

## **The benefits of cooperation between university, NGOs and community – The case of a health care extension program in Ceará**

**BRUNO DE SOUZA LESSA**  
Universidade Federal do Ceará  
brunolessa85@yahoo.com.br

**ROBERTO CUNHA FERREIRA**  
UFC  
roberto.academico85@gmail.com

**JOSÉ CARLOS LÁZARO DA SILVA FILHO**  
Universidade Federal do Ceará  
lazar@ufc.br

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**ABSTRACT**

The *Instituto da Primeira Infância* (IPREDE) is a NGO started twenty-nine years ago that became an extension program of the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). Students from the school of Medicine from UFC have been contributing with the extension project by exercising practically the knowledge they acquire in their lectures. The community, the University and the organization have been harvesting advantages out of this cooperation. In this regard, the research question asks which would be the benefits to each part. To analyse the extent this collaboration is fruitful, this study uses three categories of benefits drawn on from Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011), which identify advantages (i) for the participating organization and for society; (ii) for the researchers involved; (iii) and for the university implicated, in order to classify the benefits for each actor. This research is exploratory, qualitative and uses semi-structured interviews to reach its objectives. The data analysis utilizes the content analysis technique from Bardin (1977). This study aims to contribute by showing how the relationship between NGOs, community and university can be beneficial for all parties, in as much as this interaction tackles a social problem such as the lack of appropriate paediatric and family healthcare.

**Keywords:** Paediatric health care; university extension; community.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of university in present times concerns to a very recent institution, which underwent several changes over time. At first, it was thought as the University of Consciousness with the prime mission to shape human minds. Later, during the 1950s, the concept of university as a place of labour emerged, inspired by North American principles. Currently, universities have been adopting a model that intends to connect citizenship, human rights and greater urge to achieve a less unequal and unbalanced society (Sleutjes, 1999).

In Brazil, there are three inseparable practices for universities as stated in the constitution of 1988: teaching, research and extension. In this sense, the role of universities goes beyond the obligation of transferring contents in as much as it is also their attribution to perform scientific investigations and provide services to surrounding communities (Santos, 1996).

This service provision is directly related to university extension, to be defined here as different initiatives by which the university inserts itself into the community. This insertion may happen in different ways such as by developing projects and receiving new experiences aggregated by students and professors. Moreover, this interaction permits university members to engage with people from distinct social classes, feature that also contributes with the local development of places in which these projects take place. Furthermore, public and private higher education institutions have broadly used extension programs to train their students and, at the same time, provide healthy interaction with certain communities (Mauerberg, Guerreiro, Costa & Ferreira, 2014).

Thiollent (2002) identifies extension programs as emancipatory projects given that they may enable people to overcome obstacles inherent to their social conditions. These programs have the potential to promote social changes once poor individuals start building new knowledge on their own.

Therefore, to investigate the role of university extension programs, this study draws on the one performed by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) published in the *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental*, in which an initiative exchanging social technologies in Rio de Janeiro for more than two decades was analysed. These authors provided three categories for benefits that served as basis for the research conducted here; they are related to advantages for the participating organization and for society; for the researchers involved; and for the university implicated. Nonetheless, we propose a different approach as we intend to scrutinize the benefits generated for the NGO involved, for the surrounding community (to be understood as the extension program direct beneficiaries) and, the advantages for the university, which we encompass here as the positive impacts the participation in the program had for the students who took part in it.

The initiative reported in this paper has been existing in the Brazilian state of Ceará since the 1980s. The *Instituto da Primeira Infância* (IPREDE – Institute for the First Childhood, in Portuguese) was established in 1986. A team of social entrepreneurs founded the non-governmental organization (NGO) with the mission to prevent and treat children with malnutrition as well as to deal with connected illnesses caused by such condition. This NGO became an extension program sponsored by the Federal University of Ceará (UFC, in Portuguese). UFC students have been working in the project as a way practice the knowledge on paediatric care they previously receive during theoretical lectures (IPREDE, 2015). Hence, the efforts carried out there align with our objectives and with the categories proposed by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) given that university, community and NGO have been interacting and collecting benefits from this joint experience.

Our general objective is to analyse the advantages each part attain from this cooperation. This general objective unfolds into three specific ones. First, to identify the benefits the

interaction provides to the community served. Second, to outline the advantages granted to the university itself, taken into perspective by the students' experiences and opinions as well as by one representative from UFC. Third, to identify the benefits attained by the NGO, represented here by its president. Therefore, considering the aspects conveyed, this study intends to answer the following research question: *What benefits the community, university and an NGO obtain from interacting with one another?*

This article is important for three main reasons. Firstly, it is about an initiative linked with paediatric care that has been operating for more than twenty years; this area in healthcare is sensitive and deserves attention, especially in Brazil, a country with an increasing demand for quality healthcare services. Secondly, this paper describes to a certain extent the advantages of an interaction considered good, but not deeply investigated in the health related sector. Thirdly, it contributes with advancing the discussion about the role of universities in civil society.

To facilitate understanding, this paper is divided in seven sections. After this introduction, the second section deals with the theoretical background regarding university extension. Afterwards, the third section takes opportunity to explain the categories of benefits from Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011), which were adapted to be used in this study. The fourth section considers methodological aspects that guided the research process. The fifth section presents an overview of the NGO wherein the university extension programs occurs. Afterwards, the following segment puts forward the analysis of findings and its discussion. At last, the last section presents the final remarks, limitations and directions for future research.

## **2 UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

Mauerberg, Guerreiro, Costa and Ferreira (2014) state that extension might be understood as several distinct practices the university engages to get closer to the community it belongs. It is considered one of the pillars of those institutions along with teaching and research. In this sense, the university extension needs to generate integration, offer knowledge to support developing projects and to receive new life experiences accumulated by participants, based on the involvement of all actors engaged.

Regarding the relevance of university extension programs for society, Melo Neto (1996) has also evidenced the role of university as a service provider for its community. For example, in the USA, university extension programs hold this feature whereas European schools evidence the dissemination of technical knowledge. This author stated that the European tradition turned out determining, most of times, the shape of university extension practices in Brazil. An instance of that can be observed in the quick spread and popularization of MBA programs claiming to be extension projects.

In this sense, the most traditional service-related forms of university extension programs in Brazil are presented in the health area, with the provision of services to the population through university hospitals. Mauerberg, Guerreiro, Costa and Ferreira (2014) also suggest that the university should problematize and offer to the community conditions to carry out some services by itself, thus, being able to generate the emancipation of those individuals. In this author's point of view, the extension process would depend less on the university's bureaucratic and administrative structure, but more on the commitment of professors and students.

Rubin (2000) introduces the idea that the academic literature considering university extension falls into the following categories: studies elaborated by universities, mostly resembling internal reports. Second, the local assessment supplied by partners, focusing on the analysis of processes and results produced by researchers and professors from the same university. In a third category, the objective is to detect and record what the target population

would be expecting from the initiative. Fourth, the scrutiny of proposes, discussions and methodologies to evaluate partnerships, or, how partnerships between university-community can indeed provide reliable assessments, and comparisons between case studies. Finally, the author points out to studies regarding the national evaluation of programs supporting local partnerships, this last category deals with the clustering of the fourth first ones attempting to outline a national program of incentives.

Cunha (1989) foregrounded the role attained by extension in Brazil that contrasts with the secondary part it had had decades ago. According to this scholar, the second-class status given to extension by the Brazilian Constitution promulgated in 1968, once that it lacked importance behind research and teaching, was conversed by the Constitution from 1988 in as much as it was raised to be as important as research and teaching.

In Brazil, as previously mentioned, issues linked with university extension started to be more broadly discussed after the redemocratization occurred in the 1980s. Analysing different public policies related to university extension programs that were deployed in the country along almost 15 years (1985-1998), Tavares (1997) concluded that these governmental projects still had placed extension as a third university function, which mostly sustained an welfare perspective, intending to promote a dominant ideology.

Among the desirable features for an extension project lies flexibility, as the program needs to change whenever the target-population demands. In this regard, once community emancipation is also an aspect to be highlighted by these projects, they should, besides providing services demanded by the local population, create opportunities for these locals assimilate new knowledge, putting it in practice in their daily lives (Castro, 2004; Hennington, 2005).

Therefore, the transference of knowledge and the work performed by universities' faculty and students has potential to foment benefits for everyone involved. In this sense, to analyse how each part can harvest advantages out of such cooperation, the next sections conveys the categories of benefits presented by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011).

### **3 CATEGORIES OF BENEFITS**

Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) classify the beneficiaries of partnerships between communities, universities and institutions in three main categories: participants and society; researchers; and institutions. Regarding the first category, *participants and society*, members from the community served by the extension program listed the benefits they obtained, which were related to being able to get funding for projects in the community. Community members received training and became able to reach opportunities that would not be available or would be more difficult to be attained otherwise. It is relevant to evidence this study was conducted in an extension program working with entrepreneurship and projects related to it.

The extension project also fostered cooperation among community members, strengthening interactive bonds among the community itself. The initiative fomented social capital and results in greater involvement from people inhabiting an area and the space itself, along with their social demands and possible solutions. The project served a meeting place with individuals from other neighbourhoods coming to have that same service, a contributing feature to fortify connections with other communities increasing possibilities for the initiative to be replicated. Furthermore, an extension project, while a university action in a community, offered to external audiences a range of theories and techniques through teaching and researching. The interaction between faculty members and community enabled social changes to happen, besides

providing students and professors a wider perspective of society (Cruz, Melo, Malafaia & Tenório, 2011).

The second category, *researchers*, comprises benefits to faculty members participating in the extension project. In their study, Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) highlighted the experience as complementary to the ones attained in lectures, granted that students would be able to exercise in practice what they had learnt completely or partially in theory. Moreover, the project's activities, in a methodological and epistemological point of view, may permit students to produce material for academic writings, which promote and advance knowledge in the area the project occurs. At last, the time experienced in the extension project might contribute with changing the way students' practices are carried out in other fields. In as much as students and professors work in a university extension move to other actions, they transfer new knowledge and ways of thinking developed during the first involvement.

In the third category of benefits, which regards the ones granted to *institutions*, Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) expose the advantages the university harvested by cooperating with the community. In this sense, the authors bring forward that as the experience with the extension program was advertised by students who had participated in it, more students became interested, thus, improving faculty contact with external audiences. Knowledge concerning practices students engaged in the project diffused through and the syllabus underwent transformation to encompass new demands. Furthermore, the university was acknowledged by the community through reports in radio and TV programs highlighting the importance of joint actions with higher education institutions. The project became visible and students from other universities stated looking for and working with it, reproducing the idea elsewhere.

Nevertheless, drawing on the categories proposed by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011), we suggest a different perspective as we aim to analyse the benefits generated by these partnerships. Granted that the sample comprised here was smaller and the extension project was different, we proposed another terminology to guide data analysis. Three categories have been kept, but the terms used to refer to each and the beneficiaries encompassed changed. The proposal was to work with the following categories operationalize this study: *community*, *university* and *organization*.

The first one reports the benefits obtained by *community* members who had received the service provided in the extension project. The main question to be answered is what kind of gains, tangible or not, these "customers" were able to reach through the project. The following category, *university*, intended to deal with the ways faculty members perceive how the participation and cooperation between all partners involved was beneficial to them and to university as a whole. Finally, the third category concerns how the *organization* IPREDE, wherein the extension project takes place, was benefitted by interacting with both other parts. Our prime objective, as previously stated, was to provide a broader perspective on the benefits each side attain from cooperating with one another.

#### **4 METHODOLOGY**

IPREDE was chosen for this research because of its importance and success in helping children undergoing nutrition, cognitive and psychological problems. The NGO has been operating in Ceará for almost three decades and it has set partnerships with many kinds of organizations to fulfil its social mission, besides being a UFC's extension project. The variety of medical services offered there, the length of time the partnership between UFC and the NGO has been taking place and the availability the organization offered were also driving factors for this choice.

This study is classified as qualitative once the processes regarding the transference of knowledge is epistemologically underpinned on non-Cartesian principles, which value the interaction between the parts involved and the depth of related social issues (Vieira, 2004). Our purpose is to analyse, based on the categories of benefits conveyed by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) how the partnerships and interactions established between the Federal University of Ceará, the NGO IPREDE and the community has been prolific to all parts. In this sense, this qualitative research is exploratory given that its main objective is to provide greater understanding about a phenomenon (Gil, 1999).

For our objectives to be reached, the research strategy adopted was the case study. Yin (2001) asserts the case study is the most appropriate way to comprehend questions such as “how” and “why” certain phenomena occur, when there is little or no control over the events investigated and the focus of interest lies on current phenomena, to be analysed considering the present context.

Both primary and secondary data were used as sources of evidence. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, in which questions sought to understand participants’ profiles and how they perceived the connected parts were benefitted by interacting with one another. Secondary data, conversely, mainly included information taken from websites.

Furthermore, for the interview process, we selected three Medicine students that had worked in IPREDE and a professor who still sees patients there, who coordinates and oversees the operational extension activities there. These actors were chosen because of their work at the NGO as an UFC’s extension project. A university representative working at the dean of extension projects was also heard; these five interviews aimed at checking the perceptions of faculty members on the aforementioned interaction. IPREDE’s executive director was interviewed in order to attain the NGO’s perspective and a community leader was heard so the community point of view was taken into account as well. In total, nine interviews were performed during January and February 2015.

After data were collected, it was necessary to interpret broadly all information. The instrument employed for such comprehension was Bardin’s (1977) content analysis technique. Themes were worked in a previous analysis, which resulted in the creation of categories related to the ones introduced by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) and the reality investigated.

Nevertheless, after the research was carried out, it was decided to change which elements would be included in each category. Such undertake happened because the views from students, professors and UFC’s representative were rather similar, aspect that allowed comprising these actors in the same category. Thus, *university* encompasses the benefits generated for UFC related members; *community* includes benefits harnessed by patients who are members of the surrounding community; at last, *organization* takes into account how the NGO is benefitted by engaging with the other two parts, the university and the community.

## **5 The *Instituto de Prevenção da Desnutrição e da Excepcionalidade* (IPREDE)**

This sections aims to provide an overview of the NGO participating in the interaction studied here; the focus is to provide the reader with a more comprehensive background on the efforts this organization has been performing throughout the years. Such efforts were crucial for its incorporation as an extension program not only by the Federal University of Ceará, but also by other public and private universities, whose professors have been taking students there with the objective of grating on-hands experience for their health related studies.

The *Instituto de Prevenção da Desnutrição e da Excepcionalidade* (Institute for the Prevention of Malnutrition and Excepcionality – IPREDE in Portuguese) started its operations

in 1986. The NGO aimed at preventing and treating children with malnutrition problems and the related consequences of such illness. During the 1980s in Ceará, the IPREDE intervened in a context in which only 100 out of 1000 new-borns survived until their first year of age and wherein around 30% of all malnourished children had their growth rates negatively influenced by problems connected with malnutrition (IPREDE, 2015).

Nevertheless, over the decades, Brazilian economic situation improved and the paradigm mentioned above changed. In this new context, malnutrition indices lowered to residual figures of around 6% to 7% and child mortality rates dropped to around 20 of every 1,000 births (IPREDE, 2015). Hence, the organization felt the urge to evolve in its mission by investing broadly in the period named the first childhood, which ranges from gestation to the six years of age. This new scenario made the NGO to rename itself, becoming the *Instituto da Primeira Infância* (First Childhood Institute in Portuguese), although it kept the acronym IPREDE for which it was nationally known.

Currently, IPREDE is a reference center on the first childhood. Moreover, it has also become space for the production, teaching and advertising of topics related to this period for society. The Institute has been dedicating to expanding its activities through programs and actions enabling intervention not only with the children, but also with their mothers or caregivers. This novel perspective overcomes the simple healing of malnutrition related problems or to weight loss; its goal has evolved into encouraging a more holistic view of childhood.

To reach such objective, the NGO has been developing projects, goods and services in articulation with other sectors of society. The focus is on public welfare, nutrition and first childhood development. In addition, IPREDE works with generating and spreading scientific and technical knowledge from the experiences they have acquired over the years as well as it aims to produce and endorse art as an instrument for raising awareness and giving higher value to citizenship.

Professionals such as nutritionists, doctors, form the multidisciplinary team that takes care of infants arriving at IPREDE, educators specialized in child nutrition, nurses, pedagogues, physiotherapists, occupational and speech therapists also cooperate to provide the appropriate treatment the child needs. This team provides a variety of treatments, encompassing consultations, educational sessions, nutritional orientation and individual appointments with specialists if the case requires.

Furthermore, over the years, besides the development of other activities besides providing food and medical care to children, IPREDE has been diversifying its means to obtain funding; the bottom line for such initiative is to decrease the reliance on governmental grants and/ or private donations, resources that are both limited in duration and quantity. The NGO has been implementing multiple measures to tackle this issue, for instance, building office spaces to be rented by health professionals and a conference center that is offered to private companies to be used for training sessions.

Moreover, and more importantly for this research, the non-governmental organization started two social enterprises. The first one, the Saúde Popular Clinic, began operating in 2013 and the *Luz* Laboratory (LabLuz), started one year later. IPREDE's website is clear about the fact these endeavours were idealized aiming to provide financial sustainability to the NGO, in the sense that they would allow the organization to address to its social mission whereas providing funding for its long-term continuity.

Interestingly, one of the social enterprise marketing strategies, as well as a method to mobilize collaboration amid its workers, suppliers and customers, is emphasizing the fact that by using Saúde services one helps directly in the struggle against malnutrition the NGO has performed throughout its history. Collaborators are motivated to visit IPREDE in order to be



known more about the initiatives performed there, thus, understanding the relevance of the contribution they make, whatever it might be.

The efforts and success IPREDE has carried out over the years drew our attention to it, making it central for this research. The primary and secondary data gathered about the organization helped in building the analysis and the discussion of results, subject of the next section.

## 6 RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This sixth section analyses the data from the interviews as well as discusses the implication of such findings, fitting them into the categories of benefits drawn on from Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011). This part comprises three subsections aiming to contemplate the benefits the interaction between the UFC, IPREDE and the community have been receiving. The first subsection introduces the benefits for the Federal University of Ceará. Afterwards, the following subsection discusses the benefits the NGO has been harvesting by the interplay with the other two parts. Finally, the ways the community has been benefitted by the aforementioned interaction are displayed in the last subsection.

### 6.1 Benefits for the Federal University of Ceará

To investigate the advantages collected by UFC’s students and professors, this study took opportunity to interview three students and one professor who worked (in the case of the professor still works) at IPREDE. Their speeches were consistent with one another in the sense that all of them highlighted similar benefits by having a closer experience with the NGO.

<b>Category: Benefits for the Federal University of Ceará</b>	
<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Accounts</b>
UFC Student 1	“The books always tell us to talk to the parents and suggest the best therapeutic alternative, but when you go there and try to do so, you realize there’s a whole context surrounding it. A lot of times the parents can’t pay attention to the kids properly or don’t have the money to afford the treatment we suggest, so we need to take this into account, learning these aspects was great to me”.
UFC Student 2	“We learn that the biggest problem in the public health system is the patients’ socioeconomic condition. I realized that there are issues as important to them as the medicine, issues like food, transportation and safety. If you don’t get empathetic with the patient, he will never be able to get good treatment. Moreover, I got to know a reality different of my own, although I have lived near IPREDE my whole life I wasn’t aware of many social problems these families undergo.”
UFC Student 3	“We don’t see the patient as a photograph. There is a follow-up process and this process takes you to get involved with the cause, to get involved with the families’ histories, but that’s not all. We see that there are many social and psychological factors interfering in their health and that is why you need a multidisciplinary team. You need the whole team to get the patient to reach the best health possible.”
UFC Professor	“What we do here, besides the extension, is part of the undergraduate courses like the internship. Then, the post-graduation, with the resident doctor who is encompassed in this perspective; that is, they perform both ambulatory activities and malnutrition treatment. Therefore, we end up linking graduation, extension and post-graduation.”  “In the IPREDE we can interact with a greater number of professionals, something we can also do at the university, but it is much easier here. We interact with the occupational therapist, the physiotherapist, the nutritionist. We also have greater

	autonomy in this sense, and once we have more autonomy, this extension work is helping to fill this gap we had at the university.”
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Figure 1 – Benefits for the Federal University of Ceará

Source: Interviews’ transcriptions

For instance, Student’s 1 accounts state that he believes the experience at the NGO was beneficial given that in academic terms he sought to study harder so he could be of further assistance at the organization. What was seen in the books, according to him, is important although deeply theoretical; thus, the extension programs worked as a chance to put in practice what he had seen only in theory, what turned out to be quite different from what was studied in the manuals.

The second student interviewed conveyed similar advantages in as much as she affirmed that being able to work at the NGO for a time helped in fomenting a kind of “socioeconomic awareness” related to where patients came from, and how such background influenced their illnesses, which automatically would result in a different approach to their conditions. Furthermore, the hands-on experience at IPREDE, according to her accounts, strengthened her desire to work with Paediatrics.

Student 3, besides emphasizing aspects foregrounded by the others, also asserted about the opportunity of working with a multidisciplinary team as one of the main advantages of working at IPREDE. Once the NGO does not only receive Medicine students or even students just from one specific university, everybody who takes part in the project has the chance to interact with other fields and institutions. Hence, the student gets in touch with knowledge not only from other specialties, but also with areas such as psychology, occupational therapy, speech therapy and social work.

The UFC professor highlighted two important benefits the partnership and the extension program provide to students and the university. First, there is the possibility for students to acquire the requirements they need throughout their courses, besides practicing what they had learnt theoretically. In this regard, they also have contact with researches and are able to link undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

Moreover, and additionally to the greater socioeconomic awareness the students asserted, the professor emphasized their chance to interact with academics from other areas and institutions. He considers a problem the lack of interaction medicine students normally have with faculty and students from other areas, a gap IPREDE helps to fulfil as UFC students meet people from different academic backgrounds while working there.

Therefore, following the categories drawn on from Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011), the benefits for UFC represented by its students and faculty are multiple. In addition, as part of the interaction as well as active member and place where such interplay occurs, the NGO also harvests benefits, subject discussed in the next subsection.

**6.2 Benefits for IPREDE**

The NGO has also been reaching multiple advantages by sharing knowledge and resources with the community and the UFC, serving as a stage for positive exchanges. In order to present and analyse the benefits this subsection brings the accounts collected during the interview process and highlights such benefits based on Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011).

Category: Benefits for IPREDE	
Interviewees	Accounts
IPREDE’s President	“We are the biggest UFC extension program. We seek the academia a lot to give us support and legitimacy in one of our fundamental pillars, which is the scientific

	<p>support. We have been acknowledged by our scientific methodologies since our beginning. Nowadays, IPREDE has become an advanced center for health studies.”</p> <p>“Currently, our partnership goes beyond UFC. This first connection gave us space with other institutions and now we receive all universities in Ceará with health related courses both public and private, all Medicine students from all universities mandatorily pass through an internship here.”</p>
UFC Professor	IPREDE is now walking towards the first childhood period. IPREDE can now set strong foundations wherein can treat its children in a wider way, thus, society will have less teenagers and adults with pathological processes and with less repercussions of those problems. Our work allows them to do a better job in the end.
UFC Student 1	“In the extension program sometimes there were six to eight students helping the senior doctor there, so, with our help IPREDE could serve much more people”.
UFC Student 2	“They get a person who is both committed with the organization and an academic, a specialized workforce. The academic is there willing to learn so he wants to do his best and the organization gains more, it gets a person committed with the cause”.
UFC Student 3	“IPREDE has also made some good partnerships. We [the UFC team] made contact with a laboratory and we got exams for free for the patients here, we did the request and the lab supplied what we needed with no charge.”

Figure 2 – Benefits for IPREDE  
Source: Interviews’ transcriptions

The President of the NGO, who is also a professor of Paediatrics at UFC, emphasized the provision of legitimacy as the first benefit that cooperating with UFC deliver. In this regard, the university, through its students and professors, brings actual and updated scientific knowledge. Moreover, once the NGO has a close bond with a renowned institution such as UFC, it has attained more legitimacy with the community.

In this sense, the connection with UFC granted legitimacy with other educational institutions, which have also been cooperating with the NGO. Students and professors from many courses go to the organization to practice or improve their skills, which turns out to be effective both for them and for the members of the community served at IPREDE.

Regarding further benefits for the NGO, the interviewees highlighted the opportunity IPREDE has to give their patients more prompt and quality service through the work they perform. The Brazilian public health system, although universal, has not been able to provide appropriate and swift service to its beneficiaries (Salvatori & Ventura, 2012). Hence, the work carried out at IPREDE is important for vulnerable individuals who would take much longer to be seen by a doctor or other health professionals elsewhere.

In their accounts, UFC students asserted three other benefits IPREDE has been attaining through by interacting with the university. First, the patients receive treatment that is both better and faster, as the professor had already stated, and senior doctors working there are able to see patients more calmly because of students’ assistance. Second, the NGO receives health professionals who are committed to the organization’s social mission. Third, these committed students cooperate with the NGO by going after partnerships to allow not only to do their job, but also to help patients to receive better care. One example was the collaboration with one private laboratory that donated free exams for IPREDE’s patients, an achievement whose protagonists were the UFC team of students and professor working at the NGO.

Hence, it is noticeable that the benefits IPREDE has collected by interacting with UFC have a direct impact on the ones served. These service improvements are a result of the interplay for the people from surrounding communities, who go to the NGO to receive medical treatment difficult to be reached in the public health system otherwise. Therefore, to increase understanding on how the community has been benefitted, according to the categories drawn on from Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011), the next subsection discussed this issue.

### 6.3 Benefits for the community

The interplay fomented by the Federal University of Ceará and IPREDE has made possible for Medicine and other students from healthcare courses to practice their knowledge, granting hands-on experience as well as the chance to interact with a community they would not normally have contact. To analyse the benefits this third part, the community, receives by sharing experiences with UFC and IPREDE this section conveys the accounts presented by the interviewees, foregrounding such aspects using the category suggested by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011).

<b>Category: Benefits for the community</b>	
<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Accounts</b>
IPREDE's President	"IPREDE, besides giving treatment and food, needed to go after social technologies to stimulate the children and their mothers. Using a scientific methodological base and academic assistance, we have become a center for social technologies as well as childcare for our community".
UFC Professor	"To work with nutrition it is necessary to create a bond. It is difficult for vulnerable families to have access to good healthcare; the waiting line is too long. Then, here patients can receive attention and quality treatment from doctors and other professionals difficult to be accessed in the public health system".
UFC Student 1	"The quality of service is improved, the waiting time is much shorter and we can see patients with more attention. Hence, our assessment on his or her problems turn out to be better, everybody wins in the end. Some time ago, these people would be seen in a couple of minutes in a normal hospital, but in IPREDE they realize we have time and we care about them".
UFC Student 2	"It's good for the children who receive good treatment and for the moms who can take part in projects. Some projects teach them skills, others provide psychological support. There are moments just for talking to them, to get their doubts regarding not only health issues, but other needs the child and the family may have".
UFC Student 3	"If the child needs some special kind of food, IPREDE provides for free, something they cannot get elsewhere. Moreover, there are multidisciplinary teams to help these families. Teachers, psychologists, social workers and doctors working together to help solving their difficulties, to prevent that from harming the child's development.

Figure 3 – Benefits for the community  
Source: Interviews' transcriptions

IPREDE's president emphasized the role the organization has in developing projects not only related to malnutrition, supplying food to children, but also involving their mothers and families with the problem. The organization has taken opportunity to implement and create social technologies to help its beneficiaries, besides making partnerships to provide better service like the one with UFC. In this sense, the university assists the NGO by supplying both human resources, legitimacy and scientific background in which IPREDE can rely on its activities. The community harvests benefits both from the projects the organization provides as well as from the attention given by students and professor from the university.

Furthermore, the UFC professor highlighted the chance local people have to obtain quality and prompt medical treatment in a short term. The public health system in Brazil would not be capable of providing service with the swiftness and width malnourished children need, not only by providing food, but also by giving a multidisciplinary treatment with a team from professionals from different areas. The waiting time at IPREDE is smaller, feature that ends up being beneficial for the health system as a whole.

UFC's students also asserted about the importance the higher quality of the treatment people are able to receive there. Children who need special kinds of milk, for instance, can receive it without any charge. Moreover, mothers can obtain job training besides the medical treatment for their children, thus, they can go to the job market with improved skills, finding better opportunities with higher salaries. In addition, students pursue other institutions to enhance the methods to provide treatment, such as laboratories for exams of many sorts and, as a result, children attain a diagnosis and treatment that are more precise.

Because of the interaction between UFC and IPREDE, the community gains are multifolded. They receive quality medical service to treat paediatric problems related to malnutrition or not; mother are able to get job training and participate in groups that raise social capital as well as improve their lives. The community is benefitted by having healthcare that would be difficult to be reached in the regular public health system or they would not be able to afford privately.

## **7 FINAL REMARKS**

The importance of universities within society as well as the influence local communities and organizations have on them was the engine leading to conduct this study. In this sense, the focus was to scrutinize how the relationship between the Federal University of Ceará, an NGO and the surrounding community foments benefits to these parts. To categorize these benefits, the dimensions proposed by Cruz, Melo, Malafaia and Tenório (2011) were used to ensure more accurate analysis and scientific rigor.

The general objective was then reached in as much as it was possible to outline how this interaction has been beneficial to the aforementioned parts. Furthermore, the analysis of community, university and NGO related advantages made possible to refer to specific objectives, answering them as well.

Concerning the first specific objective, linked with the benefits engendered to the community, the interviewees emphasized the easier access to quality medical attention and treatment, feature that would not be reached through the regular public health system. The possibility to be seen and examined by a specialist hard to be found even through private means was also posed as an advantage the partnership creates to the community. Nevertheless, given that it was not possible to hear community leaders to confront results, we suggest that further studies contemplate these individuals overcoming one of this study's limitations. We also recommend that more students be heard as well as professionals from other health areas who work at IPREDE, besides the ones from Medicine school.

Considering the second specific objective, according to the data analysed, the university teams having the opportunity of going to IPREDE are benefitted by being able to put and see in practice what had been learnt only in theory. What is more, students and professor are not only able to exercise their knowledge, but are changed by interacting with patients at the organization. In other words, the experience these individuals have there was capable of transforming their perspective of the world, humanizing the way they will exercise medicine in the future.

Third, regarding the last specific objective, the NGO has been benefitted by receiving contributions in human resources with no charge. In this regard, skilled professors and students go to the organization and provide the beneficiaries with prompt and quality healthcare. This treatment for free helps IPREDE to reach its social mission, strengthen its bonds with the community and aids the organization in reducing its overheads, besides giving more projection to the work it performs.

Finally, concerning the information provided about the NGO, this paper has also had the role to advertise and publicize for a different audience the work that has been performed by

a NGO in Ceará. The contribution of such advertisement relates to the fact this non-governmental organization has been struggling for nearly three decades with paediatric healthcare conditions with success. The organization has been achieving effective results, innovating in its field and collaborating with not only vulnerable surrounding communities, but also with the local academia; thus, helping with training a new generation of medical professionals and generating knowledge regarding the first childhood period.

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