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BRAZIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATORY BUDGET IN BARRA MANSA

This initiative shows how the political participation of children and young people in public affairs can develop their citizenship by means of a council for participatory budgeting. Promoting their participation gives young people the opportunity to discuss the needs of their neighbourhoods and the city.

In Barra Mansa, a municipality in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, children make up 35% of the population. Their specific needs were scarcely ever taken into account in the process of city planning and management. The lack of recreational facilities for children and youth increased their social vulnerability, with truancy and repetition of school years becoming common, while drugs and violence were part of everyday life.

The local government of Barra Mansa planned to initiate the responsibilities of citizenship from childhood, contributing to a broader vision of government, through the programme Cidadania Nao Tem



Tamanho (or 'Citizenship Without Size'). This programme aims to promote the effective participation of children and youth while exercising their rights of citizenship. One aspect of the programme, the Conselho do Orcamento Participativo Mirim (or 'Children and Young People's Council for Participatory Budgeting'), allows youths to participate in decision-making with respect to the municipal budget.

This Council (formed in 1998) is composed of elected children and youth representatives from the municipi-

pality with power to decide how to spend their percentage of the municipal budget.

Plenary assemblies become the spaces for participation within which the local youth and children deliberate, organise the election of representatives to the Council and discuss budgetary priorities.

Plenary assemblies are organised at neighbourhood, municipal and regional levels, although the initial involvement takes place at schools. Following this process, there are meetings to examine priorities according to resources. Throughout the process, a balance is



sought between the active participation of boys and girls and the various age groups. More than 6,700 young people have taken part in this initiative (ie 37% of those eligible).



Financial resources have been made available by the Barra Mansa municipality, with the support of the Urban Management Programme (Latin America regional office). Members of the government participate actively in the planning and execution of the project. Additional operational assistance is provided by ENCOMEN (Barra Mansa Boys and Girls Encounter), a local NGO.

The initiative is carried out in conjunction with the local schools (public and private), neighbourhood leaders and community groups, churches as well as with the adult Participatory Budget Council and the Municipal Council for Childhood and Adolescence.

A total of 12 projects have been implemented and due to financial restraints, the Council has chosen mostly areas for recreation, social interaction and the lighting dangerous areas. Where priorities identified by children have been translated into actual works, their confidence has increased noticeably and the living conditions in the neighbourhoods have improved. In particular, children have expressed a great sense of pride in their participation and felt they had a certain status in the municipality. Moreover, the proposals have benefited all citizens in the community.

Over the last two years, awareness of social responsibility has increased among the children and young people of Barra Mansa and contributed to an improved knowledge of local governmental management, its limits and responsibilities and the legitimacy of public authorities representing society.