

THE CONTEMPORARY RESPONSE
OF THE BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT,
THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND UNESCO

TO THE
HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

CCO Meeting, New York, October 2003



"Brazil has handled HIV/AIDS problems with much innovation and effectiveness, thereby creating good practices that other countries can learn from. As a universal organization, with a mandate encompassing the whole world, UNESCO must seek solutions wherever it can. Today, preventive education to fight HIV/AIDS is at the top of its agenda. Hence we must draw lessons from Brazil's experience so that your example can save lives and help development elsewhere: in Latin America, in Asia, in Africa, in Europe. We must learn from Brazil. We must learn fast. And we must apply what we learn quickly and effectively".



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I - An overview of the "Brazilian model" and the current scenario of the epidemic

The Brazilian response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic has effectively started in the early 80s with the creation of the Sao Paulo State Program and later on with the creation of the National STD/AIDS Program at the Ministry of Health. Since then the organizations of the civil society, mainly those organizations of people dealing with HIV/AIDS, have been key partners of the Brazilian Government in order to contribute to the accomplishment of policies of assistance, prevention and human rights. The principles of the program are equity, integrality of the actions taken, the universal access to health goods and services, social control, as well as decentralization towards States and Municipalities.

The participation of the civil society, as one of the guidelines of the Brazilian Program of AIDS, has been expanded under the perspective of the construction of social responses to the epidemic, such as the formulation of strategies and actions that are aimed to the promotion of public health policies. The incentive to the participation of representatives

from the civil society in several instances of the government - in the federal, state and municipal levels - so as the collaboration of nongovernmental organizations that develop projects with special communities, are mechanisms which have been magnified by the participation of civil society organizations across the country. These instruments are done through an intense work of advocacy and sophisticated networking in councils and fora which have been present in the formulation, follow-up and implementation of policies for HIV/AIDS.

Brazil has also been internationally praised not only for the actions related to the fight against the epidemic, but also to the model of partnerships established between the civil society and the government. In addition to that, we should also stress the role played by the international cooperation - including the role of UNESCO as one of the key actors in the response to the epidemic, an institution which has been extremely collaborative in meeting the "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS", established at UNGASS in 2001, which involves international cooperation and transfer of technology to other countries as key components of its strategy.

Box I - Brazil: Epidemic Profile

- Estimated number of HIV+ individuals (2000): 597,000
- Cumulative AIDS cases (December/2002): 257,780
- Cumulative AIDS deaths (December/2002): 110,710
- IV prevalence rate (2000): 0,65%
- IV incidence rate (2001): 12,3 / 100.000

Source: National Coordination of HIV/AIDS

II - UNESCO and the Brazilian AIDS Programme

Brazil's experience in the struggle against Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and AIDS has been praised as a success story in many international fora. Over the past 20 years, the Brazilian national response to HIV has brought together a highly diverse group of national and international bodies in a joint effort to contain and reverse the spread of the epidemic. It is generally agreed that the Brazilian strategy relies on three key principles: political leadership from the top starting with the President; heavy involvement of civic and community organizations which are essential for reaching the poor and helping them take the complicated regimen of drugs; cheap medicine to treat the patients as a result of national production and effective negotiation with international drug companies.

The involvement of UNESCO in the Brazilian AIDS Program follows from a strong emphasis on health education. UNESCO is seen as well placed to offer appropriate technical assistance in relation to training and education, public awareness raising and research, as well as a more general understanding of the technical and human rights implications of this kind of program. Three specific and relevant contributions by UNESCO in this co-operation should be outlined:

- I. Partnerships with the civil-society: policymakers, experts and scholars have pointed out that a major contribution offered by UNESCO was the networking it created with NGOs, which are of outmost importance for the success of the Program. The civil society is usually resistant to engaging in direct partnerships with governmental agencies. After UNESCO started to co-operate with the Brazilian Program, 1,000 NGOs started to take part in the initiative, acting as direct implementing agencies of many of the actions developed, financed by the Government itself.
2. Horizontal co-operation: one of the major elements within the strategy of the Brazilian Government was helping in the framing of the international policy of the AIDS Program in the building of partnerships with developing countries. In this regard, a number of actions have been taken to increase co-operation with Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. UNESCO and USAID are jointly implementing a project in Mozambique to strengthen networks involving NGOs that work directly with youngsters, trying to replicate the model of a successful case that took place in Brazil.
3. Shifting the view of preventive education: perhaps one of the most important contributions of UNESCO to the AIDS Program in this country was to extend the scope of the Program itself. Fighting AIDS was initially conceived mainly as a public health issue - it is not coincidental that the Brazilian AIDS Unit works within the Ministry of Health. The partnership with UNESCO all wed the introduction of strong actions for preventive education, which have already *been* evaluated and demonstrated their relevant success. Currently, AIDS is seen as a multifaceted and cross-cutting issue - the Brazilian response now involves a number of different activities targeting various groups with special focus on the school, youngsters and women. A very relevant indicator of the continuous extension of AIDS policies in Brazil is the ongoing creation of a Division for AIDS-related matters within the Ministry of Education.

III - UNESCO's particular input to governmental and civil society responses

As far as AIDS is concerned, UNESCO has been a partner of the Brazilian government since 1998, after the execution of the second loan agreement of the World Bank (Project AIDS II). Since that date UNESCO has been contributing to the strengthening of management, so as helping in the implementation

of strategies in response to the epidemic. In that sense, strengthening the population in order to cope with the HIV/AIDS challenge means that UNESCO should place its added value in order to promote actions that could: a) alleviate the discrimination and stigma in regard to people HIV positive; b) stimulate a change in behavior; c) promote a preventive message among key opinion-formers; d) build networks for the exchange of expertise among countries so the Brazilian experience could be adapted to different realities; and e) take advantage of the potentiality of education and the school as a privileged locus for change.

The actions of combat to the epidemic in Brazil are built according to the individual and collective characteristics of the population. The Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS) ensures a policy of access to preventive material and wide health assistance. Brazil has built over the years a wide network for diagnosis, counseling and laboratory monitoring. The free distribution of medicine and anti-retroviral drugs done through the Unified Health System (SUS) since 1992 has brought a considerable decrease of 50% in mortality and has reduced in over 80% the need of hospital admissions. More than 358 thousand hospital admissions were saved in the last 5 years, what has resulted into a saving of US\$ 2.2 billion (plus US\$ 1.23 billion in hospitals and treatment of opportunistic infections). One way to ensure sustainability was the local production of drugs and the direct negotiation of prices with the laboratories. However, the main challenge of Brazil is still to ensure an integral assistance - and of quality - to HIV patients. The alternatives implemented since 1993 have demonstrated considerable social and economic benefits and the Brazilian government has been expanding the number of patients assisted by the Unified Health System (SUS).

The Brazilian government, based on the data that demonstrates the efficiency of condom use in the prevention of STDs and AIDS, not to mention the belief that the State should not intervene in the structure of the sexual behavior of the population, has been one of the protagonists of the use of this instrument of prevention. The consumption of condoms has been one of the main evaluation indicators of the National Brazilian Program. The last survey conducted in 2003 has demonstrated that 64.4% of the population under 20 years old uses the condom in their first sexual relation. The great challenge is now to maintain that behavior, mainly among the youth segment, which usually tend to discard condom use after establishing a relationship with his/her partner. Aiming to promote a change of behavior and foster the practice of safe sex, the Ministries of Education and Health have launched in August 2003 - in partnership with UNESCO - a project to make available male preservatives in public schools for youngsters ranging from 15-19 years old. Such project has as its main target, until July 2004, 105 thousand students of the public network of schools and, until the end of 2006, 2,5 million students. Until 2006 there will be distributed over 235 million units of preservatives/year.

Moreover, UNESCO has an important role in that action as it will evaluate the results and strategies implemented in the schools of five Brazilian municipalities so, by the end of 2006, every municipality in the Country will have adhered to the proposal of making available preservatives, being this proposal linked to a program of sexual education.

Among the successful strategies of the UNESCO Brasilia Office (UBO) in accomplishing the mandate of our organization we highlight its action with organizations of the civil society, main partners of the Ministry of Health, both as final beneficiaries of funding for preventive contents and direct assistance and also support of technical-institutional nature.

The funding to NGOs, through the National STD/AIDS Program, from the Ministry of Health, by

Box 2 – Major aspects in the Brazilian response to HIV/AIDS

- Balanced prevention & treatment approach with a human rights perspective in all strategies and action
- Early governmental response;
- Strong civil society participation in all decision leve
- Multisectorial mobilization.

the means of two loans of the World Bank (Projects AIDS I and II), have favored the development of communitarian actions of NGOs in the last years. We have observed - in the 90s - the need of establishing local partnerships to maintain community actions, since the number of NGOs in Brazil has considerably increased.

The loans of the World Bank, whereas *they* have made viable the development of actions of national scope, either by the Government or NGOs (fostering ties between the two levels), on the other hand have indirectly contributed from an international perspective that there are available funds in Brazil, what makes unnecessary additional influx of capital to fight the epidemic. In that sense, UNESCO has been actively contributing towards demonstrating to the international community that these experiences have an important role in the Brazilian scenario and they need support to be successfully adapted to other international contexts.

Through the cooperation with the National STDs and HIV/AIDS Program of the Ministry of Health, UNESCO has been developing a study of national scope to evaluate the responses of the civil society to the challenge that HIV/AIDS entails. Although the study is expected to be finished by April 2004, we highlight some of the data collected until the moment. These are analysis of the action of the civil society in regard to HIV/AIDS, especially those supported by UNESCO.

The study comes to reinforce the understanding that social control has an impressive influence in the construction of public policies for HIV/AIDS in Brazil. This means that the civil society has helped the government to ensure to citizens living with HIV the necessary means for prevention, treatment and assistance, the latter being done through the free distribution of drugs, but also better living conditions - socially, physically and mentally.

UNESCO has been also stimulating NGOs which are eligible to its support to participate in the overall strategy of social control. Therefore, those which are politically and technically sustainable are able to get inserted into national, state and municipal representations with the aim to follow-up, discuss and propose alternatives to health public issues.

Among the actions supported by UNESCO in partnership with the Brazilian government we highlight: actions of capacity-building/training of professionals (health and education, social development, public safety and volunteers (social educators); projects of treatment for HIV positives; programs to promote social inclusion of HIV positives in poverty living conditions; juridical support to improve human rights and the citizenship of people with HIV/AIDS; visits to HIV households who need special care; and support homes for the HIV population in poverty conditions.

The work of the civil society in the field of HIV/AIDS is widespreading to other related issues. There are now NGOs that deal with the issue from a transversal manner, understanding that HIV/AIDS is a problem that needs to be faced through several political fronts, what entails that a healthy social life has implications in sexual rights and, moreover, on reproductive rights.

IV - Concrete results of UNESCO's partnership with civil society

Recognizing the need to provide continued assistance to youth through AIDS education, UNESCO has also been supporting civil society's activities to prevent the spread of HIV among Brazilian youth. A successful experience implemented by UNESCO Brazil is the creation of the UNAIDS Youth Working Group in close collaboration with the National STD/AIDS Program of the Ministry of Health. In 2000, as the UNAIDS Chair Agency in Brazil, UNESCO encouraged and supported

youth representation in the AIDS Thematic Group, aimed at strengthening local youth networks and including issues that relate to the life style and the dynamics that rule relationships among youth in programs implemented by the government, civil society and international organizations.

Box 3 -The Bagunçação Cultural Group:

This initiative gathered seven young people (three boys and four girls from different parts of the country with experience in "peer education". During several meetings the Group discussed about AIDS related themes such as gender, behavior changing, media, aids at workplace, preventive education at schools and young people living with AIDS among others. UNESCO consolidated the youngsters' thoughts into a publication that brings recommendations in the field of AIDS for public policies and preventive education through their perspective.

Bearing in mind that preventive education and cultural sensitive communication through peer education on HIV/AIDS brings about a significant potential for positive behavior change, such initiative can be replicated to other countries. HIV/AIDS preventive education requires more horizontally oriented communication (between peers instead of the more traditional way of vertical communication.

Therefore, the UNESCO Brasilia Office in partnership with the UNESCO Maputo Office is also implementing a strategic project funded by UNFIP aiming to provide capacity-building for civil society organizations that work with young people addressing reproductive health and STD/HIV/AIDS preventive education through youth leadership, taking advantage of the Brazilian experience with these themes. The adaptation of successful Brazilian experiences with civil society organizations is one of the cores of this project. UNESCO's interest in replicating Brazilian experiences in Mozambique and strengthening youth networks in that country coincided with advanced negotiations with USAID/Brazil in order to promote an exchange between Brazilian youth from Salvador (capital city of Bahia State and Mozambican youth around art education and aids prevention issues.

It is important to highlight that Brazil and Mozambique share a number of similarities and cultural identification factors: Portuguese is the common language to both countries, which are former Portuguese colonies; aspects of the African culture are deeply rooted in Brazilian regions that concentrate large populations of African-descendants; in these two countries the largest portion of the population is composed by children, adolescents and young adults; and even though AIDS prevention and treatment activities have advanced faster in Brazil, the AIDS epidemic has taken a considerable toll in both countries.

During fifteen days last February, twelve Brazilian youths from three Salvador/Bahia NGOs (Axé Project, the Bagunçação Cultural Group, and CRIA - Integrated Reference Center for Adolescents) and three

Box 2 – The Bagunçação Cultural Group

Bagunçação is an organization serving youth and led by these same youth in the neighborhood of Alagados, the poorest area of Salvador. Its strength is based in empowering children and adolescents to build the necessary abilities to fight the causes and effects of social exclusion. Using music, dance, and African-Brazilian values, this institution works towards promoting the social reinsertion of children and youth, promoting changes in the community's views and attitudes towards its own children. Based on a holistic view of assistance to children and adolescents, Bagunçação's methodology and activities include providing information on AIDS prevention; building democratic values and environmental education; promoting social and community reinsertion; and encouraging youth pro-activeness. Bagunçação's adolescents will work with Mozambican youth in the manufacture and use of percussion instruments, using waste recycling techniques. These workshops will allow Brazilian and Mozambican youth to exchange inform and values relating to AIDS prevention and health-related risk behavior. Bagunçação's experience in creating and maintaining community-based safety networks will be of key importance to this process.

Box 4 – CRIA (Integrated Reference Center for Adolescents)

CRIA leads the 300 NGOs and GOs from the youth network that implements the HIV/AIDS program in Salvador. Through this network, CRIA has been able to disseminate AIDS prevention information to over 500 public schools in Salvador. Using theater as its core methodology, CRIA encourages youth to develop theater plays, poetry sessions, publications, internet sites and other instruments to disseminate information to the largest possible number of youth in other NGOs and government programs. Besides working with Mozambican youth, CRIA will work with the National and Provincial Youth Councils on networking methodologies

Brazilian educators involved with AIDS prevention and network-building activities, visited Maputo and shared methodological society organizations and projects. This first "Exchange Between Brazilian and Mozambican Youth for Peer Education On HIV/AIDS Prevention through Art-Education" (funded by USAID and UNESCO) represented a challenge and a unique opportunity for peer educators in different continents to interact and learn from each others efforts to break down old paradigms by employing a great deal of creativity. The approach of the workshops was focused on youth proactivity-based methodologies developed to appeal to young people. The Brazilian youth conducted the activities with a strong contribution from the Mozambicans. The topics discussed were basically related

to youth networking, legislation and advocacy, art-education and HIV/AIDS issues. Through dance, theatre and music, the participants exchanged views and experiences by using these artistic languages as tools to facilitate youth in the development of strategies which make possible the raising of awareness about HIV/AIDS, sexuality and other cultural aspects that influence preventive education in that country. Such approach and its methodologies, transferred to Mozambican institutions information about the framework that, in Brazil, leads to successful prevention programs focused on youth.

The second part of this exchange will take part on early November. Seventeen youth from five different provinces from Mozambique will be together in Salvador to share their experiences in promoting the art education methodology in preventing HIV/AIDS. By involving and empowering youth and their associations, this project will achieve sustainable results that will have a lasting impact beyond the project implementation period.

Box 5 - Project Axé:

This project was created in 1990 to address the increasingly difficult conditions faced by street boys and girls in Salvador. Today, Axé assists 1,500 children and youth ages 5-18, mostly of African-descendants, who carry the burden of centuries of racial discrimination, poverty, and physical, psychological, and social violence. Through art, education and the use of African-Brazilian values, Axé has managed to reintegrate children into their families, provide all 1,500 children and youth with access to formal education, build their self-esteem and develop a pedagogical approach which is counted among the most successful in the world to deal with high-risk populations. Axé's health unit has developed, tested and validated innovative methodologies to disseminate contents related to AIDS prevention among high-risk youth.

V - Conclusions

One of the main successes of the National IDS Program of the Brazilian government is its articulation with the civil society for several tasks. The universal distribution of anti-retroviral drugs, the implementation of laws that guarantee rights to the HIV positives and the consolidated structure of specialized support are successful practices that relate directly to the role of civil society in fostering social control. The robustness of civil society in the field of HIV/AIDS goes beyond the action of NGOs, including networks, fora and scientific meetings. The exchange of expertise, strongly stimulated and promoted by UNESCO, has put together different ways to deal with the epidemic in Brazil, what brings considerable knowledge that, applied

to a vast country such as Brazil, has contributed to the fact that information will become an asset to public wellbeing and the construction of alternatives to face the challenges imposed by the epidemic.

The collective work between government and civil society in Brazil, without a doubt, deserves special attention in what is related to the shape that this partnership was established. Whereas in a majority of the countries civil society organizations are considered a threat to governments as they unveil the fragility of governmental programs, this partnership between historically non-collaborative sectors, counting on the support of an organization such as UNESCO, has proven that the collaboration between these institutional set-ups - as long as their independence is maintained - will ensure the capillarity of actions and will offer concrete results such as efficiency in the approach to particularly vulnerable groups, agility in the execution of projects, methodological creativity, reduced operational costs, and efficiency in multiplying the experience to other countries.

"At a relatively early stage, UNESCO recognized that the weapons with the biggest potential to respond to the threat of HIV/Aids were NGOs. NGOs are not only ideally situated, but also well equipped to disseminate the message of preventive education to the population. It is in this context that UNESCO displayed its immense value and contribution in HIV/Aids prevention: the creation of partnerships with more than 1,000 Brazilian AIDS-NGOs, the promotion of NGO activity development in the field of preventive education and the exchange of their subsequent experiences in the struggle against HIV/Aids. Together with the Brazilian National Aids Program, UNESCO has developed a formidable Aids-NGO network to counter the threat posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, thus contributing to the big success of the Brazilian response to STD/AIDS".

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