

SAVING CHILDREN'S LIVES IN
PERNAMBUCO STATE, BRAZIL
INTERIM REPORT: MAY TO OCTOBER 2011



BACKGROUND

Despite Brazil's recent economic development, children in the country's northeast region face immense challenges to their survival and development. Two thirds of the population are of African or indigenous descent, most of whom live in the region's marginalised interior. Over 70% of indigenous families live in poverty and thousands of families are forced to migrate to find seasonal work in agriculture. These pressures have a grave effect on their children's wellbeing, with high levels of family breakdown and domestic violence, as well as violence in the broader community. Parents often don't know how to keep their children healthy and well nourished, and struggle to get their children access to appropriate health services. All of these factors make a child in the northeast twice as likely to die before the age of five as a child born in the more prosperous southeast.

Together, we are helping children in Pernambuco to survive, stay safe and get a good early education. Working with a variety of partners, our project takes a holistic approach to improving children's health, nutrition and development - both supporting providers of education, nutrition and health services to better attend to the most vulnerable children's needs, and helping parents care for their children and access these services.



Nutritional education training with mothers.

Our project has found children who are seriously malnourished children due to poor dietary diversity. By teaching parents to prepare nutritious food for their children, we're changing this, helping ensure they grow up healthy.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

Over the last six months our hard work has begun to bring about visible, lasting improvements in the situation for young children in the target areas. Our training of health workers is helping them to detect cases of malnutrition and childhood illnesses, as well as to identify and refer cases of violence and abuse to protection services. Crèches are more child-friendly, with more stimulating learning and play activities; crèche carers are better able to engage young children; and there is a greater focus on developing literacy skills – helping young children excel when they move up to school.

Our progress is beginning to make an impact on governments and society, who are showing a better understanding of their responsibilities to young children. In particular, the national government has included the creation of 6,000 crèches in its flagship national development plan (PAC), while there has been continued support for a national plan for early childhood. With municipal elections looming over the coming year, we aim to put our achievements high on the public agenda, helping change the lives of thousands more children.

BETTER NUTRITION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AT HOME...

Over the last six months we have formed four child health and nutrition focus groups in Salguiero, Cabrobó, Ouricuri and Conceição das Crioulas. In these communities, the majority of the families have a poor diet. Particularly, families lack protein, and often have low calorific intake - we still encounter cases of malnutrition. Since a great deal of the problem is parental knowledge of food groups and preparation, we've been holding training workshops. We're showing mothers how to keep their children healthy and well nourished, and monitoring the results with regular nutritional and health checks. While there's a long way to go (behavioural change takes time) we are confident that we are on the road to success.

... AND HEALTHIER FOOD AT SCHOOL.

We've also been continuing the process of improving school meals. We've helped 14 schools to modify their menus, improving the diet of thousands of children. Building on these improvements in the use of fresh fruit and vegetables, we are now looking to make changes on a wider scale. In the next reporting period we will work with the local education authorities to help change school menus across all of the schools in the municipalities.

We have fully implemented three school gardens which are now producing healthy foodstuffs for young children to enjoy for their morning and afternoon snacks. The children have been actively participating in the school gardens, and are learning how to plant crops and what the nutritional values of the different foodstuffs are. Crucially, this is helping them to be more accepting of fruit and vegetables in their diet. In addition, one more school garden is in the process of being constructed. In Conceição das Crioulas, creation of the school garden has not yet been possible since the community has been without access to running water for the last six months.

MAKING BRIGHTER FUTURES THROUGH EARLY EDUCATION

The programme has continued working to make crèches and preschools places which promote good nutrition, health and protection, and which stimulate young children's learning. Over the last six months, 108 teachers have concluded training and five crèches have completed their education plans which incorporate our methodologies (including reading sessions, nutritional education, children's rights and culture and infancy). We've really started to notice the improvement in the crèches, with improvements to facilities, teacher capacity and management attitudes. Finally, we have supported 152 families, along with 33 carers, to increase their links to the crèches and better support their children.

We've also set up community "Também Sou Pessoa" ("I'm a person too") clubs to help professionals and families to deepen and share their knowledge in the methodology, which improves parent's knowledge of care and communication for young children. We've now set up 14 clubs which are supported by 175 professionals, who have already worked with 750 families to help them better care for their young children's learning and development needs.



**Thank you FOR
HELPING SAVE LIVES IN
BRAZIL**

Left: children from one crèche planting seeds in one of the school gardens.