

UNICEF Brazil & British Telecom Launch Edu-Communication Project in São Paulo

"If you see that the world isn't changing, it's up to you to change it!", declared 12-year old Maria da Silva of Fortaleza, Brazil, at the launch of the new UNICEF and British Telecom youth participation programme, focusing on education and communication for young people from low-income communities in Brazil. "I've had the chance over the past number of months to learn how to interview, report and write articles for my school newspaper, and we're now beginning to communicate through new media, like blogs. I've written about teenage pregnancy and violence in school, and I've learned a lot and now my friends ask me questions on these subjects. It's important for young people like me to learn how to report and communicate because we know how to best talk with other teenagers, and sometimes it seems like we're the only people who can change things for the better."

The UNICEF/BT programme will support and train Brazilian adolescents on how to use a wide range of communication tools to improve the quality of education in their schools and communities, and to enhance their life decision-making processes. 10,000 adolescents across ten schools, in five of Brazil's largest cities: Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Salvador and Fortaleza, will benefit from the BT and UNICEF partnership to which BT is providing £500,000. Partners from the Brazilian Communication and Participation Network of NGOs will be responsible for implementing the programme in each of the five cities.

Adolescents and young people in Brazil will use communication tools and techniques such as the internet, radio, blogs, photography and video to publicize campaigns to improve their schools, and to help shape public policies on health services, the environment, digital inclusion and other issues important to their communities. The programme will provide PCs, digital cameras and other equipment in schools, and a dedicated web site will enable the adolescents to publish stories and photographs that illustrate their experiences and share learning with their peers, in their schools, community, country and around the world. UNICEF is in close contact with the Brazilian Ministry of Education, actively encouraging the Ministry to expand the programme concept and to roll it out with other youth participation projects at schools throughout Brazil.

"Brazil faces an enormous challenge in ensuring that children remain in school. Only four out of every ten students who start primary school actually complete secondary education", said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Representative to Brazil. "One of UNICEF's priorities is to promote young people's participation in their schools and communities. To have access to communication tools and to be able to express their views are basic rights of adolescents. Furthermore, a UNICEF survey in 2006 found that adolescents in Brazil who participated in community activities appeared to be less susceptible to dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and involvement with violence."

"Our partnership with UNICEF creates education environments where children receive the support they need to thrive. Access to information and communications technology can help to foster new skills, in turn enabling them to pass exams, get a job, play an active role in their communities, and achieve their goals in life", said Luis Alvarez, President Europe, Middle East, Africa & Latin America, BT Global Services. "BT is committed to making a positive and sustainable difference to the communities in which it operates globally. By working with UNICEF we are helping to develop the skills of young people at a very local level, ultimately improving children's futures around the world."

UNICEF's partnership with BT in Brazil aims to engage adolescents in social issues that affect them, and to help make their school environments more stimulating, to reduce high dropout rates. By equipping adolescents with communication and technology skills, BT and UNICEF will also be helping to strengthen their future job prospects, so that they have a better chance of success in their adult lives.

17-year old Bruna, of Vila Madelena, São Paulo, agrees. "Education and communication are the basis if 'we want to change our world' says Bruna. "I've learned a lot from my reporting training, about people who are trying to change the world for the better, and some who seem to want to destroy it. It's opened new doors of understanding for me, and I think one of the best ways to make our communities and our world a better place to is be able to share information and to find solutions together. But we can only do that if we have a good education and can communicate honest information with each other, and with new media, young people are starting to make it happen."



12-year old Maria da Silva of Fortaleza, Brazil, being interviewed by a Brazilian television crew on the programme that has helped her learn how to be a reporter and work with new communication media at her school. Photo: UNICEF/Kent Page