

# Funky, but functional

By Camila Godinho

**Brazilian slums – *favelas* in Portuguese – are notorious for violence, disease and desperation. Much has been written about their poor living conditions – ranging from unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation to drug-related crimes and murders. But despite facing such enormous daily difficulties, young people growing up in them often display remarkable spirit and determination, fighting to restore dignity to their lives.**

Across Brazil's *favelas*, programmes to promote the arts, environmentally friendly practices and information technology are blossoming, engaging young people in recycling campaigns, computer classes, plays and musicals. Many were started by organizations working with local community associations.

Young designers are turning discarded plastic bottles and other rubbish into funky but functional pieces of furniture. Encouraged and trained by an organization called OndAzul, their eco-designs are selling well – and, as Brazilians throw away nearly 5.9 billion bottles a year, they are unlikely to run short of raw materials!

Web-browsers from the *favelas* can find



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information on the Ecopop website – [www.ecopop.com.br](http://www.ecopop.com.br) – about recycling, gardening, and do-it-yourself sanitation and waste disposal for when public services fail to deliver. Set up and run by young people from the Viva Rio group, it discusses environmental issues, features local projects and best practices and runs weekly articles by a well-known Brazilian journalist André Trigueiro. Ecopop grew out of a previous Viva Rio project, 'Portal Viva Favela', that introduced *favela* youth to information and communication

technologies. Today the organization's base team has 30 members – half of them young people from Rio's slums.

Did you see the internationally acclaimed movie *City of God*, which chronicled gang warfare in an impoverished housing project in Rio? Many of those taking part in it came from Vidigal's youth theatre company Nos do Morro ('We from the Hillside'), which puts on productions for aspiring actors. Another initiative, 'Favela's Culture', in Andaraí, Rio de Janeiro has helped more than 300 talented youth to discover the stage as a serious profession.

Projects such as these – many created for young people, by young people – are bringing new hope of health, happiness and personal development to slum dwellers. Amid hunger, uncertainty, illiteracy and open sewers, restoring human dignity does wonders to lift people's spirits and harness their creative potential. In *favelas* throughout Brazil, young people have started thinking differently about their future prospects and realizing that they do have the power to change their lives for the better.

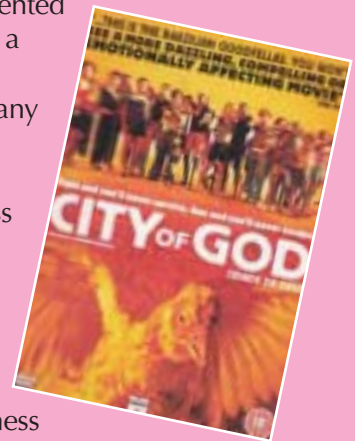


photo: World Bank

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