

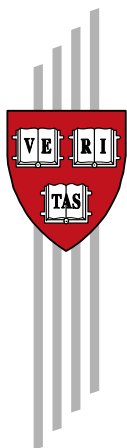
**Social Inclusion or Poverty Alleviation?
Lessons from Recent Brazilian
Experiences**

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Abstract

This article analyses *Bolsa-Escola*, a Brazilian educational program that seeks to guarantee the basic right of education to children living in poverty. *Bolsa-Escola* was originally established in 1995, in the national capital, Brasilia. The local government made monthly payments in cash to each family living in poverty, with the condition that all school-age children—from 7 to 14 years old—be kept in school. The program was later established at the federal level of government, in 1997, and gained a fully national coverage in 2001. Many changes occurred since the original program started in Brasília and more recently its name changed to *Bolsa-Família*. However, *Bolsa-Escola* and *Bolsa-Família* are distinct social public policies. This article examines the differences and the similarities between them. One conclusion is that poverty alleviation programs such as those analyzed in this article are vulnerable to clientelistic misuse.

Keywords: poverty alleviation, social inclusion, education, basic income, clientelism

JEL subject codes: I28, I38, R28, G35, H75

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1 Introduction

Given the high levels of drop-outs and serious bottlenecks in student enrollment, in 1995 a special educational program was started in Brasilia, the Brazilian national capital, at the beginning of the term of Cristovam Buarque as governor of the Federal District. It was named *Bolsa Escola*—BE. The central concept was the association of a short-term poverty alleviation strategy with the promotion of long-term opportunities, by joining together income transfer and commitment to education. This program made payments in money to poor families (preferably to a mother) who enrolled and kept their children in school.

BE expanded throughout Brazil and was adopted by several countries in Latin America and Africa. Also, many NGOs undertook similar programs, giving a wider dimension to such exchanges between poor families and the State. At the time, the program seemed—and actually was—a new component of the old toolbox of the Welfare State, since it integrated segments of the population excluded from formal access to the social protection system.

In 2003, with the inauguration of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva as President of Brazil, on a wave of popular support, the pre-existing federal BE¹ was fused with other income transfer programs (*Cartão-Alimentação*², *Bolsa-Alimentação*³ and *Vale-Gás*⁴), originating the more encompassing *Bolsa-Família* (BF) program, one of two programs to be examined in more details here.⁵ In the context of the stated rationale for the fusion of all these programs—basically the simplification of bureaucratic routines—an important question came up: could the clientelistic misuse of such a program be avoided?

Brazil has displayed a remarkable resistance to the notion of universal elementary school education. Historically, the country has denied access to formal education to a considerable part of its population. The prerogative of meritocracy prevailed over public education rights and thus formal education was systematically restricted to the more well-to-do classes. The setbacks generated by this political option are astonishing and all Brazilians feel them today. In the early 20th century, 65.2 per cent of youths and adults were illiterate; in the 1950s, more than half of the Brazilian population (55 per cent) still remained illiterate. The century closed with a still significant illiteracy rate of approximately 15 per cent (IBGE, Brazilian 2000 Census).

In this context, BE is of particular interest, since it has the potential to guarantee a historically denied universal right (ensured by the Brazilian Constitution)—access and permanent enrollment of children and youths in school. From this perspective, the program does

¹ The federal *Bolsa-Escola* program guaranteed a monthly payment of 15 reais per enrolled child (limited to three children from 6 to 15 years of age per family). The program was managed by the Ministry of Education. Its legal base was Law number 10.219, April 11, 2001. In March, 2008 one American dollar was worth 1.8 reais.

² The federal *Cartão-Alimentação* (Food Stamp) program corresponded to the National Program to Access Nutrition, part of the Zero Hunger Program. It was designed to provide up to 50 reais per month to families living in a situation of food insecurity. The money was supposed to be used exclusively for the acquisition of food products. Its legal base was federal Law number 10.689, June 13, 2003.

³ The federal *Bolsa-Alimentação* program was managed by the Ministry of Health. It sought to provide basic nutrition to poor children belonging to the critical bracket between six months and 6 years and 11 months of age, and to women who were pregnant or breast feeding. The family received between 15 and 45 reais per month. Its legal base was Provisional Measure number 2.206-1, September 6, 2001.

⁴ The federal *Vale-Gás* program offered 7.5 reais per month to poor families, to be used exclusively in the acquisition of LPG bottles, to be used mainly for the purpose of cooking. The Ministry of Mines and Energy was in charge of this program. The legal base was Decree number 4.102, January 24, 2002.

⁵ The federal *Bolsa-Família* program was created by Provisional Measure number 132, in October 20, 2003. It was managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Abatement.

no more than pay an outstanding debt to a large section of the Brazilian population. This is why the original BE program drew the attention of educators, researchers, politicians, governments and the media in general. Numerous studies have dealt with BE, either directly or indirectly. This article reviews some of these studies, with particular attention to the points of agreement and disagreement in the literature.

It was the success and legitimacy of BE that inspired the other government policies also known for the use of the word *bolsa* (translatable as “scholarship” or “financial aid”). This word is common in the academic world and normally implies that a payment in money is made to a student or researcher who will engage in a certain research project, in a given area of knowledge, during a pre-established period of time. This is where the original name of the program came from, with the addition of the word *escola* (“school”), on account of the program’s design.

In this article, we examine if and to what extent the BE and BF programs are similar or distinct. Our conclusion is that the BF program, as could be predicted by its very name, negated the basic concept of BE, which is to reinforce the importance of education in the lives of all children and youths to whom this basic right has been historically denied.

2 The role of education in society

The 19th and 20th centuries were a period of radical and global changes, bringing about both improvements and uncertainties. Technological development accelerated the economy, while the democratization of the State had extensive implications in terms of social policies. Both were crucial in the reconfiguration of society during this period. Education was a moving force in this process. The same radical transformations (Hobsbawm, 1995, captured them in his *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914 -1991*) that caused advances in the economy produced an alarming disparity between the levels of welfare among different sectors of the world population, to a degree previously unknown. To a considerable part of population, eating, drinking, communicating, interacting, traveling, having access to education, health and leisure, and adapting to natural climates and landscapes are trivial things. This same world, however, is not experienced in the same manner by the 1.2 billion people who survive with less than a dollar a day, and by the 2.8 billion people who live with less than two dollars a day (World Bank, 2001). These incomes make them fall into the categories of miserable and poor, respectively, according to the World Bank.

Increasing poverty has been a kind of collateral effect of the prosperity provided by the advances in science and technology. The lack of access to formal education has been, in this context, a crucial fact. According to Unesco (2003), in 2000 there were 860 million adults in the world who could not read or write their own names. Besides, more than 100 million school-age children did not have access to school.

There is a straight connection between poverty and people without access to formal education. Along history, formal education has been related to economic growth in each nation. No country currently considered developed displays a high rate of illiteracy in the ranks of its youths and adults. Upward social mobility is also intrinsically related to access to formal education, in most cases (Meighan, 1986; Argyle, 1994; Levin e Kelley, 1994; Londoño, 1996; Green, 1997; Wolf, 2002). Since the 19th century, all countries that achieved improvements in their economies and social welfare adopted strategies that placed a very high value on universal education.

The concept of “human capital” marked the 20th century (Woodhall, 1997). It has been associated with investments in formal education and training, besides other forms of the improvement of work skills, and with the possibilities of achieving higher income. This concept had its theoretical underpinning in economic notions of capital investment, such as the acquisition of new machinery or the building of new installations, in order to produce more and increase profits. The role of education in the reduction of inequalities was already considered

essential by classics such as Rousseau and Tocqueville. Classical economists, such as Adam Smith, also understood education to be instrumental in the increase of the capability and productivity of workers. In this sense, public policies seeking economic development and educational improvements have been deployed for more than a century by some governments, especially those of the developed countries.

Brazil, however, achieved high rates of economic growth during the 20th century with very little regard to the low level of schooling of a considerable part of its population. The country also failed to distribute the results of this economic growth to society as a whole. This is confirmed by three figures valid for 2001 - 55,429,500 Brazilians lived in poverty and 24,085,833 were indigent, adding up to 44,02 percent of the Brazilian population (Ipea, 2004).

If formal education has been until now a factor crucial to development, the tendency for the 21st century is that its importance will increase. In this era of knowledge, a person who does not read or write will have serious difficulties in exercising his/her citizen's rights and evidently will be excluded from the job market. Currently, acquiring knowledge and information has imposed new training models, due to changes in paradigms and in epistemological structures. This affects the production of science and technology, as well as the ability to predict and deal with their outcomes. Much has been shown about, for example, the implications of new scientific fields such as genetic engineering, biotechnology and military technology (such as chemical warfare). Given foreseeable trends, formal education should also be the object of inquiries about its positive role and its risks.

3 Bolsa-Escola: guaranteed access to education

BE was designed for children in a situation of social risk, who needed to work in order to increase their families' income and who consequently dropped out of school - or were enrolled without attendance (Nascimento and Aguiar, 2006). In practical terms, Brasilia's BE program, between 1995 and 1998, consisted of monthly payments of a minimum wage (equivalent to US\$ 100,00 at the time) to families resident in Brasilia for more than five years (this was a precaution to avoid attracting new migrants), who were living in poverty and who kept all their sons and daughters aged 7 to 14 in school (with confirmed daily attendance). If children were not sent to school daily—except in cases of verified health problems—the monthly payments were suspended or, after three months, were cancelled. In 1998, the program already benefited 25,680 families and 44.879 students (GDF, 1998).

When the program was launched in Brasília, it became known in Brazil as a program associated with education, with the clear purposes of fighting poverty and social exclusion and, most importantly, of providing future opportunities to today's youths and children.

The BE program generated different views concerning its focus. On the one hand, there are those who consider it to be a type of basic income program linked to the promotion of education (Sabóia, 1996; Amaral 1997; Waiselfisz, Abramovay and Andrade, 1998; Suplicy, 1998 and 2002; Sabóia and Rocha, 1998; Rocha, 2000). On the other hand, there are authors who consider the program to be focused on getting poor children into school and making them attend school, it was not seen as a basic income program (GDF, 1995; Castro, 1999 and 2004).

The concept of basic income is not new. Since the early the 17th century, the Poor Law (1601) expressed the existing concern about the fate of people who did not have the minimum resources necessary for survival. Several instruments were created by the state to guarantee their subsistence. Later, English Poor Laws also guaranteed a minimum food diet (Corn Laws). Between improvements and setbacks, the principle of basic income arrived much later at Mitterrand's France, with the institution of the *Revenu minimum d'insertion* (RMI). In this context, basic income is closely related to the idea of the right to life or to survival (Parijs, 1991 and 1997). However, BE cannot be classified as a basic income program, since it is based on the families' commitment to keep their sons and daughters enrolled in and attending school.

The deployment of the program in Brazil's national capital allowed it to achieve a strong visibility in society and in the national and international media (see Box 1).

Box 1: International Impact

At the international level, the Bolsa-Escola program was quite favorably received. It was also quickly reproduced after its inception, in 1995. Many articles in newspapers and magazines and research projects dealt with the issue of this income transfer program focused on families living in poverty and who were stimulated to enroll their children in schools and to make them attend schools. The program's innovative traits, particularly the association of income transfer with education, caught the eyes of all those who examined it.

Several countries, mainly from Latin America, became interested in the program and created similar ones. In 1997, for instance, Mexico started Progresá (Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación), later called Oportunidades. It was the first country to adopt a similar program on a national scale. In 1999, about 40 percent of all Mexican rural families had been included in it, leading to expenses that corresponded to 0.2 percent of the national GDP. Progresá was monitored along three basic dimensions: health, education and nutrition (Skofias, 2005) of the beneficiaries. Starting in 2004, Oportunidades was benefiting almost five million families.

A comprehensive study carried out by Reimers, Silva and Trevino (2006) analyzes Conditional Cash Transfer—CCT programs focused on education, in nine countries: Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malawi. The authors suggest that it is necessary to evaluate whether CCT programs are primarily instruments of poverty alleviation with an educational component, or educational policy instruments with a secondary poverty alleviation component. As educational outcomes can only be assessed in the long run, it is recommended that those programs be systematically monitored.

Since it was an innovative program, BE was studied and evaluated from its very beginning by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Sabóia (1996), for example, studied BE and found that it cost less per beneficiary than other official social programs⁶, such as *Cesta-Alimentação*⁷—a food stamp program, or *Tiquete-Leite*⁸—a food stamp program focused on milk. Sabóia was struck particularly by the design of BE, since the program promoted the self-management of resources, which were maximized by the beneficiary, since payments were made in cash and directly to the beneficiary, usually the mother. Urani (1995) highlights the ability of the BE program to benefit a larger number of people that are really in a situation of poverty. The author used a decile methodology - dividing and classifying the population in percentage groups, according to income. He uses units like the 10 per cent poorest all the way up to the 10 per cent richest. Using this computing method, he found that income complementation programs effectively benefit the three poorest groups. Hence, the 30 percent poorest Brazilians are the potential beneficiaries of such programs.

The first impacts of BE were related to children's school attendance, which increased considerably. Children admitted in the program improve their academic performance and dropping out is practically inexistent. (Sant'Ana and Moraes, 1996; GDF, 1997; Sabóia and Rocha, 1998; Polis and Unicef, 1998; Unesco, Unicef and Polis, 1998; Amaral and Ramos, 1999; Castro, 1999).

⁶ As it used an already existing bank and school infra-structure.

⁷ Rations of basic food for poor families

⁸ A ration of a liter of milk per day for families with children

Food consumption was another thing that changed in the lives of all benefited families, both in quantity and quality. Many families spent a considerable part of BE payments on food. Almost all studies about the program include statements by family members about the difficulty of buying food before the program. It is important to recall that students in Brazilian public schools are served one or two free meals daily, part of a program called *merenda escolar* (school lunch). Schools thus became a strong presence in the lives of all family members, especially for mothers and children. Many children were already enrolled in school, but dropping out was frequent. Besides the children, the major target of the program, some mothers or adults in students' families were enrolled in literacy courses or were stimulated to start studying again. Other changes that may be credited to BE are related to the acquisition of clothing (especially school uniforms, at first) and shoes. In addition, some people bought household goods and utensils, such as beds, mattresses and bed sheets (Sant'Ana and Moraes, 1996; Sabóia and Rocha, 1998; Polis and Unicef, 1998; Arce, 2001; Castro, 1999 and 2004).

4 The National *Bolsa-Escola* program: expanding and recreating the experience

The federal government, during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1995-2002), created a program similar to BE, in 1997, officially called the Minimum Income Guarantee Program, associated with educational actions. The Ministry of Education was responsible for its management. The program was modified, in 2001, when it also gained the name BE. The program was aimed at families with a *per capita* income of less than one half of the minimum wage (about US\$ 50, at the time), all of whose children between 6 and 15 years of age would have to attend school on a daily basis and who were residents of the county in which they enrolled in the program. The payments had a value of about 15 reais (a little less than 5 dollars) per month, per child, with a maximum of three children benefited per family. Payments were made to each child, and not to the family. This federal BE demanded a monthly school attendance rate of at least 85 per cent for each child. Its structure was the result of direct partnerships between the federal government and each county. Payments were made through a federal savings bank (Caixa Econômica Federal) or through lottery sales outlets. Each mother had an individual magnetic card, used to receive the payments.

The Ministry of Education created a special secretariat to manage the federal BE program. It also coordinated the financial operations made by bank branches in charge of the payments. Municipalities were responsible for the local implementation of the program. First of all, they had to approve a local law creating the program. After that, they had several duties: to create a social control council or to insert the duties related to the program in an existing council; to generate lists of families to be enrolled in the program; to make all contacts with the Ministry of Education about legal aspects; to deliver the electronic bank cards to the selected families. In this manner, management was in charge of federal and county governments. Counties per se did not spend any resources of their own, although they were responsible for the tasks of selecting the families and monitoring and controlling students' school attendance. However, this was one of the major flaws of the federal BE, since there was no systematic, monthly control of school attendance (Castro, 2004).

Since 2003, during the Luis Inácio Lula da Silva presidency, BE program was changed again.. The program even lost its original name, becoming Bolsa-Familia. As mentioned earlier, different programs, related to social assistance and not only to education (*Bolsa-Alimentação*, *Cartão-Alimentação* and *Vale-Gás*) were grouped into a single program. After a protracted debate inside the government about the institutional position of the new program, in less than eight months it was transferred from a specific secretariat under the Presidency to the new Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Abatement.

Downgraded to the status of a social assistance program, BF does not monitor parents' obligations linked to education⁹ or to health¹⁰. School attendance, for example, is not monitored on a monthly basis. Therefore, it lost its educational dimension and became a welfare program (see Box 2). Thus, BE was changed in much more than its name. As it changed its name and migrated to a new institutional slot, it was also transformed in its very nature.

Box 2: Coverage of the Bolsa-Familia Program

The Bolsa-Família program operates on national scale. It benefits families living in each of Brazil's 5,564 municipalities. As of early 2008, the federal government defined the poverty line as a per capita income falling between R\$ 60.01 to R\$ 120.00 (US\$ 1 = R\$ 1.8). People living in extreme poverty are those who receive less than R\$ 60,00. Program payments range between R\$ 18.00 to R\$ 112.00 per family.

During 2007, the program had a total cost of R\$ 9,260,720,213.00 (about 5.1 billion dollars), corresponding to approximately of 0.36 % of the GDP. This figure refers solely to the direct transfer of income and leaves out administrative and executive costs. In December of 2007, the program was benefiting 11.1 million families, amounting to approximately 24 percent of all Brazilian families.

When the program was starting, in 2004, only 15.6 percent of Brazilian households received benefits from any type of income transfer program. 70 percent of them were located in rural areas and the remaining 30 percent were located in towns and cities. These figures demonstrate an enormous increase in the number of beneficiaries since 2004.

Sources: <http://www.portaltransparencia.gov.br/default.asp>
<http://www.mds.gov.br/>
<http://www.ipeadata.gov.br/>

5 Bolsa-Escola and Bolsa-Família—what is the difference?

BF, as it is currently being managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Abatement, subtracts the meaning of health and education measures from their context. The management of these unified programs displays a strong content of welfare. Welfare is understood as the aid provided to those social groups that cannot fully exercise their citizenship and therefore need government actions in order to survive (Demo, 1998). In other words, the initial concept of each program that was grouped under BF changed. In this article the focus falls on the changes made to BE.

⁹ Federal *Bolsa-Família* educational conditions for eligibility were defined by the Joint Ministerial Ordinance number 3.789, November 17, 2004 (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Abatement): enrollment of all children and youths from 6 to 15 years of age in school; and guarantee a minimum class attendance of 85 percent for each month. If the student is absent, the reason must be explained; Inform program managers about children's transfers to other schools.

¹⁰ Federal *Bolsa-Família* health conditions for eligibility were defined by the Joint Ministerial Ordinance number 2.509, November 18, 2004 (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Abatement). For families with children up to 7 years of age: assure that children receive their shots and keep their vaccination cards up to date; and assure that children are weighed, measured and examined, according to the schedule issued by the Ministry of Health. For pregnant women and women who are breast-feeding: attend pre-birth examinations; continue examinations after giving birth, according to the Ministry of Health's schedule, always carrying the Pregnancy Card; and participate in educational activities conducted by health teams about breast-feeding and healthy nutrition.

BE was basically an educational program. It was not universal, as it was focused only on families in situation of poverty and with school-aged children. There is a clear consensus among all observers that BE was educational in its nature (GDF, 1995; Wailselfisz, 1998; Sant'ana and Moraes, 1998; Sabóia and Rocha, 1998; Sousa, 1998; Lavinás 2001; Rocha, 2000; Buarque, Castro and Aguiar, 2001; Castro, 2004).

The bottom line in this discussion is that BE was not a basic income program. If it were, it would be managed under the area of welfare, not under the area of education. In almost all countries with basic income programs, management falls under the area of welfare. The idea of basic income appeared at the end of World War II in some industrialized countries, in the wake of principles of welfare and universal policies stated in the Beveridge Plan, in the UK. It meant the provision of income “without compensation” (Parijs, 1992 and 1997) to each person residing in the country. The value of this income would vary from country to country. Parijs (1992) has an interesting statement about what basic income programs may promote:

Liberty and equality, efficiency and community, common ownership of the earth and equal sharing in the benefits of technical progress, the flexibility of the labor market and the dignity of the poor, the fight against unemployment and inhumane working conditions, against the desertification of the countryside and interregional inequalities, the viability of co-operatives and the promotion of adult education, autonomy from bosses, husbands and bureaucrats (p. 3).

According to Walter (1989), basic income, along with other programs, may be able to prevent poverty, provide greater empowerment to women, allow more freedom of choice to each person, and reduce the number of poorly paid jobs, thus creating a less divided society. This argument, based on the functions of a basic income program, does not deal with the basic trait of BE: compensation by the family, directly linked to education.

The BF program is based on the notion of family, ambiguous and hard to be analyzed, since family embodies many complex factors, feelings and established relations, far beyond education, health, food, religion. Furthermore, in a free society the regulation of the family is not a direct responsibility of the state. Public power has the duty to assure the proper conditions for the family, as an institution, to reproduce itself in a proper manner. In this sense, the state expands the range of its regulatory action when it creates a program like BF. If it were a basic income program, it would be easier to understand, since all such programs are designed to offer the minimum required for a person to live, but not necessarily to rescue them from poverty. Basic income programs are committed to support an individual. They cannot be linked to anything but the condition of poverty. Also, they cannot demand compensations from beneficiaries, as highlighted by Parijs (1992 and 1997). This is the risky aspect of basic income programs, since they tend to generate a culture of dependency among those who wish to remain as beneficiaries. A vicious poverty cycle may be formed in such programs if they do not create clear rules and conditions for the permanence and exit of beneficiaries. This matter loomed over the debates in the British parliament in the 1830s, when the Corn Laws were abolished.

The BE was concerned basically with school attendance, and not if the student has the means to support himself that month. BE, as it was initially conceived, had the school as its major focus, although it was also fully linked to the family, the direct beneficiary of the payments. However, the school was the centerpiece of the program. The program existed in the school, although it was experienced also in the family home. One depends on the other, in a dialectical manner. From the perspective of the state, the family was paid to have the minimum resources necessary to send their children to school every day. Therefore, there was an exchange between state and family.

The issue of whether or not BE was a basic income program is important but not commonly discussed in the studies about the program. The only statement found about this matter is that BE is a basic income program or income transfer program linked to education. Suplicy (1992, 1998 and 2002), a pioneer in the subject, states that BE is a way to achieve what he calls *Renda Cidadania* (Citizenship Income).

The central issue is that BE expressed a choice, and a choice that was not geared at welfare. It selected families with school-age children and demanded that these families send their children to school regularly. Families that were in worse conditions of poverty, but who had no school-aged children, were not eligible for the program. Therefore, the state chose to focus on education.

6 Weak spots

A remarkable trait of social policies is that their coverage is not always universal. Brazil is an example of a country that adopted many instruments of the welfare state, since the 1930s, but never managed to extend them to the entire population. There are debates about the limitations of offering narrowly designed public policies. They simply do not reach all potential beneficiaries they are designed for because most of the time there are no financial resources to make them work for everyone. Actually, what happens is the selection of the people to be affected, according to the amount of available resources. In the case of BE, universal coverage was not achieved. Not all Brazilian families that met the criteria were included as beneficiaries.

One of the weakest points of the program, on a national scale, was its coordination at the municipal level. Many local coordinators changed the program's profile and demanded compensations from the families, according to their own interests or points of view. This defaced BE as an educational program, because it generated discrimination and burdens to the families, since they had to engage in activities at the schools, such as cleaning and preparation of school lunch, things that benefited families were not supposed to do (Castro, 2004).

A risk was pointed out from the beginning came true—the political use of the program especially during elections. Many accusations were made about the program being used during election periods at the county level to obtain votes. Also, many local coordinators eventually became candidates to public office. The county is responsible for enrolling candidates and for the selection of the families to be admitted into the program. There were many accusations involving people who should receive the benefit, but do not. On the other hand, some families living in better conditions were included in the program. Since there is no control over this process, the program is vulnerable in its most important phase, the selection of the families to be included.

The program, on account of its link with education, has the potential to break away from the clientelistic nature of many social programs in Brazil in the past (Bursztyn, 1984 and 1990). However, this has not been easy to achieve (see Box 3). The control of school attendance has been a quite controversial matter. On the one side, there are those who argue that it is not fair to cancel the benefit for a family that truly needs it, even if they are not doing their share, which is to keep children in school. On the other side, there are those who think that the program should have a welfare nature, and therefore should not require any form of compensation. However, it is important to consider that education is a constitutional right of every child and that BE is nothing more than an effort to maximize this right for children who cannot attend school daily, since they have to work to help in their families' survival. If attendance is not required, poor children do not benefit from a truly universal educational system, perpetuating a historical trait of exclusion.

Box 3: A strong electoral support

The results of the 2006 Brazilian presidential elections reveal features that are interesting to the analysis of the relation between income transfer programs and political choices among the poor. Nicolau and Peixoto (2007) made this correlation and found that President Lula's re-election is directly related to the effects of BF. In comparison with the results of his first election, in 2002, there is a clear correlation, at the municipal level, between bad social conditions and the higher percentages of poor voters, on the one side, and a higher likelihood of Lula being victorious.

In 2002, Lula had won mainly thanks to the votes he got in the large cities, where the weight of the poor is relatively smaller. On the other hand, in 2006, after BF was implemented, his victory was very much based on the results achieved in small cities, where he got 64.2 % of the valid votes in the second round of the presidential election.

The above mentioned authors present data showing that the regions with higher percentage of poor in Brazil (Amazon and Northeast) where those that received more income transfers by BF. And there Lula got his highest voting scores, overcoming even the historical thresholds reached by other candidates in previous elections. Each 50 dollars spent per capita on the BF produced a 3% increase in the votes for Lula in these two regions.

7 Conclusion

BE was an innovative experience in terms of public policies of a social nature. Considering the universe of public interventions and the accumulated knowledge about the alleviation of extreme poverty, ever since the first English laws for the "protection" of the poor, early in the 17th century, a common trace of these policies has been "compensation", that is, supplementation to achieve minimum subsistence conditions. This was done mostly through internships in work houses (for the fit), orphanages (for small children) or shelters (for the elderly or invalid). Slowly, some compensation measures based on the provision of a minimum diet for the poor were adopted (Corn Laws). In the 19th century, as the principles of liberal economy prevailed at the political level, public protection mechanisms were abolished and the poor were relegated to their fate as determined by the market or by private charity. At this juncture, corporative forms of helping the poor arose, such as cooperatives, mutual societies and even unions.

The new generation of social policies emerged only during the last quarter of the 19th century, with the adoption of protective mechanisms, such as social welfare and public health systems, besides some more daring initiatives such as universal education and land reform. In respect to poverty, particularly extreme poverty, the 20th century brought about a certain generalization of protection instruments, as universalized and effective as the degree of development reached by each national economy. Welfare state social protection had a positive role, but on the other hand it revealed its fragility during economic crises that resulted in fiscal crises and in mass unemployment. An overall examination of the issue reveals the persistence of compensation in social policies directed at the alleviation of poverty.

BE, as it was originally launched in Brasilia, late in de 20th century, was an innovation, for several reasons. First, it represented a reaction against the late 20th century prevalence of neo-liberal policies, a period in which the state reduced its protective functions, particularly in the countries where the welfare state had not yet consolidated itself. Second, BE was unique for having appeared first in a country that usually imitates successful social policies developed in the North. Third, it is remarkable for its innovative character, as it went beyond the paradigm of protection by means of compensation and included the concept of joining education with income. Fourth, the program can be credited also with the reduction of gender inequalities, since mothers were key players, something that strengthened their position in the family hierarchy.

The combination of education and income rescues the notion that comes from the Bismarck era, in recently unified Germany, when working classes were to be included into the universe of citizenship institutions. In the welfare state countries, the 20th century showed that the results of universal education appear after two decades, in the form of the multiplication of opportunities. Joining income and education therefore means associating immediate protection—in the case of basic needs—with future inclusion.

In Brazil there had never been a program designed exclusively for students in situations of poverty until the implementation of BE, since all policies relevant to basic schooling had been universal. Of course, an educational program focused on access and attendance to school is not enough to confront poverty, a problem that demands much more to be solved than placing children in the school system. However, there can be no doubt about the fact that formal education is one of the pathways out of poverty. Every set of data shows that people with limited schooling or who are illiterate are the most likely to be or to fall into a situation of poverty. Poverty is not reduced, however, exclusively by improved access to education. Other programs related to the welfare of the population are required. This is why educational programs such as BE must be a part of a wider national project. A challenge to be faced today in Brazil is that BE was not a part even of a macro-educational project, much less of a national development project aimed at overcoming poverty.

Returning to the issues of BF, the key question about it is its linkage to education. BE included in its very name the notion of education (school), while BF is associated with the notion of family. The meaning of family in the context of the program and its symbolic significance are important questions to be understood, so that each participating public agency can estimate the exact dimension of its role. How and why should the state interfere with the family? Schools, belonging to the public sphere, are clearly a state responsibility. Even private schools must follow public rules. Families, however, belong to the private sphere.

When BE ceased being “school” and became “family”, it was not just a change in names, nor a matter of hermeneutics or semantics. It was basically a matter of principle. First, the new program fell out of the scope of the Ministry of Education and started to be run by agencies linked to welfare. Second, a program directly linked to education lost its basic characteristic of providing long-term education to children and youths and became a welfare program, with the unavoidable risk of converting itself into an instrument of political clientelism. There is a broad discussion about the correlation between the BF and the massive victory of the party that holds power at the national level in municipalities that historically voted according to traditional patronage practices (Hunter and Power, 2007). The rise of new leaders, linked to the implementation of the program at the local level, could be a sign that the old style clientelism—related to landowners—is being renewed, under new basis but according to the same foundations. Nevertheless, this is still a controversial issue, as there are also authors who see in these facts symptoms of the overcoming of those practices. Third, education is more than just a matter of welfare. It is a civil right. Outside of this concept, BE loses its essence. Fourth, BF is not BE. Despite the differences, BF is important and does have its merits. However, it is not an educational program. Finally, when BE lost its educational role, a void was created in the realm of public policies seeking universal education.

It is important to point out that both programs have in common the fact that they were conceived, implemented, maintained, changed and terminated for many reasons and in particular moments within the state politics. They were not linked to a more encompassing national project. Deploying social policies in the absence of a national project will cause these policies that go against themselves. This happens because these policies are free floating, they are not attached to the more encompassing issues that each public policy is designed to tackle.

There is no doubt that BE is an indicator of improved school attendance, even if it does not cause short-term and substantial changes in the quality of education. BE had the merit of bringing to the nation’s attention educational issues that had never been effectively dealt with, such as the permanence in school of children and youths living in situations of poverty.

Recent Brazilian experiences in fighting poverty are worthy of examination because they have been innovative when compared to traditional instruments for promoting welfare, and because they are being replicated in other countries. BE was clearly conceived to promote the long-term inclusion of members of future generations, through education, while alleviating the immediate needs of their families. But the program was not universal, as it was focused on poor families with children. BF, on the other hand, is a typical poverty alleviation program, very much in accordance with an international trend (poverty alleviation) promoted by agencies such as the World Bank (Grindle, 2004 and 2007). It focuses on short-term needs and can be universalized to all those considered to be poor. Its limitation lies in how much each family can benefit from it, when all the poor are included.

Two questions must be raised here, indicating issues to be monitored in the assessment of poverty alleviation programs such as the BF. The first is: How to avoid recurrent of practices that strongly characterize the political backwardness of countries such as Brazil, as attested by paternalism and clientelism? The second is: How to prevent income transfers from the government to the poor from becoming a vicious circle that instead of promoting inclusion just encourages the poor population to remain poor in order to be eligible for the benefit?

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