



At a Glance AÇÃO EDUCATIVA

Ação Educativa is a human rights educational organization based in Sao Paulo, Brazil focused on defending educational, cultural and youth rights and ultimately promoting democracy through education. Emerging from a history anchored in educationalist and activist Paulo Freire's legacy, Ação Educativa employs a model of popular education. For Ação Educativa, gender is an integral dimension of achieving human rights and fighting for democracy. To that end, Ação Educativa trains educators, young people and cultural workers, organizes educational campaigns and collective action, and advocates for public policies that are aligned with community needs.

Founding Background

Ação Educativa was founded in 1994 by a former team of the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI), an organization that was critical in efforts

towards the democratization of the country. In the 1970s and 1980s, CEDI was active in popular education initiatives. For instance, in the 1980s, CEDI assembled volunteers to produce a literacy primer for rubber tappers in the Brazilian state of Acre, with

a staunch commitment to democratization through access to literacy education. Through these popular education efforts, public educational access became even more prominent. In 1994, CEDI ended operation, and the organization's education team founded Ação Educativa to continue working for democracy through educational justice efforts.

Overview of Programs Offered

Gender and Education

The gender-focused program that Ação offers is called the Gender and Education project. The Gender and Education project provides capacity building for teachers around gender equality and censorship.

Girls Decide Committee

This program, carried out in 2022, created safe and participatory initiatives for girls and diverse youth to express themselves and develop leadership skills during the national elections. A new edition is expected by 2026.

Tô no Rumor (I'm on Track)

This is a methodology developed by Ação Educativa and applied to reflect on life projects with adolescents, including gender roles.

Afluentes (Tributaries)

The project maps youth leaders and empowers adolescents to tackle the socio-environmental emergency.

Street Football

Methodology that combines sports with critical debate, promoting mixed-team games and the inclusion of transgender and disabled people.

Target Population

Ação Educativa's programs reach multiple, interconnected target populations. Its teacher training courses and pedagogical resources are directed primarily toward educators and school staff, helping them integrate gender equality into teaching and school management. The organization also prioritizes adolescents and young people, particularly girls, LGBTQIA+, Black, Indigenous, and quilombola youth, who participate in empowerment activities such as the Girls Decide Committee and youth leadership courses. Schools and school communities including families, administrators, and local networks form another key audience through participatory initiatives like the Education Quality Indicators. At a broader level, Ação Educativa engages civil society and policy actors, such as NGOs, unions, research institutes, and government bodies, through coalition work and advocacy campaigns. Ação Educativa targets both youth and educators through their programming. Since 1994, Ação has trained 38,000 educators and served approximately 105,000 young people. The gender norms programming has trained 500 educators, served 81 young people, and approximately 400,000 schools.

Relationship to Formal Systems

Through their advocacy projects and training programs, Ações is closely engaged with formal education systems. Ações is currently in dialogue with the federal executive branch to develop national policies to promote gender equality through education. Most recently Ações finalized a policy proposal delivered to the Ministry of Education in hopes for implementation. While the government support is limited at this time, this public document is being used as an advocacy instrument. Further, Ações provides courses to support teacher and administrator development around gender equality such as the Gender and Education online course, and the Intersectionality in Action hybrid course. These courses support education personnel in developing their capacity in adopting gender-responsive practices within existing school structures. Ações works with government bodies, unions, and research institutes to inform policy development and education reforms. All of Ações Educativa's initiatives are designed to complement formal education rather than operate in isolation, strengthening both classroom practice and systemic equity initiatives.

Program Structure and Duration

Ações's programs are designed to address multiple levels of the education ecosystem, from individual youth to school communities and policy actors.

Its youth empowerment initiatives (e.g., Girls Decide Committee, youth leadership courses) as Ações's teacher training courses and pedagogical programs are modular, allowing flexible implementation over weeks or months depending on school needs and context. For instance, the Gender & Education online courses have taken various forms and have been offered both online and in person. This course changes depending on what is most important at the time. The most recent course that was delivered in November 2025 focused on the ultraconservative wave, analyzing various aspects such as antigender movements, penal populism and the role of big technology within education. The course in 2023 highlighted gender in childhood education and intersectionality. Participatory projects like Education Quality Indicators (EQIs) are implemented periodically in partnership with schools and communities, often aligning with academic calendars.

Program Delivery

Ações has a range of program delivery modes including direct engagement through in-person workshops, training sessions, and participatory activities with youth, educators, and communities. It develops mentorship and support as facilitators guide youth and teachers through structured activities and reflective exercises. Its methods are generally participatory and collaborative as community members, families, and school

staff are actively involved in program planning and implementation. Finally, Ação integrates media in their campaigns, publications, and coalition work to amplify program messages and support systemic change.

Curriculum

A range of curricular topics are embedded within the different programs. Within Ação's youth programs, there is a focus on leadership development, critical thinking, gender equality, civic engagement, social awareness, and empowerment skills. Teacher and school staff training programs focus on gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive classroom management, and integration of equity principles into teaching and school management. Its community and participatory programs engage tools for assessing education quality, inclusive decision-making processes, and strategies to engage families and local networks. Based on the principles of popular education, the training courses take the reality of the students as their starting point, recognizing

the diversity of knowledge and cultures in educational processes. Ação's programs are designed to be interconnected, reinforcing learning and empowerment across youth, educators, and communities.

Geography and Reach

Ação Educativa is located in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and works within the city and has national projects as well. In Sao Paulo, the headquarters operates as a vibrant cultural center where courses, cultural events, and exhibitions are held and provides space for social movements and other organizations to hold their meetings. In the state of Sao Paulo, the Street Football program operates in 25 centers. Ação also works in Bahia and Maranhao. Ação provides online courses which extends its geographic reach, and finally as a rights-based organization, Ação advocates for local and national policies that guarantee the right to education, culture and youth rights.

For more information, see:

Açãoeducativa.org.br/en



OVERVIEW AND MISSION

Ação Educativa was established in 1994 and runs its operations from a cultural center in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Ação emerged from popular education and democratization efforts of the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI). Ação was established during a period of social transformation in Brazil; the organization emerged from the belief that education and cultural engagement are essential tools for promoting democracy, equality, and civic participation. The mission statement of Ação Educativa is the defense of educational, cultural, and youth rights to promote democracy, social justice, and socio-environmental sustainability in Brazil. Ação operates from a cultural center in central Sao Paulo and combines training, materials production, participatory research and advocacy to defend education, culture and youth rights. The organization explicitly frames its work through a human rights lens and centers democracy and social justice.

Approach to Shifting Adolescent Gender Norms

Ação’s approach to shifting gender norms begins with the understanding that gender is a social force that regulates expectations, relationships and behaviors. As Ação Educativa believes that gender operates at both structural and interpersonal, everyday levels, its programming addresses multiple layers.

Teachers are a target population for Ação Educativa in their efforts to address the everyday dimensions in gender inside and out of school contexts. Ação’s signature teacher training courses, includes three editions of the Gender and Education online course, and the Intersectionality in Action hybrid course. Both courses address gender and intersectionality and gender inequalities within education, and strategies for addressing these issues within the classroom

as well as at the level of legal advocacy and frameworks.

Another key area for Ação is supporting schools in assessing their climate and coalescing best practices. Ação implements the Gender Equality in Basic Education Call for Proposals which recognizes innovative school practices and publishes effective lesson plans in a public database for educators and educational professionals. In order to support schools in assessing their climate in alignment with promoting gender equality, Ação developed education quality indicators and the Gender, Sexuality and Race in Schools, a participatory tool that guides schools through self assessment using ten indicators, including prevention of gender violence, promotion of democratic masculinities, and comprehensive sexuality education.

Another programmatic approach to shifting gender norms is through advocacy. As

gender is a key ideological debate ground for conservative ideologies and movements trying to rollback human rights, Ação coordinates the Coalition against Ultraconservatism in Education, a network that congregates civil society organizations, social movements, and university-based research groups.

Additionally, they have worked with the executive, legislative and judicial branches against censorship laws, the militarization of schools and homeschooling. Importantly, Ação is in present discussions with the federal executive branch to develop a national policy to promote gender equality in education.

THEORY OF CHANGE

How Does Ação Educativa's Programming Shift Gender Norms?

The theory of change that anchors Ação Educativa's programming is based on a comprehensive and multilayered understanding of gender and gender inequality. Ação understands gender as a social force that distributes power unequally based on binary classifications of masculine and feminine. This binary division permeates all aspects of sociocultural life, from personal to forms of government. Gender norms establish rigid standards for what it means to be a man or a woman, reflecting an expected continuity between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. And even still, despite violence used to enforce them, people, especially women and LGBTQIA+ people, who are disproportionately disadvantaged - constantly negotiate, deceive, and challenge them.

As such, Ação's gender-focused programming works at multiple levels. The organization's advocacy projects engage the government to mobilize for a national policy for gender equality in education. Its school-wide assessment uses materials that encourage participatory, self assessment helps schools examine the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality and lead to political pedagogical projects and other institutional norms. Professional courses for teachers unpack entrenched gender biases and norms within educators in order for them to create gender equitable classrooms and the context for internal change amongst young people. And youth programming

As Ação believes gender norms are entrenched in the social and cultural fabric, and therefore, the cultural center has an active, vibrant life as the social movements and other organizations frequent the cultural center in Sao Paulo.

Research and Program Evaluations

Ação Educativa integrates research into its advocacy and program design, often in collaboration with universities and civil society partners. Ação Educativa programming has been studied through a combination of internal monitoring, mixed-methods research, and independent academic evaluations. In 2022, the organization conducted a national survey with Center for Studies and Research in Education, Culture and Community Action, combining qualitative and survey data to analyze how ultraconservative narratives have influenced education policy and teacher behavior.

That same year, it released the edited volume *Gender and Education: Reactionary Offensives, Democratic Resistance and Proclamations for the Human Right to Education*, which reflects on resistance strategies against censorship and gender based backlash. This book brings together a compilation of articles by different civil society actors who have acted as partners in advocacy strategies, demonstrating political action in networks and coalitions as a mechanism for sustainable change.

Ação Educativa also led the project *Gender and Education Policies* in partnership with the School of Education at the University of San Paulo, Geledes Institute of Black Women, FundAção Carlos Chagas, and Teachers Against Nonpartisan School. This research includes three strands: a review of academic literature on gender and education policy, a quantitative analysis of gender in technical education, and a

mapping of legislative proposals related to gender in education. Collectively, these studies highlight how conservative pressures have caused teacher harassment, censorship, and self censorship, while also demonstrating that coordinated advocacy can yield concrete policy wins, including favorable court decisions. The organization recognizes a need to strengthen its impact measurement systems, noting that it “still lacks the tools to measure the impact of our project in terms of changing gender norms.” Through its partnerships with Cenpec, USP, Geledes, FundAção Carlos Chagas, and the Malala Fund, Ação Educativa continues to build an evidence base for transforming gender norms through education.

What Works

Several promising practices emerge from Ação Educativa’s approach to shifting gender norms through education. First, its dual level strategy links structural advocacy with everyday pedagogical change, ensuring that reforms in policy and school culture reinforce each other. Second, the organization’s participatory school self assessment model, embodied in the Education Quality Indicators, Gender, Sexuality and Race in Schools, empowers teachers, students, and families to collectively identify and address gender inequities. Third, Ação Educativa demonstrates the effectiveness of a multi stakeholder coalition, as seen in the Coalition against Ultraconservatism in Education, which unites civil society groups, researchers, and educators to defend inclusive education. Finally, the organization

prioritizes youth leadership and voice, creating spaces where girls and marginalized youth can co design initiatives and become advocates for equality within their schools and communities.

