Maranhão de Sá believed that, without some federal intervention, important programmes might have to close.

Also worrying to the Foundation was the election for state governor in October 1990, with the winner due to assume power in March 1991. The continuity of development initiatives in Brazil are particularly vulnerable to political changes which can result in the replacement of key state officials and important policy changes. Eline Maranhão de Sá was concerned that even comparatively uncontroversial changes in policy could also have far reaching consequences.

An independent evaluation of the Foundation's work, funded by UNICEF, notes that its considerable successes are attributable in great measure to the strong political backing it has enjoyed. "The police reduced their violence towards children not because they were more aware but because we have had the political backing to stop them," says Eline Maranhão de Sá. Now, with the political uncertainty created by the election, street children have noted an increase in police action against them.

The Foundation believed its programme would draw strength from the provisions of the new statute. It was ensuring that the legislation was debated and understood as broadly as possible. But establishing some of the mechanisms required by the statute – particularly the Councils for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent and the Guardianship Councils – would take some time.

One advantage was that the existing Goiás State Council for Minors Policy, with its established mix of government and non-governmental representatives, already had some features of the state-level rights council envisaged in the statute. "We are already discussing how it is to be transformed into this new council."

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS

WHILE there are some studies of children on the street and in institutions, there has been little systematic research into what happens to children in the family and school contexts to inform new government responses to endangered children.

There are projects being formulated, for instance, around the twinned notions that the displacement of children on to the streets, or into informal employment, is simply a consequence of poverty and that the answer is one of adjusting the poverty of individual families so that children can remain at home and attend school. An associated assumption is that children who do not go to the streets, but stay in their families are invariably better off. One of the voids in research, points out Irene Rizzini of CESME at Santa Úrsula University, remains that of the analysis of child abuse in the home.

The lack of a body of formal knowledge about parental abandonment of children, child abandonment of the home, or why children forego education to work, is arguably less critical for the alternative programmes than for policy-makers. They have been fighting a rear-guard action, not trying to win the war. More importantly, many comprise long-term commitments by individuals to relatively small numbers of children. They are able to develop their own knowledge of the subtleties of each child's family circumstances and provide a high degree of individual attention.

This is less true of programmes adapting existing government structures and staffs to the new approaches. Here, the hope for success must rely on the quality of training rather than the experiential development of individual officials. It is no accident, for instance, that least developed in Goiania's already advanced programme is the time-consuming, all-important linkage to families and the community. The old system provided no tradition and no bank of people with the skills for this work.

The FLACSO/UNICEF study of street children and their families suggests just how important knowledge about families can be in planning programmes that either try to keep children at risk integrated in their families or help them effectively once they are on the streets. Though the study did not set out to make policy recommendations, the findings of the qualitative research indicate, among other points, that:

- Children rarely arrive in situations of risk for reasons that are purely economic. There are other disempowering and/or marginalizing factors whose clearer definition might indicate suitable preventive interventions;
- The reintegration of children into their families is probably not an option for most children who have already fully broken with them and become absorbed into gang life, and is something they themselves discount;
- More needs to be known about street gangs and the possibility of taking them as a starting point in working with street children.

The qualitative part of the study comprises inquiries from a psychological and an anthropological perspective. One aim was to throw light on the reasons, given the poverty of millions of families, that more children don't end up on the streets with little or no family protection.

A small number of carefully selected street and underemployed children and their families were identified and interviewed during the study. The psychological inquiry, conducted by Wilson Moura, identifies an "expelling void" at the heart of street children's experience of family life.

In his in-depth socio-psychological exploration of what happens in six poor families, Moura considers the family as a group. He argues that people tend to stay in groups that help them satisfy important needs and abandon those that don't. Furthermore, commitment to a group is both reflected in and strengthened by participation in its activities. "What I call a well-structured family," he says, "is one in which all assume some kind of responsibility. They invest energy in cooking, cleaning and making arrangements for feeding themselves."

He discounts the degree of poverty within poor families as in itself determining whether they will hold together or not. Of the two poorest families – the one of a street girl, who had been sexually abused at home, the other of a boy working as a market porter – the former showed almost none of the aspects of a successful group

Even where the mother had no immediate partner, but believed in the possibility of a rewarding relationship, she would invest in the family structure

while the latter enjoyed the strong commitment of its members. The composition of the family is also discounted as determining whether it works as a group, as is the physical presence of both parent figures in the home.

What was of great significance was the quality of the relationship between parental partners. Even where the

mother had no immediate partner but believed in the possibility of a rewarding relationship she would "invest in the family structure and play the role of leader, which didn't happen in the families of the street children".

In only two of six families was there family cohesion. In one of the others, there was "the clear sensation that it was an empty place, with each member being there on his or her own. The children had nothing to get or hope from others and no-one expected anything from them, including the mother. Of the children who had gone to the street, the mother simply said there was nothing she could do, as if she was an observer and not part of the process. She spoke of the suffering of her children on the streets with pseudo concern, and was much more anxious about her suffering than that of her child."

In fact she had good cause. One of the things that surprised me most was that the parents' life histories were even more tragic than those of their children on the street," says Wilson. "For instance one mother had been raped when she was eight by a 50-year-old person. At 13 she was forced to marry a man who spanked her and beat her up. She split from him and joined up with another man with whom she had two children; these later went to the streets. For three years she had what she considers the good time of her life and then she discovered her husband in bed with another man. So there was a triangle until both men started behaving aggressively towards her. She took up with a fourth man, who was a kind of a bandit and he tried to teach her children how to rob.

"When you see the life of a mother like this, to demand that she be affectionate is to expect her to be a wonder-woman." What was clear in such cases was that the lives of both men and women had been without pleasure. Their relationships were a mechanical means to create the minimum possibilities for survival.

In two of the families there was such hatred between the parental partners that it had inspired murder attempts. In another single-parent family, the mother would leave for work six days a week at five in the morning, and arrive home at nine at night. There were 10 children, the oldest two of whom were living elsewhere. Of those living at home, none would take responsibility and the household was chaotic. The oldest child, a boy of 16, was away much of the time working and studying. The next oldest brother and sister were on the streets. The younger children spent much of the day out of the house, coming home just to sleep. But the house had all the domestic appliances, including television, and the mother was proud that she worked so hard and earned a good income. "She said: 'I give my children everything I can – why can't they stay home?' As for the children, they said home was very bad." At the end of her interview, the mother asked Wilson if he might help place the children in an institution.

Wilson refers to the process in such families as "the expelling dynamic" whereby the street becomes much more attractive for children than the home.

The anthropological team, Arno Vogel and Marco Antonio Mello, also found that the departure of children from their families for life on the streets could not be ascribed simply to the usual stereotypes of family breakdown. Poverty, migration, loneliness and boredom, parental absence, alcoholism, unemployment, violence, abuse, and the breakdown in traditional roles and relationships were recurring themes of the drama, as single and multiple factors but in different combinations.

What was common was the inability of the families of street children to translate themselves in crucial ways into the nuclear family of the city. They could not afford to put their children first or invest in them sufficiently to assure their eventual independence. On the contrary they were dependent on at least some of their children contributing to their survival. Children did not just leave for the streets, they were attracted away from a waning force field of influence of the family to the more potent force field of the street gang, in a tragic process that left both parent and child believing they had been betrayed by each other.

While the need for children to work could arise from parental separation, unemployment, illness or death, it could equally occur where both parents were earning.

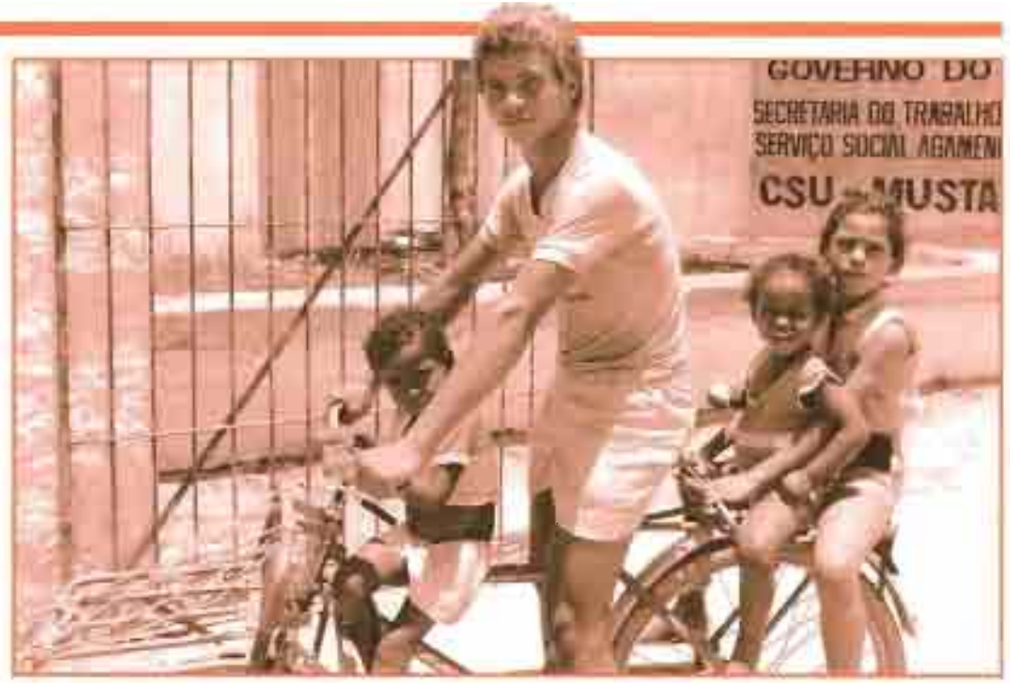
Need is a central reason for children having to work, but both parents and children express other motives. Some asserted it was the appropriate thing to do. Children may be coaxed, given incentives, nagged or commanded, threatened or subjected to punishment to get them to work, but often it is they themselves who make the decision, sometimes because of perceived lack of goods in the home. A 13-year-old vendor explained: "Everybody at home argued because of money. At school I was hungry and wanted desperately to eat the things other boys ate in the break. So I went out to earn my own."

The experience of the child in becoming a contributor can be reassuring for both child and family and add to family cohesion. The child gets the feeling of having money in his pocket, takes pride in helping his mother and may be treated with more respect and punished less, gaining a sense of increased status.

The quality of childhood

However there is often an exorbitant price to pay, the loss of childhood time and, for many children, the denial, or undermining of the chance of getting an education. The damaging nature and injustice of this loss is reflected in the statements of both adults and children. "Parents should work more so that children can stay home more," complains a 10-year-old shoe-shiner, while adults will often attribute children going off the rails to their having been denied a childhood.

Such judgements must relate more to received ideas of what childhood should be rather than what it could ever be in the households in question. The childhood denied them is that of the consumer society, in which parents provide for their children, have time and space to play with them, and children are absorbed by material acquisitions, pleasures and acquiring skills that will assure their ability to become consumers themselves. Television reaches a wide audience in Brazil. The childhood projected through it as normal and universal is light years away from



anything realizable by poor families in the neglected peripheries of the cities.

The parents in such households, deprived of the chance to translate free time into creative development opportunities for their children, are likely to equate unemployment with idleness. If the child were not working there would be conflict in the home and, outside the home, the probability of the child getting into mischief. From the child's point of view, work may offer a welcome escape from loneliness and boredom. "Work is fun," says one street trader. "I make new friends and colleagues. I go back home with news to tell."

Another parental purpose in the child's going out to work is the possibility that he/she will learn something about earning a living. In reality the work generally done by children is a launch-pad to nothing but an adulthood of poverty and insecurity. Furthermore, this slight hope of securing an advantage for the child is counterbalanced by dangers. Children on the street often suffer from the systematic reinforcement of a poor self-image. They risk falling into bad company, and being beaten and mugged by street children, as well as abused by adults. Instead of contributing to the home, the child may be lost to the influence of a gang, with rebounding shame to the family.

The risk is no doubt heightened where the child experiences the home as violent or empty, or associates it with servitude. But such dislocations happen without apparent parental negligence or abuse.

Family values and survival strategies of the rural areas do not translate well to the city. One father tried to direct the family to invest their collective energies in the development of the oldest son, who was a talented soccer player. This son he argued would be the salvation of the whole family so his brothers must work to promote his chances. But this survival strategy of the father was experienced by the brothers as unfair, requiring the sacrifice of their aspirations to their brother's realization of his. One brother left what otherwise appeared to be a good home to take to the streets.

An underlying theme in the statements of the parents of children who took to street life was their impotence to control them, whether they worked or stayed at home: several referred to the fact that the children were left alone too much. The statements of the children reflected a broader indictment of family impotence. One father specifically referred to the loss of authority over the son who had gone to the streets as a loss to another sphere of influence: "Now I can do nothing, because he has got the courage of the city."

Parents expressed their sense of impotence in relation to the gangs. A mother whose son returned home periodically said that members of his group would come and whistle outside for him and he would go. So afraid of this whistle was she, that she chained him up to prevent his going. But when he was again whistled for he somehow unchained himself and was gone.

Among the statements by street children of their families, some focused on the failure of parents to fulfil conventional roles. The father was unemployed and might also drink heavily. He was idle, and hung around the home, bothering the children. The children expressed exasperation at the irrelevance to them of their fathers' strictures. They had an expression to describe the way in which their fathers wasted their time with meaningless advice and nagging. For some, a very important reason for taking to the streets was to get away from such "rent collecting", as they put it.

Street children also refer to the failure of their families to provide the goods that assume such importance in the context of the city. One street child said: "I made up

my mind to go. I left home to work because first everybody only wanted to watch television, secondly no-one understood me, thirdly they were always worrying about money. I wanted to have things and there were no things to have, I wanted my own money and there was no money to be had."

"Turfs" and gangs

The streets, however, are not an open repository for any child who wants to leave home. The city is divided into "turfs" under the control of different gangs. No child interviewed in Goiania believed it was possible to survive on the streets without belonging to a gang. The gangs discriminated between children, actively recruiting some and rejecting others as "home children", not suited to the rigours of street life, even if they were siblings of gang members. The basis for this discrimination remains unclear but there are hints that resentment or rebelliousness were valued qualities.

The transition from home to gang is often marked by what appears to be an act of initiation. A gang will take away a working child's shoe-shine box or sales tray – the means by which he contributes to the home and defines himself as a working child. Parents warn their children not to react if they are robbed or challenged by street children and to have as little to do with them as possible.

Another part of initiation is the invitation to get the taste of the city. One boy told of his first outing with the group. They watched tv at the entrances of the stores and moved around by hanging on the backs of buses. They sniffed glue, went to eat and even went to a hotel. "Sleeping in a hotel, between clean sheets and in a bed to yourself, or with a girl to share it when you are only 12 or 13, is heady stuff for a child from the marginal areas," says Arno Vogel.

The researchers probed what it is that the gangs offer that the families are unable to provide. Firstly the gang provides the means of survival – training new recruits in the arts of begging and stealing. By these means the child obtains goods inaccessible through the family, or through available work. The gang shows children that the fruits of the city denied to the poor are accessible to those with the courage to seize them.

Significantly, the goods coveted by street children are those most emblematic of success in city terms – the brand-name designer products of tv advertising; lesser products are referred to as "false goods".

Both the choice of goods and "use-and-dispose" style of consumption reflect prime values of the consumer culture. "It's easy come, easy go," says Arno. "They use the clothes till they are dirty and then throw them away and get others. It's the reverse value to conserving children's cast-offs for younger siblings to inherit. Street children don't have working clothes – they wear their best clothes all the time."

Gang life offers practical support and protection, companionship and a sense of belonging with few controls. There is plenty of scope for fun, for skylarking, catching a ride, having parties, a freedom of time and space in which to recreate each day. There is also freedom to experiment with sex and drugs.

Freedom of movement and action is part of a system of values and rules that stress group cohesion and the

courage and independence of the members. They are the values of the hunting pack. Prime rules are that you remain silent about the gang's affairs, stand on your own feet, and never say anything is difficult, because in the streets nothing is difficult. Members must also never interfere by word or action in anything another member wants to do.

Sayings of the children recognize the operation of poetic justice on the streets, according to which whatever you do to others can be done to you. Everything you do is known to have a "*volta*", a come-back. The children also have no illusion about the hazards of the life they are embracing. "They know they are exploited criminally and sexually," says Arno. "They know they risk being beaten, arrested and killed. They know who kills. Even so they think it is a very adventurous kind of life."

The children aspire to and admire those who are "*toro*" – that is audacious, sharp, cunning, self-reliant, silent. Some give themselves names indicating autonomy, subtlety and fearlessness – King, Rambo, Cat-hand.

The adventure ethic

Through gang membership, the children replace the work ethic with an adventure ethic through which they have a sense of themselves as urban pirates who are aiming not at citizenship – but to conquer the city. Through their adventures they develop a very strong sense of identification with each other.

Whatever the circumstances of children leaving home, they talk of their acceptance of street life as if it were a positive choice. And clearly one of the triumphs of the gang is its ability to "recycle positively the resentment and revolt originating from the family nest's collapse". Even the few children who had returned to their families spoke, as does Reinaldo Moreira, of having a great sense of solidarity with and nostalgia for the gang.

At the same time the street adventure cannot be sustained without the help of drugs. The children say they sniff glue because it makes them feel strong, daring, cunning, "like the Hulk". Children in a slum in Recife said that they took drugs to psyche themselves up before going bag-snatching and robbing in the city centre. "We go out," said one child, "to live or die." But glue has other great virtues – "it takes away the cold and hunger" and "makes you feel everything is just fine".

Generally the children understand that the life they lead on the streets belongs to a certain period of their life and is short-lived. But none of those interviewed said they wanted to go home when their street time was up. Instead they wanted the conventional family life of the city.

"They would like to marry, have a house, have regular work and rear children," says Arno Vogel. "So the idea of a family was strong. But even those who were respectful of both parents would say, 'but father and mother didn't know how to live. Look they had ten children. I want children but two, three at the most.'"

Many of the programmes that try to work with street children share the parents' view that the gangs are the enemy and wholly a bad influence. Arno Vogel believes that unless they begin to recognize their achievements and take account of them in their approach to working with street children, they will often be doomed to frustration.

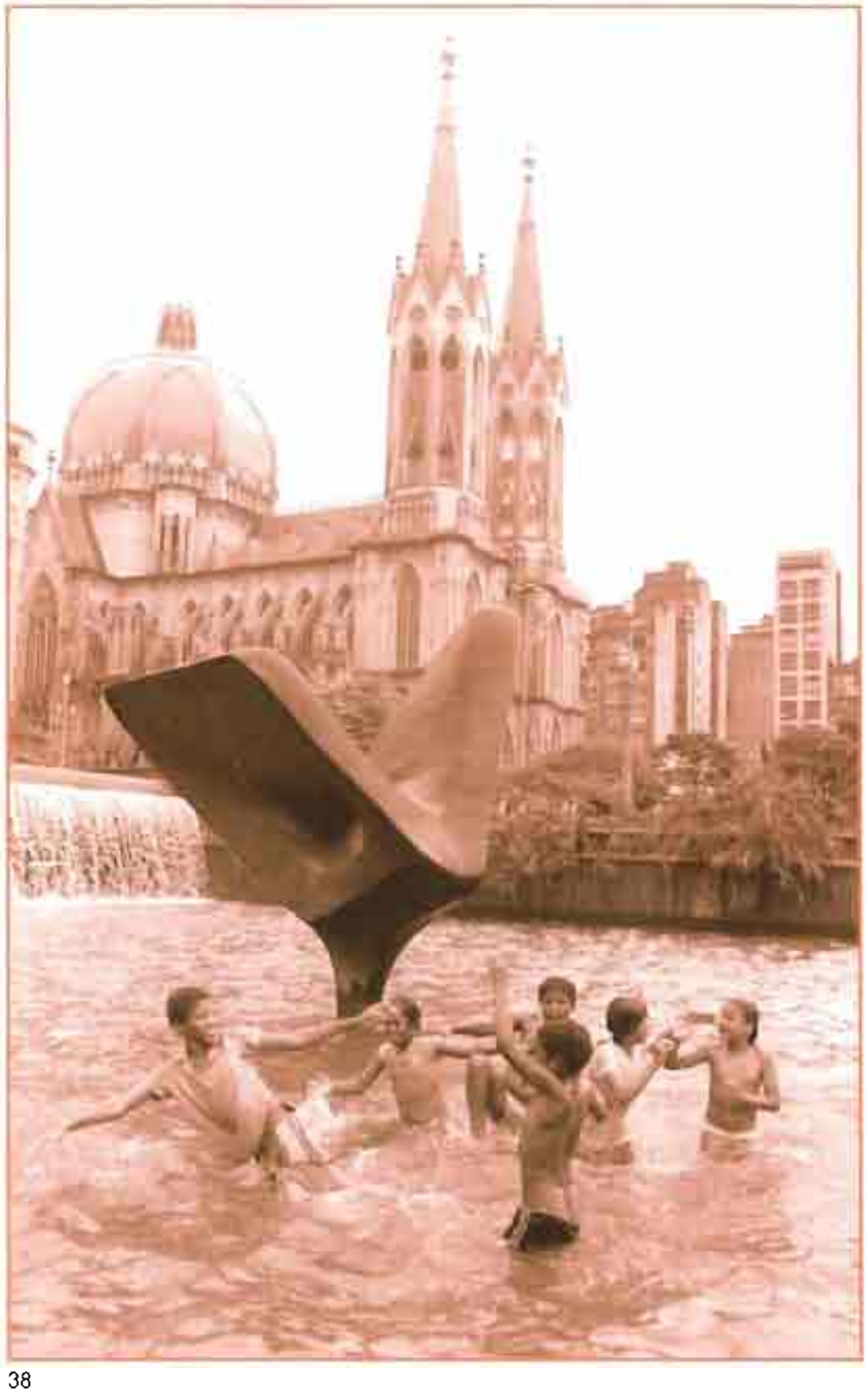
"What actually happens in the drop-in centre for street children is that gangs use them as safe houses in which to take cover and regroup. The people working in the centres are referred to as aunts and some are easy to manipulate. It's as if you had some aunts in town. When you do something wrong you go to your aunt and she will give you something to eat and take care of you, put you into the shower and then call the car to take you to the other centre where your group is. That happens. From a distance its funny but it's a very difficult situation because these aunts are there and desperate – they ask us, 'Do you think this all works? What's the use of it?'"

"What actually happens in the drop-in centre is that gangs use them as safe houses in which to take cover and regroup"

None of the researchers in the FLACSO/UNICEF study believe they have produced a definitive statement about street and unemployed children in relation to their families. Theirs is rather a first concerted and revealing look at this area in Brazil.

Much remains to be done. Why, for instance, does the expelling dynamic in some homes in many cases afflict only some children and not others? Under the stresses of poverty, do some families selectively abandon or expose some of their children to the hazards of street work while educating others? Are the children who abandon the family more adventurous and more intelligent, or simply more problematic? Are the ones who stay at home more submissive or more loved? What is the long-term fate of the child workers – is their life any less nasty, brutish and short than those who go to the streets? How does the failure of the school system to incorporate the children of the poor contribute to their going to the streets or into underemployment? And what is the experience of girls who go to the streets?

Ana Vasconcelos of the Passage House is keen to understand more about the trajectory of girl children from their families on to the streets. Among street children there are significantly fewer girls than boys. But this shouldn't be taken to indicate that the overall position of girls in a poor urban setting is better than it is for boys. "One possibility," says Ana Vasconcelos, "is that many girls are in family homes working as maids, or maybe they are in organized brothels. We don't know for sure. But what I believe is that the girls will do their best to stay home. They want to stay home and help their mother and will suffer more than the boys in order to stay."



GEARING UP FOR CHANGE

AT the time at which the research for this document was undertaken, government agencies in Brazil working with children were absorbed by the changes needed to meet the requirements of the new statute.

"It is a law basically designed for a new society," said Regina Helena Pedroso. She is one of a number of people who have moved from the popular movement into government to assist in the transformation of policies and practice. Formerly President of the National Front for the Defence of Children's Rights she is now a consultant to the President of the Foundation of Brazilian Centres for the Child and Adolescent (FCBIA).

"As the old edifice of child and adolescent assistance is dismantled, I hope this central office will cease to exist, the federal system simply disappear and everything be returned to the municipalities and the states," said Regina.

The transfer of autonomy, authority and patrimony have been greatly complicated by the radically different approach required in response to children at risk. Some of the old institutions were designed to take 5,000 children and had 2,500 employees, notably in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. "These are our bastilles which we are now trying to knock down, with the new approach of keeping children in their own communities and municipalities wherever possible instead of funnelling them into large city centre institutions.

"There are 4,500 municipalities. Under the old system they could wash their hands of the problem of the children, passing it on to the large institutions. Now they are having to prepare for their new responsibilities of identifying, planning and executing policies."

Regina confirmed that an immediate challenge for FCBIA arose from having to absorb all the staff of the old system, safeguarded in their jobs by the new constitution. Major problems included:

- Getting over the message that the statute was not just another law but something that made it obligatory for officials to secure the rights of all children and adolescents independently of class, race or socio-economic background;
- Getting the less progressive staff to see that endangered children were citizens and not criminals or bandits, beyond help;
- Getting some elements in state and municipal governments to understand that the new child assistance programmes were there, not for purposes of political patronage, or corporate interest as was often the case in the past, but to ensure that the rights of children and adolescents were secured.

Power of persuasion in bringing these changes about was now reinforced by sanctions allowing heads of institutions to be sacked, judges to be sued, people to be jailed for not enforcing the new law.

The new Councils for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent, with their combination of government and organized civil society's representatives, were not yet in place or only just establishing themselves. The Guardianship Councils, with their crucial role of trying to reduce the risks of children having to leave their families and communities, were also not yet established. Civil organizations were mobilizing themselves to participate in the new councils and a major campaign was in full swing to inform children fully of their rights and raise public awareness of the new opportunities.

With UNICEF support, the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls had established centres in São Paulo and Belem for the crucial work of training street educators and outreach workers for both government and non-governmental programmes and was seeking additional funding to establish more centres.

Several organizations were vigorously campaigning against violence towards children. The National Movement of Street Boys and Girls was opening up lines of communication with the police to try to increase understanding of and identification with the problems of at-risk children. Violence was being exposed as a threat both to the children and to society.

The movement had produced a dossier on the killing of children and adolescents by off-duty police and other vigilante groups. The dossier had sparked major international media coverage, and prompted a direct inquiry from the Minister of Justice. An official emergency committee on violence, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the FCBIA and the General Prosecutor of the Republic and well as non-governmental bodies concerned with child and adolescent rights, was set up to investigate the problem. Some government and NGO workers expressed concern that the sudden release of adolescents from closed institutions before alternative structures were in place might in the short term produce an increase in community violence towards children.

Organizations within the popular movement were adjusting their sights to the short and long-term implications of the post-statute era and to what kind of relationship they would have with government. Some recommended a withdrawal from all direct assistance to children which, they argued, had been developed in the context of a state failing to recognize its responsibilities. Now that rights

had been established in law with all-party endorsement, the popular movement should switch to pressuring government to provide adequately for the health and development of all the nation's children.

Others thought that non-governmental organizations should continue to do innovative and explorative work in housing, health, street children projects or community schools, but balance such work with monitoring public policy and lobbying government. None doubted that lobbying had become an important new part of their

"We cannot expect that one law within an unjustly structured society can solve the problems from one day to another"

responsibilities, or that while embarking upon a partnership with government they had to be careful to preserve their independence.

"We made a big step but we have no illusions that injustices will continue, especially those that result from the social economic structure," says Roberto José dos Santos. "The problems are very complex – they start partly in the rural areas, with the neglect of the rural workers and their families. The authorities in Brazil lack the courage to make real agrarian reform. The great landowners control the politics and economy of the country. We still have a lot of migration into the cities, on the one hand. On the other, the swelling of the cities creates areas of great impoverishment where violence has a free hand.

"Peripheric areas of the major cities come under the control of marginal powers – gangs of drugs traffickers and extermination groups. The dividing line between organized crime and some sectors of police is very fine. So families are subjected to an atmosphere of terror." Some city areas have become no-go areas, controlled by gangs and beyond the reach of both law and assistance.

Ivanir Dos Santos had just been sworn in as one of the 12 NGO representatives on Rio de Janeiro's new collaborative Council for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent. A former street child and one-time inmate of a FUNABEM institution, he is now executive secretary of the human rights organization, the Centre of Co-ordination of Marginalized Peoples. He believes that, while the President and the government were keen to nail their colours to the mast of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and make Brazil the first country to adopt its tenets, they will be less euphoric about the social and economic consequences of implementing the statute.

"We cannot expect that one law – even a good law like this – within an unjustly structured society can solve the problems from one day to another."

This perception was not restricted to non-governmental workers. Said Regina Helena Pedroso: "Brazil is a very wealthy country the problem is income distribution – it is a perverted distribution that makes the rich richer and poor poorer. Fifty to sixty per cent of everything owned in the country is held by two per cent of the population. What must be done now is a more serious practice of democracy in the sense that people begin to force the government to do what it should do – which is to address these problems."

Meanwhile the deepening recession, the country's international debt problems, and its salaries' squeeze in the fight against continually mounting inflation left the government with little immediate room for manoeuvre. Pressure on the poor and demands for more fundamental reform were likely to increase rather than diminish.

Opposing forces

Despite the all-party adoption of the statute, there were powerful forces within Brazilian society opposed to its implementation. In particular, there was strong opposition to the law from among the judges. One explanation of the unanimous political support for the statute is that it was adopted in an election year when few representatives would wish to cross swords with the well-entrenched popular movement.

Was there not a danger of a major reversal? Were public expectations not being raised in an economic context in which investment in extensive reform was least likely? What if the new programmes for children, being formulated in the face of considerable difficulties failed to reduce criminality on streets? Could there not be a public backlash and political reversals?

Several observers feel that reversal is possible. Valdemar de Oliveira Neto of the Luis Frere Centre, believes that with the growing recession, 1991 could be a make-or-break year for the democratization process in Brazil. But he argued that, because of the strength of public opinion and the organization of the popular movements, the government would try to be really strong on the question of children, education, health.

UNICEF's Antonio Carlos sees the 1990s as a time in which, the legislative battle of the 1980s yields to the implementation of the statute as "a project of society".

"The social movement in Brazil today in general is not advancing. The economic recession puts the labour forces in a defensive posture. The women's movement peaked in the mid-eighties and arrives at the nineties with a greatly diminished profile. Residents' associations, once very active, have, with the redemocratization of the country, been encompassed by political party life. Their leaders have lost credibility and friends because of party divisions. Landless workers suffered a great setback in their fight for agrarian reform in the constitution. In terms of such reform the constitution may be even more backward than the legislation of the military regime.

"The children's movement alone, which was perhaps the weakest point of the social movement at the beginning of the 1980s now has an accumulation of victories and a new perspective for very interesting action in the decade of the 1990s."

On the government's side, the President of Brazil had so far met all of his clearly stated commitments to the promotion of children's rights. However the social welfare branch of the state had never been so fragile as it was in the immediate stage of the transition to the new reality. The old FUNABEM/FEBEM system had been abandoned but the new structures were not yet in place, though there had been important isolated anticipatory initiatives like those of Goiania and São Paulo. The growing recession made it all the more urgent that change-over be accomplished.

Implementation of the statute required a deep institutional, administrative and technical reorganization and profound changes in the understanding and actions of the people who worked directly with children. Public participation in the policy-making councils introduced a new principle into public policy – that of public control over state actions. Justice, health and education provision would all be affected. Public participation needed to be extended to social spending policy.

A major difficulty that would face the new participatory councils was securing popular involvement. Education, for instance – currently denied to four million school-aged children – was now a legally enforceable right. But persuading people to assert this right faced an established tradition of non-participation and passivity among the popular layers of society who had never had a citizenship role.

"We don't believe that the statute is like a magic wand that will instantly transform reality but it has stopped being a banner, a symbol of struggle of certain progressive sectors, to become a tool and a weapon in the ongoing political struggle. Those who want changes have in their hands in this statute a most modern instrument to work on reality," says Antonio Carlos.

"We don't believe that after the statute is enforced, we can go home, mission accomplished. In fact we know we are at the very beginning of a new stage of work and struggle. We are engaged in a marathon rather than a hundred-metre dash and looking, not at tomorrow, but the next decade."

Of particular interest in the case of Brazil will be the continuing role of those children who helped bring in the new legislation and triggered a surge of public awareness of the courage and potential of children to make a valuable contribution, given the chance. More Brazilians than ever before are concerned that they should be assured of that chance, and not just at t
he moment of crisis, but preventively, before their families are destroyed as effective centres of caring. Many children with experience of poverty have learned that disgrace lies not with being poor, not with being the endangered child, but with the impoverishment process.

Like Margaret, with her aspiration to be a street educator, they introduce some reassurance that today's marathon has some potential to become tomorrow's relay race. "I'm a person who has suffered on the street," she says, "and so as an educator I will serve as an example and give the children hope. I will work with girls. I will be together with them and help them fight and defend themselves against all we suffer on the street." A keen student of the implications of the new Child and Adolescent Statute, she observes: "Many things hurt a child, including not having the right to be a child – because it's only recently we got this right. Now let us see if this statute makes things better."

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