

SOCIAL POLICIES IN BRAZIL AIMED AT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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When analyzing the youth in a foreseeable future for our generation, I wish one could use less the term 'turbulent'. In fact we live a time that shakes our confidence to build a more dignifying, human and equalitarian world. This historical period threatens to cloud the horizons of history if we are not firmly committed to our goals. It is a challenge that magnifies our responsibility to build a better future for our youth.

The globalized world brought about a fragmented time, the hegemony of the neoliberal rhetoric deprived of universal values and marked by all kinds of exclusions – economic and social and also in the realms of knowledge, information and culture. In the times of globalization and post-modernity, remarkable achievements of human and collective values are scarce. Then we are more than ever confronted with the challenge of rescuing, incorporating and broadening ethical values that have been consolidated in the last two thousand years under the aegis of the best part of the Christian thought. These values are based on the defense of the human dignity, the primacy of human life, the defense of the common good, the care towards the poor. We need to recover the presence of God and the reference to the values of Justice. Technological progress, which thinkers inspired by Enlightenment conceived as a clue to strengthen human potentials, has reinforced social contradictions rather than consolidating Enlightenment ideals. The wave of triumphant capitalism has once more paved the way to an era of the 'temple merchants', which undermines the social fabric and turns the market itself into the new temple. The supreme reference has turned out to be money, private property unlinked to its social function, profit by all means has become the current expression of the 'golden calf'. The consequence of the divinization of consumption is the loss of the fundamental values that inspire human development, and casts a shadow upon the importance of mediation of human conflicts and human relations. The

weakening of references represents a remarkable challenge for the formation of young people, whose opportunities are compromised by anxiety, anguish and doubts. An objective assessment of our challenging times leads us to pessimism.

On the one hand we are pessimistic about our historical period, on the other the work and efforts to face the challenges in Brazil and other Latin American and Caribbean countries allow space for optimism. The acknowledgement of our difficulties must stimulate the search for solutions to change reality, instead of giving space to inaction. Therefore, I take this opportunity to talk about the source of our hope as far the future of the children and young people of my country is concerned.

Brazil recognizes the effects of the post-modern and global times, to which must be added a historical social debt that have accentuated social inequalities for a long time. Shattered families, young people with few or no perspectives, unemployment, child labor, sexual violence against children and teenagers, child prostitution, hunger, all these factors bring about generalized hopelessness among young people. These are some of the challenges we are trying to overcome. Since we came to power in 2003 we have been maintaining, consolidating and widening social policies with the purpose of establishing a new paradigms to protect and support poor families. I may say we have been successful in carrying out the task through a set of policies that promotes investment to benefit of our youth.

Social policies aimed at the most vulnerable family of our country are a State priority now and represent one of the main tokens of progress in our country. For the first time in our history social policies are dealt as public policies, regulated by specific legislation, they are planned and carried out according to objective and clear criteria, oriented by goals supported by social indicators.

Before considering policies aimed at children and young people, it is important to stress that the concern over these segment of society comes before any specific action. Our policies are basically centered on the family, not on individuals, and are geared towards an integrated implementation, so as to compose a web of social protection and promotion.

President Lula took this point into consideration when he launched the 'Zero Hunger' program, inspired by the highest values of the Christian tradition and the social teaching of the Catholic Church that are expressed in Latin America as the option for the poor. The 'Zero Hunger' program is a governmental strategy that articulates policies aimed at promoting the right to life, starting from the most basic level of human dignity, the right

to nourishment, most of all in the case of the poorest groups of the society. This strategy bring together actions carried out by eleven ministries, the core of which is the 'Bolsa Família' program, a program of income transfer with conditionalities.

The creation of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MSD), in January 2004, is also the byproduct of this conception of articulated implementation of public policies. The 'Bolsa Família' comprises programs carried out by two ministries – Social Assistance and Food safety – and a special secretary directly subordinated to the Presidency. The coordination goes beyond the bureaucratic sphere because all programs are linked and carried out in a synergy, which implies a political action under the aegis of the common conception of promoting social development.

Bringing together different areas and valuing the family are founding principles of an official decision that is strictly followed by all the unities of our Ministry. By concentrating our attention on the family and on the urge to recover and strengthen family ties, we are preserving cardinal values in the formation of our citizens. This is reflected in the names of the programs carried out by the different Ministries: 'Bolsa Família', National Program for the Strengthening of Family Agriculture, Houses of Family, Program for the Eradication of Child Labor.

The 'Bolsa Família' program, the major program of income distribution with conditionalities, reaches nowadays nine million families. It provides a basic income to those families who have a monthly income per person that is not higher than R\$ 120 (US\$ 57). This program guarantees the basic and sacred right to nourishment and enables the children of the beneficiary family to attend school and have access to sanitary protection, provided they comply with conditionalities (school attendance and mandatory vaccination).

From this year on, the 'Bolsa Família' project is bound in a formal and direct link to our efforts to fight and eliminate child labor, one of the most damaging situations to the future of a child. We are promoting its integration with the Program for the Eradication of Child Labor – PETI, composed by two main strategies. The first is the income transfer, a monetary contribution to families so their children attending school may also take part in social and educational activities through the day. The second strategy is the transfer of resources to communities entitled to carry out these activities. Therefore the resources of the PETI program may be directed to its main purpose, that is, to promote social and educational activities aimed at recovering the sense of citizenship and the self-reliance of children and young people. This integration enabled us to reach all children or young

people who illegally work in our country, a category estimated in 2,77 million. The Ministry of Social Development is currently carrying out a research to assess the possibility of integration the PETI program and the 'Sentinela' program, an initiative against child and juvenile prostitution. It is an effort aimed at strengthening the measures to eradicate one of the major challenges of modern societies, the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

Under this unified system of social assistance, the Family Houses project provides social and psychological care, try to identify specific local needs and to find possible solutions for them. There are currently 1,49 million families assisted by 1980 centers. These groups have carried out actions of strategic importance for the implementation of complementary policies of labor training, promotion of jobs and income increase, therefore widening the social integration of these families under the perspective of personal emancipation.

Our efforts on food security are inspired by the Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, by John XXIII, the 'peasant pope', who considered family agriculture a strong support for a democratic and stable society. The budget for the National Program for the Promotion of Family Agriculture has increased 275% in the last three years. Today it involves 1,57 million financial activities. In order to strengthen this initiative, we have conceived the Program for the Acquisition of Family Agriculture Products, which promotes the acquisition of staple food from small landowners aimed at the formation of a strategic stock for the provision of basic food needs and distribution of milk to children, pregnant women and old people of poor families. On one hand, the program promotes the local agriculture and stimulates the stable settlement of families in the countryside, providing them with conditions for stability. On the other, it is an instrument for the promotion of the food security of poor families.

The special care towards the youth is an important component of the mobilization of the government of President Lula for the promotion of poor families in Brazil. Therefore, the programs specifically aimed at them are an evolving web we have been weaving, by means of policies geared to social emancipation and 'youth empowerment'.

The Secretary General of the Presidency, in collaboration with the Ministries of Social Development, of Education and of Labor, has carried out the National Program for Youth Inclusion ('Pró-Jovem'), the aim of which is to attend 400.000 young people from 18 to 24 years old between 2005 and 2007. This program requires partnership with under-federal unities.

We also carry out the Young Agent Program, aimed at 112.000 young people in 1.077 cities, with a budget of about R\$ 86 million (US\$ 40 million). In this program poor young boys and girls between 15 and 17 years old receive a monthly stipend of R\$ 65 (US\$ 31) during one year, provided they attend school and take part in training courses to support their communities in health care, environment protection and civic education. We plan to promote professional training to the poorest young people included by the 'Bolsa Família' program, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Labor.

In partnership with the United Nations Development Program, by means of a contest we selected 28 public and communitarian universities to carry out 38 projects of labor integration of socially vulnerable people, which give special priority to people at the same age level as those attended by the 'Pró-Jovem' program (from 18 to 24 years old) and engage them in the family and local context.

The educational policy is another outstanding element aimed at widening the training options for our children and young people. In this sense the Government has conceived a project for the creation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Promotion of Education Professionals.

The Program for the Expansion of Professional Education is another relevant initiative of the federal government that involves training schools and conceives the institution of technical schools at the intermediate level. In the field of higher education, new federal universities and 42 new campi have been planned. The University for All Program forecasts the creation of four hundred thousand scholarships in private higher education institutions in the coming four years. The intention is to increase the number of posts and to engage the public and free education in the fight against social and economical inequality.

Considering only the initiatives carried out by the Ministry of Social Development, we estimate that programs for social inclusion reach about 17 million children and young people. They are also supported by the Program for the Eradication of Child Labor ('Peti'), the Program for Fighting Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Child and Young People ('Sentinela'), the Program for Intensive Family Care, thought the Family Houses, and most of all the 'Bolsa Família' project.

The eradication of child labor is a feasible possibility in Brazil. I am certain that my generation will have the opportunity to witness the end of hunger and malnutrition in our country. According to current trends, extreme poverty will cease to be a sad inheritance to future generations. In

contrast to what was done in the past, we have been supporting income distribution in order to promote sustainable economic development with social justice. Therefore it has been possible to break the free market logic and defend its regulation in order to benefit the poorest groups of society. With the basic income and the improvement of professional training initiatives, our young people have recovered hope in their future. Their families are a strong reference again. I have if not all at least many and remarkable reasons to face the future with hope.

We have been building the possibility of changing reality. Nevertheless I think we should unite our efforts so this possibility of change may become a reality in other countries also. The world have already recognized the importance of investing in the youth, of protecting and promoting poor families, both for ethical and practical reasons, in order to guarantee the sustainability of economical development. This path is indicated by the declaration of the eight millennium development goals sponsored by the United Nations.

We acknowledge the striking social debt we have accumulated thorough our history, a fact that is also linked to the colonization process and other patterns of unbalanced economical relation with richer countries. This situation was properly denounced in the three encyclical letters that deal in a more direct way with justice in international relations – *Pacem in Terris*, by Pope John XXIII, *Populorum Progressio*, by Pope Paul VI, and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, by Pope John Paul II, published in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*.

We are confident to overcome this social debt. And we have been mobilizing the efforts of our people in tandem with the initiatives of people of good will around the world. We need this international solidarity, this web of people engaged in building a better future for the generations to come. We need them in order to achieve the promise of Jesus the Nazarene, the Prince of Peace, 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly'.