

Persistent inequality is one of the most important concerns in an economy that is otherwise growing and making progress in reducing poverty. Inequality in human development outcomes among Brazil's youth endangers future progress. In particular, a shortage of labor market and educational opportunities for vulnerable groups reinforces the intergenerational transmission of poverty and leads to continuing inequality. Brazil is developing a cross-sectoral approach to break this cycle.

Brazil, an industrial power with the largest population in Latin America and the Caribbean, has made big strides in reducing the poverty that continues to afflict millions of its people. Brazil's literacy and tertiary enrollment rates are on par with other Latin American countries such as Colombia and Mexico, but averages mask the disparities that affect millions of poor young people.¹

- Youth (15–24 years old) from the poorest decile (10 percent) of families have a formal sector employment rate of 4 percent, one-eighth the national average for the age group—and barely a tenth of the national average employment rate of adults. In contrast, those from the richest decile have a formal sector employment rate of 50 percent, one-third higher than the national average for the age group.²
- Youth from the poorest decile of families have a 14 percent illiteracy rate, three times the national average (by age 12, half the youth from the poorest families have left school). The corresponding rate for those from the wealthiest decile is 0.3 percent.
- By age 14, young women from poor neighborhoods have begun their transition to motherhood—compared with age 17 among girls from the wealthiest households.³

Because inequalities of opportunity are easily transmitted across generations, investing in its young people is key to Brazil's long-run poverty reduction strategy. A recent analysis of the main household survey indicates that more than a fifth of the total earnings inequality in Brazil can be explained by four variables: parental schooling, father's occupation, race, and region of birth,⁴ with the human capital of the parents most important.

Brazil is trying to address these inequalities by targeting disadvantaged youth directly and by coordinating the actions of diverse providers.

Targeting disadvantaged youth

Brazil has a rich portfolio of public and private programs to expand opportunities, enhance capabilities, and provide second chances to its youth. It is guaranteeing universal access to antiretroviral medication, part of an HIV/AIDS strategy that is considered to be an international model. In education, it is providing more funds to local municipalities to address high repetition rates and the poor quality of secondary school services. It has also begun to look for responses that cut across transitions and sectors, with the Bolsa Família, ProJovem, Abrindo Espaços, and health education programs for males and females.

Bolsa Família

For so many overage students, the opportunity cost of staying in school is high. The perceived benefit of staying in school beyond a few grades of primary is low and the forgone earnings can be significant.⁵ To alleviate the opportunity and direct costs to attending school, Brazil was one of the first countries to experiment with conditional cash transfers for school attendance. Bolsa Escola (School Scholarship), emerged first at the state level, and paid families a monthly stipend if all of their children ages 7–14 attended school.⁶ School attendance increased more for beneficiaries than for a control group. In 2001, the program was expanded to the national level and in 2004 the federal government launched the Bolsa Família (Family Grants) program merging the Bolsa Escola with other conditional cash transfer programs.⁷ While an impact evaluation of the Bolsa Família program is just starting, a 2005 study concludes that among the lower-income deciles, the stipend can make a difference of 11.5 percent in school enrollment. To expand the program to youth, the government has been discussing the possibility of adapting Bolsa Família's education incentives by (a) providing bonuses for secondary school graduation, (b) increasing the

value of the transfer for older youth to stay in school (recognizing the higher opportunity cost), or (c) extending attendance conditions to youth ages 16–18, which would capture secondary school enrollment (or a combination of the three).

ProJovem

The Brazilian government recognizes that young people who have left school may wish to further their education. In fact, approximately 20 percent of working youth return to school.⁸ The Educação de Jovens e Adultos program is an adult education class that focuses on literacy for adults and youth who have left school. In addition, a new program—ProJovem—is being piloted. Going beyond literacy for youth (ages 18–24) who have left school, it instead offers a full curriculum that covers mathematics, languages, job preparedness, and citizenship, among other topics; a two-week volunteer project; and career and general support services to youth while they are participating in, and shortly after leaving, the program.

Abrindo Espaços

Social exclusion is hypothesized to be a driving factor behind youth violence. The Open School Program in Pernambuco, started in 2000 as a partnership between local government and UNESCO, keeps schools in the poorest and most violent neighborhoods open during weekends, offering children and youth an array of cultural and athletic activities to keep them off the streets and to allow them to express themselves in a peaceful manner. A UNESCO study shows that participating schools have experienced a 60 percent reduction in violence.⁹ The program, now known as Abrindo Espaços (opening spaces), has since been expanded to Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul, and is showing positive results.¹⁰ Also, schools that entered the program earlier had greater success, suggesting increased impact over time.¹¹



Health education

Given early sexual initiation among youth combined with risky sexual behavior (as defined by the lack of use of contraceptives), programs addressing youth are of particular importance in preventing teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In 2003 the Ministries of Health and Education launched a controversial pilot program of condom distribution to schools in five municipalities. In 2004 the program was extended to 205 municipalities responsible for almost half of all HIV/AIDS cases in Brazil. The program has the additional benefit of preventing teenage pregnancies, now accounting for 25 percent of all births in Brazil. The program was expected to reach 900 public schools attended by about a half million students. While this particular initiative has not been evaluated, similar programs for the general population have been part of Brazil's successful strategy of curbing the fast spread of HIV/AIDS.

Gender: Bring the boys in

Unsafe and early sexual behavior is often attributed to gender-related roles: boys attempting to prove their masculinity and girls without the bargaining power to negotiate the situation. Rather than leaving the responsibility to girls, as in so many programs, Program H in Brazil has instead worked to give greater agency to boys by altering the way they think about gender roles and behaviors, with the hope of changing their sexual choices and expectations.¹²

The program was evaluated in three of Rio's favelas, two of which had the program and the third of which did not. The evaluation found that six months after the program ended, there was greater condom use among program participants, less incidence of new sexually transmitted infections, and a significant improvement on the Gender Equitable Men scale,¹³ relative to the control site. While there were some shortcomings in the evaluation methodology, Program H's experience shows that its approach is promising for healthy sexual behavior.¹⁴

Coordinating policies to target poor youth in a highly decentralized state

Recently, Brazil has taken steps to enhance coordination among the various players in youth policy:

- The recent creation of the Secretaria da Juventude (Youth Secretariat) allows for a central guiding body strategically positioned within the Secretaria Geral to facilitate collaboration across ministries and develop a national strategy. By focusing on developing national priorities and guidelines to enable actions at the local level through technical and financial support, it aims to leverage public and private budgets for maximum impact. Other ministries are also doing this with their own youth strategies.
- The youth themselves are mobilizing at both the community and national lev-

els. The recently organized Vozes Jovens have developed a proposal for a national youth policy. This group of leaders from youth nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) both strengthens the NGO movement and gives youth voice on the national stage.

- State and local governments have developed youth strategies and are channeling federal and their own resources to local civil society organizations and private sector firms to implement programs. Better coordination between the state and local levels in terms of defining target groups, priorities, and the division of labor at each level of government would allow for greater efficiency in the delivery of services. For example, the federal government of Brazil is using tax and expenditure incentives to municipalities and states to increase secondary school enrollment via a financing mechanism known as the FUNDEB (Fundo de Desenvolvimento e Manutenção do Ensino Básico e Valorização do Magisterio).
- NGOs are already very active in implementing programs and giving feedback to government at all levels. Helping to align local priorities, further encouraging the work of the NGOs through incentives and support from government (financial and technical), and improving program design through the development of monitoring and evaluation systems will further enhance civil society's role.

