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# **Minimum Income Programmes Directed to Child Labour Eradication and to School Inclusion in Brazil**

Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva\*

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WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR(S).**

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\* University of Maranhão, Brazil.



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## **Abstract**

This paper presents an overview focused on minimum income policies adopted in Brazil since 1995. The major attention is focused on two national minimum income programmes: the Child Labour Eradication Programme (PETI) and the School Scholarship Programme. They are programmes formulated and supported by the federal government and implemented by thousand of municipalities in the Brazilian States, in a decentralized way. I also discuss some central issues originated from the conceptions and from the implementation of the programmes as well as possible impacts on children and families, mainly regarding the inclusion of children and teenagers in the Brazilian educational system.



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## 1. Introduction

Brazil is a large South American country, with a population of 169,799,170 inhabitants, being 38 per cent of them below the poverty line. Brazil is divided into five Regions. They present unequal economical and social indicators and cultural diversities. There are 27 States and 5,561 municipalities in the country. The monthly income of 51.9 per cent of the Brazilians is up to U\$160.00 and just 2.6 per cent of our population earns more than U\$1,600.00 a month. In relation to education, nine among 10 children from 0 to 3 years of age go to nursery school. 31.4 per cent of the population with more than 10 years of age do not finish the first level of elementary school (four years of studies). Therefore, they are functional illiterates. 59.9 per cent of the population do not finish eight years of school and just 4.1 per cent attend 15 years of school, that is, they have university degrees. Brazil is in the fourth place in income concentration in the world.

This is the context of the debate and the experiences of the minimum income in Brazil.

Minimum income, seen as cash transfer programmes to families or individuals, is in expansion in Brazil since 1995, when the implementation of the first experiences started. Those experiences were extended first in municipality and State levels. The federal programmes started in 1996 and nowadays the main federal programmes are four: The Continuous Action Programme;<sup>1</sup> The Food Scholarship Programme;<sup>2</sup> The Child Labour Eradication Programme and The School Scholarship Programme, being the third and the fourth the specific subject of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> The Continuous Action Benefit started in 1996 and is directed to people 67 years of age or older who live in families with a per capita income up to a quarter of a minimum wage (U\$12.00) and to handicap people, living in the same economical situation. The benefit is of one minimum wage, around U\$40.00 per month. This programme had benefited 2.700.00 people in December 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The Food Scholarship Programme is directed to poor families with pregnant women or undernourished children from 0 to 6 years of age. It is associated with health care to families and the benefit is around U\$4.50 to U\$13.50 per month. Each municipality gets a quote of food scholarship per year and the country quote, in 2001, was of 3,575,650 food scholarships.

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The above federal programmes are in development in a decentralized way in thousand of municipalities in the whole country. Besides them, 45 programmes are in development by municipal initiative and about 10 programmes by the States initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Two aspects are very important in the design of the minimum income programmes in Brazil:

- § the idea of the articulation between the monetary transfer, as a direct benefit to poor families, and
- § educational policy directed to children and adolescents of those families.

That is, the originality of those programmes is to maintain children and adolescents in school. The assumption is that a monetary transfer to poor families allows them to have the children out of the streets and away from precocious work while they are in school and then, stop the circle of the poverty. Besides, those children have the possibility to take advantages of basic health services. The adults of the families have the possibility of being instructed in to reading and writing when they are illiterate as well as to participate in job training and in social and educative groups and to be guided to other social services in order to meet the families' necessities.

In this study, I intend to present an overview of two national minimum income programmes. One is directed to eradicate hard and painful child labour work - Child Labour Eradication Programme (PETI) and the other is directed to the inclusion of children and adolescents living in poor families in public schools - School Scholarship Programme (*Bolsa-Escola*). These are programmes formulated and supported by the Federal Government and implemented by thousands of municipalities in all of the 27 Brazilian States, in a decentralized way. I also intent to present the geographical and quantitative dimension of these

<sup>3</sup> Those are continuous and stable programmes. Several others cash programmes that are related to some specific situations are also in development in Brazil.



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programmes, the central questions originated from the conceptions and from the implementation of the programmes as well as possible impacts of the programmes on children and families, mainly regarding the inclusion of children and teenagers in the Brazilian educational system.

First of all, it is necessary to point out minimum income as a public social policy placed in the context of the Brazilian Social Protection System, seen as a policy independent of previous contributions, implemented as a cash transfer programme to poor families. In this way, those programmes can maintain the mean of a compensatory relief or they can be distributive/redistributive programmes.

The understanding is that the debate and the experiences on minimum income, implicit or explicitly, are supported by three basic ideological orientations:

- § liberal/neoliberal perspective that sees the minimum income policy as a compensatory mechanism, efficient in fighting against poverty and unemployment. It is implemented as a substitutive policy, replacing social programmes by cash transfer, as well as working towards the simplification of the social protection systems;
- § progressist/distributivist perspective that sees minimum income policy as a mechanism for sharing socially built wealth and as a policy to complement the already offered basic social services. Therefore, it is a complementary not substitutive policy;
- § insertion perspective that sees minimum income policy as a mechanism directed toward professional or social insertion of citizenship, in a conjuncture of poverty and unemployment.

These assumptions lead to draw two models of minimum income programmes that have been inspiring the Brazilian debates and experiences, since 1995, when they started to take place in several States and municipalities. They are:

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§ minimum income as a residual and compensatory policy in a liberal/neoliberal perspective orientation. Its basic aspect is the maintenance of the economical market, oriented by the comprehension that unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion are inevitable. Its objectives are the warranty of the individual as a consumer and to mitigate the most dangerous effects of poverty and social inequality, without considering the growth of unemployment and the necessity to divide the socially built wealth. The basic orientation is to focus on extreme poverty in order to maintain the interest on jobs. The social and economical impact are, necessarily, the maintain of an underclass that just has the possibility to survive in the level of a poverty line, just taking into account the biological survival.

§ minimum income, as a redistributive policy, is oriented by universal citizenship criteria. Its ideological orientation is the necessity to share the socially built wealth among all citizens living in a country. The objective here is to reach the autonomy of the citizen by inclusion of all that need the benefit even the citizen in general, in order to give the population a worthy life for all. Therefore, the social and economical desired impact is the social inclusion of all families.

In Brazil, the inspiration of several minimum income proposals and experiences, mainly when these programmes started (1995), were oriented by progressive ideologies. They are mainly the results of projects of whose authors are politicians of the Brazilian Worker Party and the majority of them are likely to be oriented towards the direction of sharing the social built wealth. However, the expansion of these programmes and the formulation of the national programmes with large covering, as a result of a pretended political and ideological consensus, are moving the experiences towards a liberal or neoliberal perspective. That means that the programmes are taking a conservative direction and, therefore the results are unable to surpass the big social and economical inequalities of the majority of the population. This seems to be creating and maintaining an under class of poor people who just have their biological necessities took into

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consideration. They are still living in a level of indigence or in a survival level, with questionable impacts on the stopping of a vicious circle of poverty, as discussed in this paper.

## **2. The historical development of the minimum income programmes in Brazil**

The debate on minimum income in Brazil was initiated as a part of a limited agenda in 1991, starting its' first historical moment. It was when the Senator Eduardo Suplicy's Project of Law was approved by the Senate. He is a member of the Workers' Party, who proposed the creation of the Warranty Basic Income Programme (*Programa de Garantia de Renda Mínima -PGRM*), in a national level. The programme was directed to Brazilian workers with 25 years of age and over, who earned around two minimum wages.<sup>4</sup> However, this Project of Law is still in the Congress without approval.

During the first years of this decade, the population dived into a deep economical crisis and recession. All of the attention of the federal government was given to achieve economical stability, to stop inflation from increasing, and to the problems originated by the external debt. The priority was the economical growth and the exportation policy. There was no room for any poverty fighting policy or for the sharing of the socially built wealth.

In the context of this new debate on a new Social Policy, a new dimension about the minimum income programmes in Brazil was included in the political agenda. This can be considered a second moment of the debate on minimum income, in Brazil, started in 1991 and deepened in 1993, when J. M. Camarga proposed an articulation between income and the attendance of the children and young poor people from five to 16 years to age of public schools. He also proposed a monetary transfer around a minimum wage to the families that had

<sup>4</sup> A minimum wage in Brazil is, in July 31, 2002, about US\$60.00. It is important to say that the value of the *real*, the Brazilian currency, has been decreasing every day in the context of the strong economical crisis during the whole month.

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children or dependents from five to 16 years of age, if they had a regular school attendance. Therefore, the link between minimum income programmes and public school is the warranty of the focus on poor families. This is an important characteristic of the programmes because, in Brazil, just the poor people attend public schools and, at the same time, it is very difficult to identify the real income of poor families because of the high level of informal jobs.

Therefore, the debate on minimum income assumes a new position, qualified by two innovations: the introduction of the family unit instead of the individual as a beneficiary of the programmes and the link between monetary transfer and education. Their objective is to stop the simple assistance by the incorporation of a structural component.

The basic arguments to handle this debate are two. The first one is that the cost opportunity for the poor families to maintain their children in school is too high because of the decrease of the already short family income. The second argument is related to the lack of educational formation as a restrictive factor to raise the income of new generations. This situation starts a vicious circle of poverty in the present and is determinant of poverty in the future. In this sense, it is worth to define a financial compensation in order to allow the poor families to send their children to school. A cash transfer would be the mechanism to stop the vicious circle of the poverty.

It is important to consider that the economical Brazilian growth has decreased since 1993. The stability of the currency started in 1994, with the implementation of the *Plano Real*. This new conjuncture demanded from Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the Federal Government to start in 1995, the absolute priority to continue the stabilization of the economy in order to insert Brazil in the world globalization process. The country definitively made a neoliberal project choice of its economy. The social problems and social policies and programmes were less and less considered. The State became minimum for its' social aspects and large for the economical ones. Poverty continued growing and the concentration of wealth was deeper.

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The third moment of the debate on minimum income started in 1995 when the first experiences begun in the cities of Campinas and Riberão Preto in the State of São Paulo as well as in Brasília, the federal capital of Brazil. These experiences were followed by several proposals and other experiences in several cities and States, in different regions of the country. These initiatives were the response of the local and State governments to the social pressure to fight against the increasing poverty.

The fourth moment of the minimum income programmes in Brazil started in 2001, marked by the big expansion of the federal programmes, created in 1996 (Continuous Action Benefit and Child Labour Eradication Programme) as well as by the creation of new national Programmes by the federal government, implemented in almost all 5,561 municipalities of the country, being the main programmes the School Scholarship Programme and the Food Scholarship Programme.

The priority given to the economical project of stabilization of the economy had to give some room for the social situation that was worse because unemployment had increased and the salaries and job income had decreased. The consequence was the expansion of poverty. Besides that, after six years as a president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso needed to raise his popularity in order to have influence in the 2002 election.

Another important aspect of our fourth moment is the starting of a debate about the possibility to have in Brazil, a citizenship income directed to all Brazilians without basic economical conditions, that means a basic income to all of the citizens of the country. This debate has, as a starting point, the book of the Senator Eduardo Suplicy (Citizenship Income: the exit is by the door) that has been presented and debated in several cities of the country with the participation of the author of the book. This debate has been incorporated in the context of the election for the Brazilian presidency during this year by the Worker Party's candidate.

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From the above reflection, the minimum income policy, in this context, is in Brazil no longer a utopia, that cannot be reached, but a real alternative to social policies in Brazil.

It is important to register that the debate and the practice of the minimum income policy in Brazil was developed in a conjuncture where the social issues did not get much attention by the federal government. Its' main priority was given to the maintenance of the economical stability, oriented by the understanding that poverty reduction and the social issues are dependent variables of the economy. It was just in 2001, in the penultimate year of Fernando Henrique Cardoso' second mandate as the president of Brazil, that this orientation started to change and he now says that it is important to create a security network in order to reduce the poverty of the large majority the Brazilian population. The cash transfer programmes are the central strategy to support of this big security network, according to the President.

So, as those four moments above indicate, this debate, that is, the increasing number of proposals and the Brazilian experiences of minimum Income are supported by the following traces in the conjuncture:

- § the elevation of the indexes of unemployment and of job insecurity due to the liberal economical policies and structural adjustment of the national economy to the competitively of the international and global economy, adopted during the 90's;
- § elevation of violence in big cities;
- § low qualification of the Brazilian workers to answer the new demands of the new working world;
- § elevation of the indexes of infantile work, with the exploitation of children and adolescents;
- § elevation of poverty, being the children and the young people the more affected.

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### **3. Overview, dimensions and possible impacts of the national minimum income programmes directed to child labour eradication and to school inclusion in Brazil**

#### **3.1 Child Labour Eradication Programme (PETI)**

PETI is a minimum income programme created by the Federal Government in 1996. The motivation to create this programme was the identification of an extended practice of submission of children and adolescents to painful and hard work in several States of Brazil. This programme started in rural areas but was extended to urban areas since 1999. It's obligation is to maintain children, from seven to 14 years of age in school through the completion of the family monthly income with benefits ranging from U\$8.00 to U\$12.00 per child living in rural or urban areas, respectively. The families must have a monthly family per capita income of half of a minimum wage (U\$30.00 the most). The children have to attend school and social educative activities during the whole day. Its intention is to keep the children busy all day, in order to avoid their return to their previous jobs.

PETI is a minimum income programme implemented in a decentralized way in a large number of municipalities in all of the 27 Brazilian States and in Brasília, the Federal Capital, reaching around 417,000 children and adolescents in March 2002.

The main expected impact of PETI is to take children and adolescents away from hard child labour work and to maintain them all day long in school and give them a hopeful future. From the families it is expected more participation in the life of the children; raising their self-esteem and hope in the future as well giving them immediate relief from the hard economical and social life conditions.

The main issues that one can raise about PETI are:

- § Children need to work in order to help their families' income; therefore they help to support their families. This happens because the

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adults do not have opportunities to get stable and well paid jobs. They don't earn enough to support the basic needs of their family. This means that infantile work is a structural problem of the capitalist societies and this situation has become worse in the context of globalization of the economy and in the context of the increasing of unemployment and precarious, unstable and low paid jobs.

§ Another problem specifically relate to PETI itself is the age fixed for children to be accepted by the programme, from seven to 14 years of age. The age range between 0 and 6 is very important for the children's development and so is the age range after 14 years of age, when the family is dismissed from the programme. The reality is that the young return to the work market and the circle of the poverty goes on and on again and the long run situation will be kept the same.

### **3.2 School Scholarship Programme**

The School Scholarship Programme started its' implementation in June 2001 and it is presented as an universal and the major federal programme. Its' goal is to reach 10.7 million children and adolescents in 5.9 million families. It is directed to families with a monthly per capita income around U\$30.00 and with children from six to 15 years of age, enrolled in school. Each family should get around U\$4.50 per child a month, for three children the most, totalizing around U\$13.50. The family's obligation is that children have at least an 85 per cent attendance to school. The school frequency of the children must be sent to the responsible agency in order to the benefit be transferred to family mothers by a magnetic bankcard.

This programme benefited, in just 10 months, (up to April, 2002) 5,506 of the 5,561 Brazilian municipalities. 4.9 million families were reached, that is 84.5 per cent of the families who could get the benefit and 8.4 million of children were also benefited, they are 78.5 per cent of the total of the children who can be reached by the programme. This is a programme supported by the Poverty Fund



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and it has the prevision of an initial amount of resource of R\$1.7 billion and it is intended to be held up during 10 years.

The School Scholarship Programme is a universal programme and all Brazilian municipalities can be included. For that, the Municipal Government has to draw up a family cadastre and send it to the Secretariat of the Programme along with the following documentation:

- § municipal law creating the programme of local minimum income;
- § decree creating a Social Control Council;
- § declaration of the application of 25 per cent of the municipal budget in elementary education and adherence term of the programme by the municipality.

It is expected the participation of families and of some organizations of the society in the programme. It is also expected that the municipalities carry out some social and educative actions, like arts, sports, leisure and school reinforcement. The expected impacts of programme are:

- § universalization of the elementary teaching;
- § raising the economical , cultural and social conditions of the families met by the programme who are below the poverty line;
- § raising the self-esteem, dignity and hope in the future of the poor families;
- § reduction of the costs of school evasion and repetition in school;
- § citizenship development and;
- § to make more dynamic the local economies.

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## 4. Central questions

The historical dynamic of the implementation of minimum income programmes in Brazil points out some important aspects that show the characteristics and tendencies of this Policy, such as:

This policy must be seen in the context of the Brazilian Social Protection System as a Social Assistance Policy. It is a benefit without previous monetary contribution. It has contributed to print important modifications in the nature and the content of the given benefits to the poor population. It was given priority to cash transfer as a form of social benefits, under the justification to allow major freedom for the families to decide what goods and services to buy in order to meet their necessities; to decrease corruption by decreasing intermediations; simplification and reduction of the administration cost of social programmes and reduction of clientelist practices.

The minimum income programmes are implemented in a decentralized way by the municipalities. For that, the problems, limits and unprepared Brazilian local administrations as well as the lack of qualification of the public officials and the weak popular organization must be considered.

The articulation of the minimum income programmes with structural policies, as education, health and labour policies is the central proposal of these programmes. This means to articulate compensatory (cash transfer) and structural policies in order to reach poor people. However, this places the need to improve the Brazilian public educational system and to increase and democratize basic social services and the popular organization of the Brazilian society as well.

Another relevant aspect of the minimum income programmes in Brazil is that they have eradication of poverty as a goal. When the design of these programmes intends to articulate cash transfer with the possibility of access of poor people to basic social services, this goal seems to be reached. However, we must consider that this articulation has not taken place in an appropriate and satisfactory way. At the same time an economical policy to divide social built wealth has not been adopted. Therefore, the excluding and concentrating economical model adopted in

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Brazil and the no articulation of those programmes to a microeconomic policy that could enable the division of income and generation of job annuls this intention.

At the same time, one can raise the following question: What is poverty? Is it just lack of income or is it above all, the lack of social and economical opportunities and the lack of access to basic social services? In a perspective that goes beyond the income, poverty must be seen as a structural social problem and fighting it requires an economical policy able to share the social wealth and raise real possibilities of access to job and income, besides a social policy articulated to an economical policy that make the democratic access of the population to the basic social services possible.

Two important aspects are associated with the weakness of the minimum income as a policy to fight poverty:

- § the restrictive and focusing character of the programmes when they focus on the families who live in extreme poverty (living with U\$30.00 per month);
- § the restriction of the programmes to meet poor families with children 07 to 14 or 15 years of age, leaving out children from 0 to 7 years of age. This is the age that children need more intense care in order to assure them a good personal development in the future.

Besides these two problems, the extremely low amount of cash transfer as a benefit to the families is not enough to meet even the biological necessities of these families. This low amount of money (up to U\$13.50 per month, value transferred by the major programme: the School Scholarship Programme) just contributes for the reproduction and maintenance of poverty or even indigence of those families. This situation reflects the reproduction of a society historically marked by strong inequality and unacceptable income concentration.

Another aspect that has to be taken into consideration among these central issues is the mystification of the possibilities of the programmes supported by publicity, mainly television, seen by millions of people. Publicity shows false

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possibilities of the programme, giving the illusion that all problems of the poor families will be solved. This is an ideological component that maximizes the objectives and the real possibilities of those programmes. The media works as an ideological mechanism of social control over poor people, as an attempt to create legitimacy for the governments.

Although there are restrictions considering the Brazilian minimum income, it is important to consider that these programmes might have real impact as an immediate possibility to increase the income of poor families that do not have jobs or have a very small income because the Brazilian work market is narrow or excluding to most poor people. Besides, these programmes might offer opportunities to poor people to access basic social services as education and health, since those programmes maintain continuity, tend to be enlarged and to take the direction of universalization and therefore tend to facilitate the real access to basic social services.

It is important to emphasize that the experiences of minimum income in Brazil, because of its recent implementation, present more doubts than assurance in spite of the indication of new possibilities of social policies (the programmes must maintain and deepen their dimensions to facilitate the access of poor families to other economical and social policies and therefore become the focal point of policies directed to fight poverty). In this sense, The Brazilian minimum income policy needs to consider central questions already pointed out by the experiences that are in development, such as:

- § the necessity to fix a social minimum, according to each reality of the country, in order to allow objectivity in the determination of the financial amount of the benefit;
- § the necessity to extend the programmes to children from 0 to 6 years of age, because this is the lifetime that needs more attention and care, if we consider it to be a very important period for the biological and behavioural development of individual personalities;
- § support the family as a basic unit to be benefited by the programmes.

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- § the valuable articulation between the monetary transfer to poor families with other social and economical policies, such as education, health and job. This would mean the expansion and democratization of those policies and to develop complementary actions so the families can reach autonomy to meet their basic necessities.
  - § implementation of a set of essential services to develop the human being, with provision, covering and quality of those services;
  - § the expansion of the eligibility criteria mainly related towards the low per capita income as well as the amount of the benefit;
  - § the universalization of the programmes towards the target population identified through clear criteria for the society and for the programme beneficiaries, being clear why people go in and go out of the programmes;.
  - § monitoring the implementation of the programmes in order to identify problems to be corrected as well as evaluate the impact of the programmes on the benefited population and the egress of the programmes. This demands a social control of the programmes by society.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the aspects that can be considered as innovation qualifiers of the minimum income programmes in Brazil pointed out by the practitioners of those programmes and in some evaluations that have been developed by other researchers, such as:

- § minimum income is a benefit independent from previous monetary contribution. That is, it is a social policy directed to the poor population. It has been more successful on focusing poor families than any other social programme in Brazil;
- § those programmes have as main a trace the articulation of a monetary transfer to education and other social policies;

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§ therefore, they can improve the access of poor families to the basic social services, such as: education, health, job training, job market, and others.

## **5. Central thesis for discussion**

The low amount of cash transferred to poor families and the fragmentation and disarticulation of the programmes from other social programmes and mainly from the macroeconomical policy contributes for the reproduction and maintenance of an unacceptable level of indigence what maintains the high social, economical and income concentration that is historical in Brazil.

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