

Brazilian Youth Learn to Build Computers



Crossing the digital divide. Unemployed youth build computers from scratch at a training center on the outskirts of Recife.

RECIFE, Brazil—It is fairly easy to take a computer apart. All you need is a screwdriver and a bit of courage. But imagine trying to put it all back together again. That's the challenge facing hundreds of unemployed youth in Brazil.

Coming from some of the poorest slums, these young people need jobs. To get a good job, they need skills. Right now, demand is booming in Brazil for computer technicians with just the most fundamental skills. Knowing how to break down and put back together a basic desktop computer is precisely the kind of ticket needed to get a good job.

Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco, is home to inviting sand beaches and gleaming office towers, as well as one of the highest proportions of *favela* (slum) residents in the country. Youth constitute the largest group in the population, and their prospects for future employment are cloudy at best. Girls and young women are particularly at risk.

"Their computer training will begin with the fundamentals," said Marcelo Fernandes, President of the Council for Democracy and Informatics (CDI). "Youth from the poorest neighborhoods will hold computer parts in their hands as they learn about their basic functions."

The parts will come from computers donated by Brazilian businesses and individuals who otherwise would have thrown them away. Instead, the trainees will learn to build new computers that will be donated to CDI internet training centers.

This innovative training program—and the network of internet centers that house it—are part of USAID/Brazil's work to address the employment needs of the country's disadvantaged youth.

The Alliance for Digital Opportunity for Technology and Communication (DOT-COM) program of the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and

Trade will assist the mission in designing the curriculum, focusing in particular on the needs of girls and young women. Internships with the private sector will also be established to assure that the training leads to employment.

Each trainee will build at least one computer. If enough parts can be found, the student will build a second computer that he or she will receive as a graduation present. ★

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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

USAID has applied information and communication technologies (ICT) to development for over 30 years. More recently, the Agency has been working to increase access to remote areas of the world. Activities include the 1995 Leland Initiative, which brought the internet to Africa; the 1998 worldwide Internet for Economic Development Initiative; and the upcoming Bush Administration Digital Freedom Initiative. The work included getting telecommunications policy right, opening competition, decreasing costs, and increasing services to underserved areas.

ICT activities have been tightly integrated into the following:

- ◆ a Mayan language teacher-training program in Guatemala
- ◆ handheld computers that track wildlife in Namibia
- ◆ training for Moroccan women parliamentarians
- ◆ e-commerce training for small and medium enterprises in Mexico
- ◆ online services in Romania

The DOT-COM program focuses as well on critical national policy reforms and learning systems that will make the information revolution more accessible to all.