

## In Memoriam

### Ruth Cardoso: Anthropologist, First Lady, Social Reformer

Ruth Cardoso, a distinguished anthropologist, former first lady of Brazil and leader of IAF grantee Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP), died in São Paulo on June 24, 2008, after suffering a heart attack. She was 77. Over her long career as a researcher, professor, feminist, and government official, Dona Ruth, as she was affectionately known, played an important role in shaping Brazilian social policy.

In the early 1950s, Dona Ruth met Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the sociologist who later became president of Brazil, at the University of São Paulo where she eventually earned a doctorate. The couple married in 1952. Like many other intellectuals of their generation, she was forced into exile during the repressive military regime beginning in the late 1960s. While abroad, Dona Ruth studied or taught at la Maison de Sciences de L'Homme in France, the University of Chile, Columbia University in the United States and Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. Her publications included a series of influential articles and book chapters on social movements and on the complex community life in Brazil's *favelas*, or slums. She is credited with having helped introduce the study of poverty and violence into the Brazilian academic agenda.

But it was as first lady, that Dona Ruth wielded the most influence, and her approach to the role has been compared to Eleanor Roosevelt's. When her husband assumed office in 1994, she abolished the ineffectual, patronage-laden Legião Brasileira de Assistência Social (LBA), a charity with the first lady as its titular head, and replaced it with the Comunidade Solidária, a ground-breaking agency targeting poverty reduction through engagement with civil society. Over eight years, it addressed adult literacy, job training, volunteerism, and financing for small enterprises. Dona Ruth also launched the Conselho da Comunidade Solidária, made up of government ministers, NGO leaders and businessmen, which promoted dialogue on such hot-button issues as agrarian reform and the role of the third sector. The programs she pioneered benefited poor communities

throughout Brazil. They also paved the way for the *Bolsa Familia* launched by the Lula government in 2003, a massive conditional cash transfer program that serves as a safety net for some 11 million families and has significantly reduced absolute poverty.

D. Ruth worked as a researcher with CEBRAP, a leading social science think-tank based in Sao Paulo, with which the IAF has been in contact since its founding in early 1970s when it was founded. Later, in the 1990s, the IAF funded CEBRAP's research on the economic integration of immigrants from the Northeast in Sao Paulo. As the FR for Brazil and later as an employee of the World Bank, I met with Dona Ruth on several occasions. She was always unpretentious and friendly, displaying the intellect of a seasoned academic and the resolute calm and simplicity of someone deeply committed to social change.

Dona Ruth lived through a landmark era and was well ahead of her time. When the history of this transition is written, she will be featured as a key figure who led Brazil to recognize and begin to overcome longstanding gender discrimination and social inequality. An enduring image embodying her uninterrupted commitment to social justice is the small doll crafted by one of the countless women's groups funded by Comunidade Solidária and placed in her coffin in final tribute.—*John Garrison, senior civil society specialist, the World Bank*