

# Brazil

## Partnerships to empower girls and adolescents

### Objective:

Strengthen the empowerment of adolescents through the development, dissemination and management of a chatbot on body confidence and self-esteem, with special emphasis on addressing gender stereotypes.

### Duration:

May 2019 to December 2023

### Target audiences:

13 to 19-year-old girls and adolescents

### Donor:

DOVE

### Current scope:

49,938 adolescent users of the chatbot (60% girls, 37% boys, 3% non-binary), of which 5,730 adolescents participated in designing the tool (66% girls, 34% boys) and 1,004 people responded to the consultations carried out by the University of Brasilia (85% girls, 15% boys)

### Skill component:

mental health through technological tools (social media)

### Collaborators:

Centre for Appearance Research (CAR) -West England University- and the University of Brasilia (UnB), as well as the technology company Talk2U that set up the chatbot.

### Financing:

USD 1,531,696.77

### Focal point:

Gabriela Mora, Youth and Adolescent Development Officer and Gender Focal Point

### Contact:

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## Some challenges for adolescent girls in Brazil

- ▶ Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of population and geographic area, with 201.5 million inhabitants, out of which 57 million are girls, boys and adolescents.
- ▶ The life of adolescents is marked by multidimensional poverty, school dropout, precarious working conditions, lack of opportunities to develop life skills, poor water and sanitation conditions, high rates of adolescent homicides, gender, race and ethnicity-based discrimination. Within this scenario, violence is one of the issues that most affects the lives of adolescents in Brazil. Every day, 31 girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 19 are murdered in the country. The life of adolescents is also marked by different types of rights violations, including racial discrimination. It is worth noting that over 70% of the victims are Afro-Brazilian.



This violence is also reproduced in virtual/digital environments. According to TIC Kids Online 2017 (produced by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee using an LSE methodology), 39% of Internet users between the ages of 9 and 17 have already witnessed some sort of discrimination. The most frequent types of discrimination are related to: race (26%), physical appearance (16%) and sexual orientation (14%).

- ▶ Among indigenous populations, the average number of suicidal deaths is almost three-fold the national average, accounting for 44.8% of deaths among young people between the ages of 10 and 19.
- ▶ Gender inequalities have perverse effects: Brazil ranks fifth in a list of 83 countries with the highest rates of murdered women (4.8 murders per 100,000 women), and fourth in the world as to the number of girls marrying before the age of 18. In addition, Brazil is the country in the world with the highest rate of murders motivated by hatred against LGBTI persons.
- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gender inequality and mental health problems, mainly affecting girls, overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities and with limited access to their safety nets. Also, there have been more cases of adolescents who inflict self-harm, resulting in self-mutilation and suicide. Due to social isolation and confinement, adolescents have become even more dependent on social media to socialize with their peers, learn and find psychosocial support when needed.



## UNICEF proposes solutions

Within this context, UNICEF Brazil is aware of the need to promote the self-care of girls, boys and adolescents, with a special focus on mental health. Since 2019, UNICEF Brazil has been implementing the “Partnerships to empower girls and adolescents” programme with the aim of strengthening body confidence and self-esteem among girls, boys and adolescents by developing their life skills, through the following strategies:

### 1. Developing skills for the positive management of mental health among girls and adolescents:

- ▶ Educational and recreational activities were organized with a focus on mental health at schools, juvenile justice centres, indigenous and riverside communities, and community centres, presenting Topity as a key tool to be used by students and teachers.

### 2. Advocacy activities to disseminate and promote the project:

- ▶ Communication strategy to have a broader scope and optimize outcomes (mostly targeted to adolescents from different sectors)
- ▶ Communications campaign on social media to disseminate Topity
- ▶ Participation of influencers and youth music groups to promote Topity

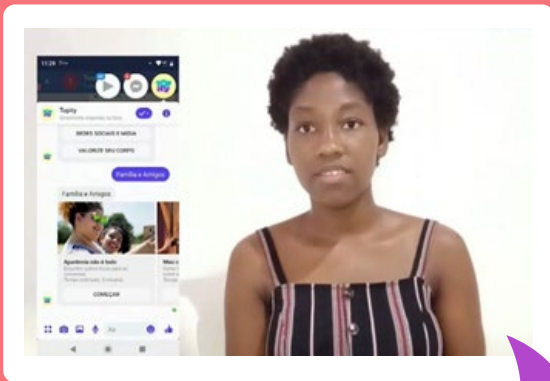
### 3. Evidence generation

- ▶ U-Report surveys focused on self-esteem and body confidence were conducted to obtain data that can be analyzed and guide future UNICEF programmes and also improve the Topity tool.
- ▶ Research is being carried out by the University of Brasilia with a view to demonstrating the importance of Topity as a tool to be used in mental health and therapeutic first aid.

The project was possible thanks to the collaboration of several teams and partners. Besides the technical and financial support of DOVE and UNICEF UK, the development of artificial intelligence storytelling was a part of the alliance with the Argentine company Talk2U. The Centre for Appearance Research (CAR) -West England University- and the University of Brasilia (UnB) are academic research institutions that also participate in this project. Furthermore, several civil society organizations supported the mobilization of adolescents to participate in workshops, focus groups, and other consultations, including U-Report.

This multi-stakeholder collaborative work promoted the development of innovative solutions to strengthen mental health management among adolescents in Brazil and, consequently, the above contributed to improving the self-esteem and body confidence of Brazilian adolescents, with a focus on addressing gender stereotypes and harmful social norms.

## Adolescent voices



**ISABELE VITÓRIA**



18-year-old

"What I like the most about Topity is that it uses youth language and was created for young people with the participation of young people". "I always think that Topity can change people's lives, so that each person feels beautiful, unique." "It helped me, I also faced problems with my image and with accepting myself as I am."



**BENJAMIN NASCIMENTO**

a 17-year-old black transgender boy

"I participate in the State Black Youth Forum and our objective is to promote the participation of young people. We advocate for public policies for youth that are missing in education and health. We have social projects in favelas (informal settlements) and in schools and we show society and children how important they are. Many children and adolescents are improving their self-esteem and stop thinking about taking their own life, about harming themselves or others with prejudice, discrimination, thanks to our intervention projects".

