

Brazil: Bolsa Familia Program – Scaling-up Cash Transfers for the Poor

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Executive Summary

In 2003, the government of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva launched a comprehensive program to stimulate growth and social progress. On the social side, the centerpiece was a sweeping reform of Brazil's social safety net, the Bolsa Familia Program (BFP), which integrated four cash transfer programs into a single program under the umbrella of a new Ministry of Social Development. The transfers are made preferentially to women in each family. The program supports the formation of human capital at the family level by conditioning transfers on behaviors such as children's school attendance, use of health cards, and other social services.

Since its launch, the Bolsa Familia Program has grown exponentially, and by January 2005 had expanded to cover about 26.4 million people. By the end of 2006, about 44 million people are expected to be covered, at least two-thirds of whom are extremely poor.

In terms of numbers of beneficiaries, the Bolsa Familia Program is by far the largest conditional cash transfer in the developing world. Its systems for beneficiary selection, monitoring and evaluation, quality control, and scaling up have implications that extend well beyond Brazil.

The World Bank's project to support the Bolsa Familia Program was conceptualized within a results-based management framework, of which there are two key aspects. First, mechanisms were developed to pace loan disbursements according to results – for example, through concrete technical improvements in areas such as beneficiary targeting. Activities undertaken under three technical components of the loan cumulatively contribute toward attainment of performance milestones. As these milestones are demonstrably met, they trigger increases in the rates of loan disbursements. Disbursement percentages increase from 8 to 9 to 11 percent, depending on performance. Second, the project includes a monitoring and evaluation system that is focused on results and thus intrinsic to both the architecture and the implementation of the program.

The Need to Extend and Strengthen Brazil's Social Safety Net – in a Hurry

In 2003, the newly elected government of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva launched a comprehensive program to stimulate rapid growth and social progress. On the social side, the centerpiece of this effort was known as Bolsa Familia, a sweeping reform of Brazil's social safety programs that consolidated four federal cash transfer programs (see box) and coordinated them with other social programs and policies.

What are Conditional Cash Transfers?

Conditional cash transfers provide money directly to poor families via a "social contract" with the beneficiaries – for example, sending children to school regularly or bringing them to health centers. For extremely poor families, cash provides emergency assistance, while the conditionalities promote longer-term investments in human capital.

As of January 2005, Bolsa Familia covered 6.6 million families and accounted for about a quarter of Brazil's social safety net spending. By the end of 2006, the consolidated Bolsa Familia proposes to

cover 11.2 million families (about 44 million people). The social investment would represent an increase from 1.1 percent to 2.5 percent of total government expenditure, and an increase from 0.2 percent to 0.5 percent of Brazil's GDP. The Bolsa Familia Program was prioritized by the Lula administration as its flagship social program.

Why existing programs needed to be reformed. Four pre-reform safety net programs were included in the Lula administration's safety net consolidation: Bolsa Escola (Ministry of Education), Bolsa Alimentação (Ministry of Health), Cartão Alimentação (Fome Zero), and Auxílio Gas (Ministry of Mines/Energy). Although each of these programs had its own emphasis – promoting schooling, health care, food consumption, compensation for fewer government subsidies, and so forth – the separate programs were redundant and difficult to administer. They all provided cash transfers to roughly the same target population. Each had its own separate administrative structure, data collection, fiduciary procedures, and public reporting. The resulting safety net was filled with both gaps and redundancies in coverage, and the programmatic fragmentation sacrificed opportunities for synergies at



the family level among schooling, health, nutrition, and other services.

What integration accomplished. The Bolsa Familia Program integrated the four programs into a single conditional cash transfer program under the umbrella of a new Ministry of Social Development. Integration of the four programs made better use of public resources by reducing administrative costs and improving the system for targeting the beneficiary population. The program and methodology were extended vertically to integrate the federal program with the state and municipal safety net programs, further extending and consolidating (or coordinating) the overall safety net. By standardizing results indicators and administrative procedures under a single program (rather than four separate programs), bureaucratic complexity was reduced. Finally, integration of the program as a concept – that is, as a way of thinking about, discussing, and planning, as well as administering – encouraged natural “synergy opportunities” for larger-scale actions related to education, health, and nutrition for the poor.

Objectives

The Bolsa Familia Program has two main objectives. The first is to reduce Brazil’s *current* poverty and inequality by means of direct monetary transfers to poor families. The second objective is to reduce *future* poverty and inequality through incentives for poor families to build their own human capital, that is, positive incentives to keep children in school, send them to health centers, and seek other complementary social services. Doing so requires two kinds of conditions:

- **Quantitative** – a far greater number of (properly targeted) poor people brought into the safety net
- **Qualitative** – significantly better outcomes, as assessed by demonstrable improvements in clear, understandable indicators of well-being for each beneficiary, as well as improvements in the transparency of processes used in implementation

More broadly, Brazil’s commitment to the Bolsa Familia objectives also served to better align the country with the Millennium Development Goals – for example, reducing malnutrition (MDG 1), achieving universal education (MDG 2), reducing child mortality (MDG 4), and improving maternal health (MDG 5) through the demand-side incentives for investments in education, nutrition, and health for pregnant women and young children.

Design and Implementation

Building on a foundation of previous programs and lessons learned, the Bolsa Familia Program was designed around four key management concepts:

- The family unit (rather than the individual or a community) was the appropriate entity to receive the benefit and should in turn bear responsibility for meeting the program’s requirements.
- Conditionalities to link transfers to positive incentives for human capital investments were viewed as fundamental to strengthening the “investment” role of the program for long-term poverty reduction.
- Through attention to vertical integration, complementary decentralized partnerships could be developed through state and municipal social programs.
- A Unified Household Registry (referred to as the Cadastro Único) is being strengthened through technical improvements to better serve as a mechanism for targeting beneficiaries as well as for administration and overarching policy planning.

Targeting the poor. By design, Bolsa Familia identified two target groups – the “extreme poor” (families with a per capita income of less than US\$17 per month) and the “moderately poor” (families with a per capita monthly income between US\$17 and \$34). Depending on the household’s composition and income, the program provides cash transfers ranging from US\$5 to \$33 (the average is US\$24). These amounts were set, in part, to minimize the number of people who might lose benefits from previous programs. On a per capita basis, the average transfer per beneficiary represents about 6 percent of the minimum wage and 19 percent of the poverty line used by the World Bank.

Conditionalities aimed at human capital formation. By law, payments are made preferentially to the mother of the household – because a substantial body of research has demonstrated that women are more likely to prioritize investments in children’s education, health, and nutrition. The cash transfers are conditional upon all relevant members of the family complying with the clearly defined human development requirements of school attendance, prenatal visits, vaccinations, and use of other social services.

Innovative features of the lending instrument. The World Bank’s loan to support the Bolsa Familia program is a tailor-made package that combines three innovative design features. First, a two-phase Adaptable Program Loan (APL) was devised. The first phase (2004-06) focuses on strengthening the effec-



tiveness of the safety net by consolidating the four conditional cash transfer programs, reducing gaps and duplication in coverage, improving systems for identifying the target population, and developing an effective monitoring and evaluation system. The attainment of key objectives – measured by clearly defined results indicators – serves as a series of triggers to move implementation to the APL's second phase (2007-08), which is designed in turn to consolidate and deepen the technical improvements and innovations of the first phase.

International Donor Support

The Brazilian government requested the World Bank to partner the BFP in the context of longstanding Bank support for its social agenda under the Policy Sector Reform framework. These efforts included a three-year rolling program of economic and sector work on social assistance, supported by the Bank and the UK. In addition, UNDP supports Bolsa Familia through the Ministry of Social Development, and the Inter-American Development Bank has undertaken a parallel initiative for a SWAp project to support the program. The Bank's four-year project loan, excluding counterpart funds, is expected to be US\$572.2 million.

Second, the project was developed with a SWAp component (see box) of US\$551 million that serves primarily to reimburse the government for conditional cash transfer expenditures. In addition, a separate technical component was designed to improve beneficiary targeting (US\$4.4 million).

A technical component was designed to develop the new monitoring and evaluation system, including development of instruments and processes to track eligibility, payments, conditionality performance, etc. (US\$7 million). A relatively small institutional component (US\$2.8 million) helps to strengthen institutional capacity for the Bolsa Familia Program and a fifth component supports project management.

Third, mechanisms were developed to pace disbursements of the conditional cash transfers according to results – in this case, specific technical improvements to the program. The activities supported under the three technical components of the loan contribute cumulatively to meeting key milestones that define the performance of the program.

As milestones are demonstrably met, the monthly disbursement percentages increase from 8 to 9 to 11 percent of the budget of the government's Bolsa Familia Program.

What Is a SWAp?

A program-based sectorwide approach – a kind of lending process that provides financial support for sector *policy* with clearly defined qualitative and quantitative targets. It generally encompasses:

- A medium-term program under government leadership, with matching sources and uses of funds
- A formalized process of donor coordination, with transparent roles and agreed rules
- A results-based monitoring system for major inputs, outputs, and outcomes
- A shared system, to the extent possible, for procedural reporting and financial management.

How pacing of disbursements reflects the Managing for Results Framework. The pacing of disbursements (the SWAp component) according to measurable improvements to the program (the three technical components) has several objectives that reflect the logic of a Managing for Results Framework:

- The Bank as lender and the government of Brazil as borrower are linked in a pragmatic partnership to support the government's Bolsa Familia Program. Each recognizes and benefits from the need for technical improvements in the Bolsa Familia Program's systems in the short run.
- Immediate interdependencies and stronger synergies develop between effective implementation (that is, the objective of safety net consolidation, as defined in Component 1) and the specific technical activities (targeting, monitoring and evaluation, etc.) that could otherwise become stand-alone bureaucratic units divorced from the outcomes themselves.
- A strong incentive evolves for the implementing agency to achieve – or better yet, exceed – the key milestones for systems improvements. If milestones are reached, the loan's financing percentage increases and disbursements accelerate. For this reason, the finance and planning ministries also have a strong incentive to actively support crucial technical activities that will concretely assist in meeting milestones.



The Relationships between M&E, Implementation, and Results

The consolidation of the existing conditional cash transfers is defined as an intermediate result to be attained during Phase One of the project. Attainment of this objective is pragmatically translated as follows:

- At least two-thirds of poor families should be receiving Bolsa Familia transfers
- The pre-reform programs will have been eliminated, with former beneficiaries either dropped or converted to the Bolsa Familia
- Transaction costs for transfer payments will have been reduced.

The project's M&E system (enhanced under a technical component) will help establish whether these specific milestones have been reached – and if not, explain why (for example, lack of funding, lack of political will to phase out pre-reform programs for families, etc.). However, attainment of these particular milestones triggers the increases in disbursements (from 8 to 9 to 11 percent). Attainment of the larger set of objectives in turn triggers the second phase of the Adaptable Program Loan.

How a solid M&E system reflects the Managing for Results Framework. The new monitoring and evaluation system is key to the basic architecture of the Bolsa Familia Program and reflects the design logic of the Managing for Results Framework. A results-based M&E system has been strongly supported by the government since the inception phase. Its implementation includes internal capacity building, tailoring an advanced management information system, developing new instruments to monitor and evaluate implementation, and producing up-to-date information on activities and outputs, as well as information on outcomes over the longer term. The point is not data, but usable feedback on the quality of service delivery and program implementation.

Problems Encountered

From its inception in October 2003, the highly visible Bolsa Familia Program has had to contend with exceptionally high public expectations for fast, visible, even dramatic social results. In an effort to at least meet its ambitious coverage targets, the government rapidly expanded the program during its first year. Yet as a vigilant, highly interested press has noted, coverage is one thing and quality of delivery is another. Reports surfaced in the press of weaknesses in the targeting mechanism (the *Cadastro Único*), as well as in the monitoring of conditionalities.

In all fairness, these problems are not new. Many of the difficulties were inherited from the pre-reform

programs, and indeed, the World Bank's results-based project was designed precisely to address them. Even prior to Senate approval and loan signing, the Bank team has been working closely with ministry counterparts to engage in continuous dialogue and ongoing technical assistance on how best to define, measure, monitor, and evaluate beneficiary targeting and other support systems, and more broadly, the sustained quality and longer-term output of the project.

Adaptations Made in Implementation

In that Bolsa Familia has evolved through several precursor safety net programs, it is itself an adaptation. Under the results-based framework, an iterative process to constantly adapt and improve the project is a fundamental element of design, not a symptom of failure.

Any welfare program in any country – particularly a program as large as this one – runs risks of fraud and leakages. The targeting, monitoring and evaluation components of the project are, in effect, countermeasures for anticipating, identifying, and minimizing fraud. In that regard, some examples of adaptations taken by the government include the following:

- Issuing a well-publicized decree (a *regulamento*) that clearly spells out the operational guidelines of the program
- Entering into formal agreements that clarify the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health for monitoring and for providing information about conditionalities to the Ministry of Social Development
- Launching a formal network system (*rede de fiscalização*) for overseeing, auditing, and controlling fraud in the BFP in collaboration with the Attorney General (*Ministerio Público*) and other public auditing agencies (*procuradorias*, TCU) for monitoring and fraud controls of Bolsa Familiar payments
- Initiating steps to improve the *Cadastro Único* (developing cross-checks to reduce duplications resulting in the canceling of some 200,000 duplicate benefits found in the process, establishing a working group to revise eligibility criteria and improve questionnaires, providing training to municipalities to strengthen implementation, developing a quality index for monitoring and evaluating the *Cadastro*, etc.)
- Strengthening citizen social controls by publishing beneficiary names by municipality on the Internet and setting up a hotline for citizens to report irregularities and suspected fraud, and reinstating local committees to provide citizen oversight for the program



- Initiating work on design for an impact evaluation of the program.

Factors for Success

While it is too early to judge the success of either the Bolsa Familia Program or international lenders' support, the results framework has already proved itself to be central in how the story is unfolding. Indeed, the results-based management approach strongly implies the use of technical milestones linked to disbursements to strengthen the implementation of the program. Even before the loan was signed – much less before initial disbursements – the government began working actively toward achieving the milestones that would serve as triggers.

Results Achieved and Expected

Since its launch in December 2003, the Bolsa Familia Program has grown exponentially, expanding by January 2005 to cover 26.6 million people. By the end of 2006, the program expects to cover about 44 million people. Translated as intermediate results in the results-based framework, this means:

- At least two-thirds of extremely poor families will be receiving Bolsa Familia income transfers.
- At least 40 percent of total transfers will be going to families in the bottom quintile of income distribution.
- At least 80 percent of primary school-age children in extremely poor beneficiary families will be attending school.
- At least 95 percent of beneficiary children will have and be using health cards.

Lessons Learned in the Design Phase

The Bolsa Familia project embodies lessons learned from earlier projects in Brazil and elsewhere, including lessons from Brazil's extensive experience with conditional cash transfers. Among the main lessons learned during the design phase are the following:

The SWAp approach has great flexibility in allowing donors to de-emphasize procedural and fiduciary requirements in order to focus their resources more effectively by providing better, broader, and more useful sectoral technical assistance. SWAps encourage donors to leverage their financial contribution and comparative advantage among agencies, potentially achieving impact across entire sectors that would not be attainable at the narrower project level. By strengthening a borrower's fiduciary framework and building on its experience in financial management, the SWAp approach responds to countries' frequent requests that redundant requirements among donors

be harmonized, thus eliminating the resource-consuming need to maintain parallel records to satisfy each donor's procedural requirements. In addition, World Bank experience with SWAps indicates that streamlining fiduciary systems and requirements enables the lender to substantially improve its supervision process – by focusing on technical advice in sectoral issues rather than as a watchdog looking for procedural errors.

Borrowers must own, lead, and sustain their commitment to the process. As the Lula administration's flagship social initiative, the Bolsa Familia Program benefited from both high-level political and broad public support. Consolidating conditional cash transfers was widely perceived as a way to build on previous successes and bring them to a new level of performance. It cut across political parties, branches of government, academic circles, civil society, and even the media.

Conditional cash transfers are operationally feasible and politically acceptable. Brazil's ownership and commitment of conditional cash transfers was strengthened because of general acceptance among the public that integration would improve the efficiency and equity of these instruments. Among international donors too, conditional cash transfers have been shown to be operationally feasible and politically acceptable as an approach to social assistance. Concerns that cash subsidies are 'just handouts' can be overcome by linking them to desirable behaviors such as sending children to school and seeking health care; by providing the transfers to mothers, whose decisions on the intra-household allocation of resources tend to favor children's nutrition, health, and education; and by honest monitoring and evaluation of results.

Conditional cash transfer programs have improved educational indicators and outcomes. An ex ante evaluation by Bourguignon, Ferreira, and Leite (2003) found that Brazil's Bolsa Escola Program (a predecessor to Bolsa Familia) significantly increased the number of children in school and decreased the number of those that were only working. Using similar methodologies, simulations suggest that the Bolsa Familia could significantly increase total educational attainment and reduce repetition rates.

Human capital conditionalities can "bridge" complementary services. International experience suggests that efforts to "bridge" beneficiaries from transfer programs to other complementary services can reduce their dependence on social assistance. Cash transfers can serve as graduation strategies, helping the poor to "grow" out of poverty.



Programs of this nature require sufficient administrative capacity. Although Bolsa Familia is a new program operating under a new ministry, it builds on the foundations established by the pre-reform programs – for example, by maintaining the channeling of payments in a fairly direct manner through the country’s extensive banking system. In addition, many of the staff involved in the Ministry of Social Development in general and the Bolsa Familia in particular have extensive prior experience managing or working on the federal pre-reform programs or similar local cash transfer programs.

Innovation with new lending instruments can be time consuming. The World Bank has relearned repeatedly that clients generally know what they want. To respond effectively, especially to middle-income borrowers, the Bank must continuously be innovative in the way that it develops and packages lending instruments. Innovation of this sort is not only hard work, but is also time consuming. Often, it requires approval at the highest levels of Bank policy making; and from the beginning of any effort, *all* involved departments must be brought into the process. In general, innovation is possible if it makes sense, is client-oriented, and provides for assurances in regard to fiduciary and safeguard frameworks. This requires not only advance planning but, in most cases, a parallel discussion and approval process on the instrument itself.

Conclusions and Applicability to Other Programs

The Bolsa Familia Program offers important insights on the design and implementation of a results framework in the context of a large ongoing, complex initiative. The program has been featured in international settings, for example, the Conference for Scaling-up Poverty Reduction, held in Shanghai in May 2004. As noted in the proceedings “Many different kinds of interventions can be scaled up, and *stories of success do travel and get adapted elsewhere*, as evidenced by the case body. Examples include systems of cash transfers to targeted poor families in Mexico and Brazil.” Bolsa Familia is relevant to social protection programs in Latin America and other regions of the world.

First, in terms of numbers of beneficiaries, it is by far the largest conditional cash transfer in the developing world and has expanded extremely rapidly. The challenges involved with developing systems for beneficiary selection, monitoring and evaluation, quality control, and scaling up have implications that extend well beyond Bolsa Familia itself.

Many of the systems’ instruments developed for the Bolsa Familia will have widespread applicability for other countries. These systems are particularly relevant to the implementation of decentralized programs – such as the Bolsa Familia’s random sample, quality control reviews, which will provide much-needed feedback for federal oversight of the locally implemented program.

The lending instrument developed for the World Bank’s project to support the Bolsa Familia Program is already being adapted for use in other projects. Some recent examples in Brazil include:

- Adaptations of the disbursement-linked results framework to a state-level SWAp being developed for Ceara State
- Adaptations of the results framework and disbursement mechanisms for preparation of a new transport project
- Development of a similar lending instrument by the IDB to support Bolsa Familia and the Ministry of Social Development (the first such SWAp in the IDB).

The project team for Bolsa Familia has also been called on to provide advice and to make presentations to other country teams considering similar results-based approaches. In all these discussions, a key message is the importance of a long menu of options and the tailoring of features to local realities and the specific needs of any given operation. As demonstrated by the World Bank’s SWAp to support Bolsa Familia, one size does not indeed fit all, and the (potential) success of the project is in many respects a function of the donor’s capacity to adapt to the specific needs of that program.

Summary: How MfDR Principles Were Applied to Brazil’s Bolsa Familia Project

1. At all phases – from strategic planning through implementation to completion and beyond – focus the dialogue on results for partner countries, development agencies, and other stakeholders.

- This was the modus operandi for the team’s work with the clients.
- 2. Align actual programming, monitoring, and evaluation activities with the agreed expected results.*
- The Results Framework was designed to be cumulative and calibrated with the agreed expected results.



3. *Keep the results reporting system as simple, cost-effective, and user-friendly as possible.*

- The project relies on country financial reporting systems, as well as technical monitoring of the program’s activities.

4. *Manage for, not by, results by arranging resources to achieve outcome.*

- The results framework – with links to positive “upside” disbursement conditions based on improved performance – was designed in this manner. It focuses on outcomes: whether people can effectively be helped to move out of poverty and how to measure this. It also looks at the outcomes at the state/province level.

5. *Use results information for management learning and decision making, as well as for reporting and accountability.*

- The results information is being used by the Brazilian government to improve the consolidated social protection program. Decisions are being made, drawing on the results of the Bolsa Familia framework and its measurement information. Accountability and transparency are central concepts.

References

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Update on Implementation of the Results Framework – Kathy Lindert, World Bank, Brasilia, November 2005

The Results Reporting system was fully operational in 2005 – and it served as a guiding force for strengthening the Bolsa Familia Program. While 2004 was a complex transition year for the Bolsa Familia Program, 2005 was certainly the year of “maturation” of the program. During the transition year of 2004, the nascent program struggled to consolidate its identity, institutional structure, and legal framework in the midst of a sweeping ministerial reform. Even during that critical time, the Results Framework provided a “compass” for the BFP, guiding it to focus on consolidating its core architecture in several key areas.

Since then – and particularly in 2005 – the government took concrete actions to reach many of the milestones highlighted by the Results Framework and Reporting System. Some examples of recent activities – which are all supported by key milestones within the Results Framework – include:

- Strengthening the targeting system through (a) clarifying operational guidelines for the registry system; (b) running internal and cross-system cross-checks to validate eligibility and eliminate duplications; (c) obtaining access to the registry database (for MDS and the municipalities); and (d) sharpening instruments for implementing eligibility criteria and overhauling the registry questionnaire (this month).
- Strengthening joint intergovernmental management of the program through formally negotiated agreements between the central agency (MDS) and Brazil’s subnational entities. These formal vertical agreements include institutional “conditions” and “targets” – in exchange for specified financial incentives – that were established within the results framework for quality implementation.
- Developing and launching an Impact Evaluation survey, with the first round of data collection entering the field this month, to track and measure the various outcome impacts of the program.
- Developing and launching improved tools for program oversight and quality control.

An important new innovation that was introduced as a result of the lessons learned is the formal extension of the “results-framework” approach to the decentralized aspects of implementation of the program. As noted above, this results framework has been carried forward by the central agency into its relations with the numerous subnational entities involved in implementing specific aspects of the program. This has been done by MDS negotiating and formalizing agreements with the subnational bodies (26 states and over 5,000 municipalities). These agreements include specified results and conditions for quality implementation in exchange for financial incentives. This has been a very innovative move for implementing a conditional cash transfer program in a decentralized environment.

The policymakers and technical specialists involved in the program are working very well within the guidelines of the results framework to strengthen the Bolsa Familia Program. The results framework indeed is providing a “compass” to guide this process, with key milestones specified to track progress. In terms of the World Bank’s project to support this, a key lesson learned is the importance of properly “calibrating” technical milestones with financial disbursement incentives. Despite initial delays in project effective-



ness, the calibration envisaged by the project still seems appropriate, with some actions moving faster and deeper than expected and others needing a bit more time. Still, future operations will want to pay close attention to institutional and political capacity for reforms when attempting to calibrate a results-based framework for disbursements and technical improvements on a program. Although the program is relatively young and the impact evaluation now underway, some results are already apparent, including: (a) measured efficiency gains, in terms of reduced federal administrative costs due to the consolidation from four programs to one; and (b) apparent positive impacts on local economies, with the transfers generating local economic activities (particularly in smaller, poorer localities). In addition, evidence from evaluations of the pre-reform programs reveal: (a) strong targeting results (bottom quintile); (b) important educational impacts of Bolsa Escola; (c) increased enrolment and overall attainment; and (d) impacts of Bolsa Alimentação on food consumption, diet, and child growth.

For more information

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