

**THE BOLSA FAMÍLIA AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN BRAZIL:**  
problematizing the conditionalities as limits for the implementation of the Citizenship  
Basic Income<sup>1</sup>

Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva<sup>2</sup>

Universidade Federal do Maranhão/Brazil

[maria.ozanira@gmail.com](mailto:maria.ozanira@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The so-called “Bolsa Família” [Family Stipend], created in 2003, is the major transfer program currently implemented in Brazil. Its target population is made of poor and extremely poor families and it is a central program in Brazil’s Social Protection System. Its goals are to fight hunger, poverty and inequality through the transfer of a monetary benefit linked to the guarantee of access to basic social rights; to promote social inclusion by contributing to the emancipation of the families that receive the benefit. It is a cash transfer program in which the families can remain as long as they meet the criteria of eligibility and if they also fulfill some conditions. Besides the money transfer, the program includes the need for the members of the beneficiary families to participate in some complementary actions, mainly in the fields of education, health and employment. This paper presents the results of an empirical and bibliographic investigation on the conditionalities of the Bolsa Família as limits to the adaptation of a Citizenship Basic Income in Brazil. Thus, it discusses the foundations and conceptions that guide the conditions adopted by the program and sketches the prospects of the implementation of a citizenship basic income in Brazil taking the “Bolsa Família” program as the first step towards that goal.

## **1 INTRODUCTION:** the development of the Social Protection System in Brazil

Historically, the beginnings of the establishment of a Social Protection System in Brazil go back to the 1930s. This was a time of significant social and economic transformations, when the development of the country was marked by the transition from an agro-exporting model of development to an urban-industrial one. The political dynamics of the country began to include the participation of an emerging working class. As a result, there was an increasing demand for the satisfaction of collective needs that emerged as a consequence of the process of industrialization and urbanization that was underway.

This process was intensified in the ’1970s, in the context of the military dictatorship’s authoritarianism, in which the social programs and services possibly took

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper, presented to the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Basic Income Earth Network, held in 2012 in Munich, Germany, is based on a study developed with the support of Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) and Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), which are Brazilian government agencies that promote the training of human resources and research.

<sup>2</sup> PhD in Social Work; professor of the Graduate Program in Public Policies at Universidade Federal do Maranhão; coordinator of the Group for the Evaluation and Study of Poverty and Policies Focused on Poverty (GAEPP: [www.gaepf.ufma.br](http://www.gaepf.ufma.br)) at that University; IA level researcher of CNPq.

on the function of minimizing the strong repression against the working class and the popular sectors in general. Thus, the social protection had the role of contributing to the reproduction of the workforce and the legitimization of the emergency regime.

The 1980s were marked by the expansion of social movements demanding the extension of social rights and the paying of the social debt that resulted from the wage squeeze and high income concentration during the period of the military dictatorship. Then, the struggles in the area of production, reproduction and party politics around the demands for political participation and the extension and universalization of social rights were united, culminating in the Federal Constitution of 1988.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 established the Social Security System, made up of the Health Policy, the Social Security and the Policy of Social Assistance, which amounted to a significant accomplishment in the field of social protection. This made it possible for Social Assistance to be regarded as a policy based on rights, rather than a practice based on favors, and to make everyone, even those excluded from the labor market, into Brazilian citizens.

It is in this context that, from 1991 onwards, the debate about income transfer programs became part of the Brazilian public agenda. The first programs of this kind were created at the municipal level in 1995, and they were followed by experiments implemented in several Brazilian states and municipalities. Income transference programs underwent a significant expansion at the national level from 2001 onwards, with the establishment of federal programs.

Thus, from the second half of the 1990s onwards, the income transfer programs became central to the Brazilian Social Protection System. In this context, the “Bolsa Família” is the most outstanding social program due to its geographic coverage and the number of families assisted by it.

The references of the present article are the result of bibliographic, documental and empirical studies performed on the basis of a research project, aiming at offering elements for the evaluation of the “Bolsa Família” management at a municipal level, taking into account the monitoring of its conditionalities, in such a way as to help raise the standard of management of the Program in the municipalities.

The field study was performed using a simple random sample composed of 13 municipalities in the State of Maranhão, Brazil, selected by drawing lots. They included small, medium and large-sized municipalities and the metropolis, São Luis, the State capital.

The bibliographic and documental survey looked at publications and documents of studies about the “Bolsa Família”, specifically on the conditionalities.

Semi-structured interviews were also performed with the state manager, municipal managers and coordinators in charge of following up the Health, Education and Social Welfare conditionalities of the “Bolsa Família” in the municipalities chosen to make up the research sample.

The state of Maranhão is the second poorest in Brazil, with a population of 6,574,789 according to the 2010 Census. In November 2011, according to the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger [Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome – MDS], the “Bolsa Família” helped 916,313 families, and represented up to 109.98% of the total number of families estimated as poor, considering the “Bolsa Família” profile which is a monthly per capita income of up to CR\$ 140.00. According to the same source, the total resources accumulated transferred by the program to the State were R\$ 1,177,368,629.00, which constituted a mean monthly sum on the order of R\$107,033,511.70. If the income of the Maranhão families is considered, social transfers represent 21.3% of the income of the State population, while the national average was 19.3%, which produced a significant impact on the local economy (IPEA, 2010b). If it is taken into account that each poor family helped by the “Bolsa Família” consists on average of 4 persons, this means a total of 3,665,252 people included in the program, i.e. 55% of the State population.

This paper presents the results of an empirical and bibliographic investigation on the conditionalities of the “Bolsa Família” as limits to the adaption of a Citizenship Basic Income in Brazil. Thus, it discusses the foundations and conceptions that guide the conditions adopted by the program and sketches the prospects of the implementation of a citizenship basic income in Brazil taking the “Bolsa Família” program as the first step towards that goal.

## **2 THE BOLSA FAMÍLIA: an overview**

Brazil is the biggest country in Latin America, with a territory of about 8,547,403 km<sup>2</sup>, divided into five regions with 26 states and 5,565 municipalities plus the Federal District. According to the 2010 Census, its population was of 190,732,694 million people. The country is marked by great economic and social inequalities and

cultural diversity, although Portuguese is the official language spoken throughout the national territory.

The recorded fertility rate was 1.86. The number of households identified was 67.6 million, with 3.3 residents on average per household.

The age structure of the population continues to exhibit a trend towards aging, as 11.3% of the population are 60 years old or more.

The School Census performed in 2010 indicated that 51.5 million students were enrolled in basic education-which goes from the day care center to pre-school and elementary school to secondary school-and that 85.5% of them were attending the public school system.

Nevertheless, the literacy rate for people aged 15 or older, although declining, is still high: it decreased from 11.5% in 2004 to 9.7% in 2009 and to 9.6% according to the 2010 Census.

Regarding children's work, the social indexes in 2008, referred to by the 2007 National Household Sample Survey [Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios – PNAD], developed by IBGE, which is the Brazilian institution responsible for the Censuses and PNAD, synthesized this reality in Brazil in the following terms: 3.3% of the children from 05 to 09 years old; 48.2% of the children and teenagers from 05 to 17 years old, and 63.9% of the youngsters from 15 to 17 years old were working. Nevertheless, if we consider the evolution of children's labor in Brazil, a decrease was registered, being it 18.7% in 1995, reaching 11.1% in 2006 and 10.6% in 2007 when the age group from 05 to 17 years old was considered. Child labor kept on decreasing: there were 4.3 million people aged 5 to 17 working in 2009, while in 2008 there were 4.5 million and in 2004 they were 5.3 million. These indexes reveal a meaningful decrease in children's labor in Brazil, although this is still a worrying issue

According to the 2010 Census, 22% of the Brazilian poor population is (about 42 million people) and have a family income of 0.5 minimum wages. Of these 8.5% are indigent (16.2 million), with a monthly income of 0.25 of the minimum wage. Further, according to IBGE, from 1998 to 2008 the poor families dropped from 32.4% to 22.6% of the population and, according to IPEA (2010), 12.8 million Brazilians rose above the level of poverty between 1998 and 2008.

Several studies (Barros et al., 2007-a; Barros et al., 2007-b, PNAD 2009; IPEA 2008, 2009, 2010) have evidenced that income transfer programs have contributed, in Brazil, to reducing the inequality and poverty indices, mainly reducing extreme poverty

and diminishing deprivation in the life of the benefitting families, but they are not sufficient for them to leave the ranks of the poor in most cases, and it has been underlined that the progressiveness of the government transfers accounted for 1/3 of the drop in inequality in 1995-2009 (Soares, 2011). Other causes of the decline of inequality and poverty in Brazil in recent years are also pointed out: the contribution of the income transference programs; the real increase in the minimum wage; the stability of the economy and the benefits from social security (Barros et al., 2006; Soares et al., 2007). Along the same lines, more recent studies show that the decreasing trend of poverty and inequality in Brazil is being maintained.

In this context, the “Bolsa Família” is the broadest income transfer program in Brazil, covering all 5,565 Brazilian municipalities, with 13,394,893 families assisted in May 2012. This means 53,579,572 people, considering that an average family consists of four persons. Since the poor population with a “Bolsa Família” profile (per capita family income of up to R\$140.00) according to the 2010 Census is 13,738,415, 97.49% of the target public is already included, which shows that the Program has a high capacity to focus. In budgetary terms, in 2011 an amount of R\$ 17,323,412,921.60 was applied, which means almost a billion and a half reais a month.<sup>3</sup>

This is a program that performs a direct monetary transfer to poor and extremely poor families, and it occupies a central position in the current Brazilian Social Protection System. It was instituted in 2003 as an intersectorial policy within the sphere of the so-called Zero Hunger [Fome Zero] Program to unify the income transfer programs<sup>4</sup>, and its purpose is “to ensure the human right to adequate nutrition by promoting food and nutritional security and helping the population that is more vulnerable to hunger to achieve citizenship.<sup>5</sup> With the implementation of the Brazil Without Misery Plan [Plano Brasil sem Miséria] started in 2011, as the main strategy of the president Dilma Rousseff Administration, aiming to raise the 16.2 million Brazilians

---

<sup>3</sup> Data taken from [www.mds.gov.br](http://www.mds.gov.br) on January 6, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> The Fome Zero strategy consists of a set of governmental and non-governmental policies whose main purpose is to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in the country. Its main programs are: Bolsa Família [Family Stipend]; Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos da Agricultura Familiar (PAA) [Program to Purchase Food from Family Farmers]; Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar (PNAE) [National Program for School Meals]; Programa de Construção de Cisternas [Cistern Construction Program]; Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar (PRONAF) [National Program to Strengthen Family Farming]; Restaurantes Populares and Centros de Referência de Assistência Social (CRAS) [Popular Restaurants and Centers of Reference for Social Welfare].

<sup>5</sup> Quote from the description of the Bolsa Família on site [www.mds.gov.br](http://www.mds.gov.br), accessed on June 12, 2011.

who live on a per capita monthly income of less than R\$ 70.00 out of a situation of extreme poverty.

Ever since its inception, the “Bolsa Família” has undergone a significant geographic expansion, covering a growing number of families. In 2006 it had already been implemented in a decentralized manner in all Brazilian municipalities and in the Federal District. By its fifth anniversary, in October 2008, it had already invested R\$ 41 billion, half in the Northeastern Region, the poorest in the country.

From April 2011 onwards, President Rousseff, beginning a policy designed to strengthen and expand the “Bolsa Família”, ordered an average readjustment of 19.4% in the amount of the aid. In this way, the mean value of the benefits rises from R\$ 96.00 to R\$ 115.00 and the amount received by these families can vary from R\$ 32.00 to R\$ 242.00. This readjustment was justified as a measure to fight extreme poverty in Brazil, which is the main priority of the Administration, announced by President Dilma Rousseff and consolidated in the Brazil Without Misery Plan.

The criterion to enter the “Bolsa Família” Program is income, considering as poor families those that have a per capita family income of up to R\$ 140.00, and extremely poor the families with a per capita family income below R\$70.00. The monetary benefit is very varied, and it is granted according to the family profile, determining the following types of benefit: basic, variable, variable linked to adolescents, variable for pregnancy and variable for breastfeeding mother. Thus, the amounts of benefits paid by the “Bolsa Família” are determined considering monthly per capita income and number of children and adolescents up to the age of 17 years, and the number of pregnant and breastfeeding women in the family.

When the Brazil Without Poverty Plan was launched in 2011, the government established the goal of including in the “Bolsa Família” more than 800,000 extremely poor families by December 2013. Another change was to raise the limit of the number of children and adolescents up to the age of 15 years, from extremely poor families, from 03 to 05. They began to have a right to the variable benefit of R\$ 32.00, enabling more than 1.3 million children and adolescents to be included. This came into force from September 2011, raising the maximum value of the benefit from R\$ 242.00 to R\$ 306.00.

The “Bolsa Família” comprises three main axes: income transfer, conditions and complementary programs. The first aims at promoting immediate poverty relief. The conditions are defined the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger

[Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome (MDS)], the national managing agency of the Bolsa Família, as commitments taken on by the families and the government for the beneficiaries to be covered by services of education, health and social welfare, as a reinforcement to access basic social rights, while the complementary programs aim at increasing the families' ability to overcome their vulnerable situation.<sup>6</sup>

The families can use the money received freely and may remain in the Program if they fulfill the eligibility criteria. They must comply with the conditions, which consist of enrolling children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years in school; at least 85% regular attendance at school of children aged 6 to 15 years and 75% for youths 16 to 17 years old; children aged 0 to 7 years must come to the outpatient clinics to be vaccinated, weighed, measured and to undergo basic health checkups, and the attendance of pregnant women for routine exams is also considered a condition in the field of Health.

Besides money transfers aimed at improving nutrition and basic living conditions of the family group, the Bolsa Família considers it necessary to include the adult members of the benefitting families in complementary actions offered by the three levels of government. They are covered by other programs, such as: social tariff for electricity; courses for literacy, education of youths and adults and professional training; actions to generate work and income and improve housing conditions, besides exemption from fees to take federal exams to become civil servants.

The "Bolsa Família" is implemented in a decentralized manner by the municipalities, with the financial support of the federal government. This process begins with the signature of the Letter of Agreement or Term of Accession, by which the municipality commits itself to instituting a local control committee or council made up of representatives of society and to appointing the municipal management agency for the Program. In order to carry out the implementation process, a set of responsibilities shared by the Union, states, municipalities and society is established.

---

<sup>6</sup> According to the description of the Bolsa Família on site [www.mds.gov.br](http://www.mds.gov.br), accessed on June 12, 2011.

### **3 THE CONDITIONALITIES OF THE “BOLSA FAMÍLIA” AS LIMITS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CITIZENSHIP BASIC INCOME IN BRAZIL**

#### **3.1 Conditionalities as a structuring element of the “Bolsa Família” program: conception and problemtization**

The conditionalities of the “Bolsa Família” are considered obligations that the families receiving benefits must accept in the areas Education, Health and Social Welfare in order to continue to receive the financial benefit of the Program. They are also commitments taken on by the government responsible for offering public health, education and social welfare services.

The managerial follow up of conditionalities is the responsibility of the MDS, articulated with the Ministries of Education and Health, and it is up to the municipalities to record and provide information to the ministries concerning each conditionality in education, health and social welfare in the respective computerized systems.

Besides identifying the level of compliance of the conditionalities, the purpose of the follow up is to look at the reasons for non-compliance, so that the municipalities will develop actions to follow the non-compliant families.

When the first non-compliance occurs, the family receives a written warning reminding them of their commitments to the Program and the fact that compliance with conditions is linked to receiving the benefit. From the second non-compliance onwards, the family is submitted to the following sanctions: the second time, the benefit is blocked for 30 days; the third and fourth, it is suspended for 60 days, and the fifth time, the benefit is cancelled. In the case of families that have children aged 16 and 17 years, who receive the Variable Youth Benefit [Benefício Variável Jovem – BVJ], they will be warned the first time they are in non-compliance with the conditionality of attending 75% of the monthly school hours; their benefit will be suspended the second time they don't comply, and the third time it will be cancelled.

The conditionalities, counterparts or commitments are, thus, a central dimension of the “Bolsa Família” design, which has given rise to polemics, consensus, opposition or divergence. Thus, an analysis of the literature allowed identifying different understandings about these conditionalities, which can be systematized in the following views.

a) **Conditionalities as access to and expansion of Rights**

The official version concerning the conditionalities of the “Bolsa Família” is that they are a mechanism that aims at combating the intergenerational transmission of poverty by investing in human capital through measures involving education and health, in articulation with the immediate objective of relieving poverty represented by the transference of money to poor and extremely poor families. In this sense, the conditionalities are situated in the field of rights, expanding the access of the families that use it to basic social rights and encouraging the demand for education, health and social welfare services. This is a two-way movement, and it is up to the State to offer public services and the beneficiaries to take up the commitments determined by the Program. In this sense, they are considered necessary, because they even force the State to improve services provided to the population (Vale, 2009). Furthermore, they may encourage the families to invest in human capital, besides stimulating the demand for social services. In this direction, conditionalities are seen as favoring intersectoriality between municipal departments (Monnrat, Maia and Schottz, 2006), fostering the interrelationship of a compensatory dimension and structuring policies in the areas of health and education. Consequently, the official version of the Program’s conditionalities advocates their fulfillment as a possibility for the impoverished population to gain access and insertion into the basic social services, favoring the interruption of the cycle of reproduction of poverty, as a way of increasing the right to health and education. Ultimately, they would only be reinforcing the social or legal obligations of the parents.

b) **Conditionalities as a denial of Rights**

Opposed to the concept above, there are those who believe that the conditionalities linked to the income transfer programs are an infraction of rights, because they are an imposition or restriction to the granting of people’s essential right to survival. It is understood that one should never impose counterparts, requirements or conditionalities on a right, since the entitlement to the right should never be conditioned. what should occur is punishment of the State for non-compliance with the obligation to ensure access to rights to education and health (Zimmermann, 2006),

The contradiction between conditionality and right reinforces the selectivity of Social Welfare, which is already focused on extreme poverty, reinforcing control and

pressure, and infringing the notion of citizenship because it conditions a constitutional right to compliance with demands by the beneficiaries who are already in a very vulnerable situation (Lavinás, 2000). In this sense, “it may be said that adopting conditionalities in an income transfer program is only valid if understood and implemented as a strategy to expand access to the social services and employment and income policies, and not the simple reflection of a restrictive view of rights” (Monnrat, Maia and Schottz, 2006. p. 8).

As regards understanding the conditionalities as an infraction of the most fundamental right, which is access to essential conditions for survival, these are conceived only as an obligation of the State to provide basic social services to all citizens, and not as a mechanism for punishment.

**c) Conditionalities as a political issue and conservative moralistic imposition**

Those who point to the political and moralistic connotation of the conditionalities express the idea that nobody, especially the poor, should receive a transfer from the State without a direct counterpart. Transfer should be a merit of the beneficiary: “sweat of their brow” (Silva, 2010-a ). As they say, “there should be no free lunch”, thence the need to demand that the government control and remove beneficiaries who are blamed for non-compliance with the requirements imposed by the programs. It is not considered that non-compliance with the conditionalities may be the result of precarious services and that, in this case, who should have been found responsible was the State, which goes unpunished. The beneficiaries are only exempted, when it is proved that non-compliance did not depend on them (Kerstenetzky, 2009). This understanding has a mystifying character that permeates the logic of conditionalities, making social policies withhold a right and begin to be considered an exchange, concession and counterpart, voiding the notion of right and social protection as a duty of the State (Silva, 2010a).

I shall now try to problematize the controversies, agreements and disagreements dealing with conditionalities as a structuring dimension of income transfer programs, even when they are considered as possibilities of guaranteeing basic social rights, seeking to potentiate positive impacts on the autonomization of the families served. I consider that, even so, they present problems and challenges:

First, they hurt the principle of non-conditionality peculiar to every citizen’s right to have access to work and to social programs that will guarantee them a life with dignity; second, the basic social services offered by the vast majority of Brazilian municipalities, even in the

field of Education, Health and Work, are quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient to respond to the needs of the families that are beneficiaries of the Income Transfer Programs. In this sense, the conditionalities should be imposed on the State, at its three levels, and not on the families, since they imply and demand the expansion and democratization of good quality basic social services, which, when they become available, will be used by all, without requiring imposition and mandatoriness. I believe that what could be developed are educational actions for orientation, referrals and follow up of families, so that they will use the services available appropriately. Conceived in this manner, the conditionalities, on the contrary of restrictions, impositions and mandatoriness, would mean the expansion of social rights (Silva, 2002-b)

As opposed to the punitive character and emphasizing the educational character of the conditionalities, I consider that they could indeed be conceived as **recommendations** to the families that are beneficiaries of the “Bolsa Família” and as a duty of State in the social protection of its citizens and in offering basic social services.

When they are configured as a requirement to remain in the “Bolsa Família”, the field research done on the conditionalities in the State of Maranhão insistently showed the strong assimilation of the punitive connotation of conditionalities, leading most of the subjects who provided information for the study to repeat that the families take their children to school and to medical care motivated by the fear of losing their participation in the Program.

I believe that, insofar as the monitoring and recording of compliance with conditionalities is based on the possibility of punishment, fear tends to be incorporated by the families. If the attendance of children and adolescents at school and health care were a recommendation presented from an educational perspective, these families would probably be more likely to see how complying with these recommendations is important for the life of all of them.

Of even greater concern is the possibility that the conditionalities, when accepted as sanctions, become a way to worsen the previous vulnerabilities and social risks. In the end the family is blamed for their situation, which is interpreted as dysfunctional. Legal advances were not able to replace the coercive methodology by a mobilization and educational methodology, and the right to life is limited by complying with conditionalities, instituting a hybrid of social protection and coercive control (Silva, 2010-d). Another aspect to be considered is that, even if the conditionalities are the responsibility of the three levels of government, most of the offer of services, their management and follow up fall to the municipality. We know how fragile the offer of education and health services is in the vast majority of Brazilian municipalities, and the

municipalities are not made responsible for this deficiency. Furthermore, the administrative and financial costs caused by control, even when it is not clear how much is spent and how much is gained by the control, express rather a political issue and a judgment of value: “The State must charge the bill, in order not to encourage laziness and lack of initiative.” This is the conservative argument that permeates segments of society, with much support from the media.

Some authors indicated obstacles to fulfilling conditionalities. In the case of health, they ultimately only provide access to primary mother-child care (Fonseca, 2006), and in the case of education, the focus is on attendance at school without really considering the quality of education. The qualitative dimension of the health and education services is not considered in the process of following up conditionalities.

The institutional and managerial fragility of Brazilian municipalities is rarely taken into account: difficulties in relating with the different government spheres and sectors; low capacity to offer services, especially in education and health (Arretch, 2000), basic sanitation and housing (Lavinias, 2006), which is worsened by the precarious mechanisms for social control (Silva, 2010-d). The direct transfer of money to the beneficiary is the responsibility of the federal sphere, while the conditionalities are decentralized in the municipalities, and it is they that are tasked with offering the services and following up and controlling them (Silva, 2010-a).

Lack of available information on services and the fragile articulation of the “Bolsa Família” with the two structuring policies of education and health are often pointed out as basic obstacles to complying with the conditionalities. These aspects are the responsibility of the State. As Cacciamali, Tatei and Batista put it, over the short term the conditions are effective to create positive externalities, but they require conjugation with complementary actions to improve the offer of school and health, and policies to generate jobs, income and training for the parents (Cacciamali, Tatei and Batista, 2010). Therefore, one cannot make the mistake of “overblaming” families because they do not fulfill certain conditionalities, without considering the objective conditions they have available to “fulfill them” (Sposati, 2008, apud Moura, 2009). The difficulty in articulating with the three spheres of government and among the ensemble of social policies, and of the latter with a distributive economic model is a structural limit of the income transfer programs (Sposati, 2008, apud Moura, 2009, p. 15), which involves a difficulty in articulating with the already precarious local services network to provide the population with access to the infrastructure, basic social services, work and

income policy. Consequently, the problem is not that the families do not know about their duties to continue in the Program, expressed in the form of conditionalities. As regards the health services, their main complaints are the absence of health clinics in the neighborhood; lack of vaccines; broken scales; absence of professionals at the clinic; lack of financial resources for the family to get around; delay in providing care. In education the problem is not access to the school, but it is certainly the low quality of education. In other words, the municipalities are not sufficiently structured to allow complying with the conditionalities required by the “Bolsa Família” (Siqueira, 2008).

### **3.2 An incursion into the empirical realities of the “Bolsa Família” conditionalities**

The implementation and follow up process of the “Bolsa Família” conditionalities expresses a contradictory movement: collective efforts to improve management, on the one hand, and structural difficulties, on the other. Outstanding are the persistence of assistentialist practices towards the families, political disputes, local bosses. In most municipalities it was found that the structure is deficient, the work team is insufficient, unstable, with problems due to lack of training, improvisation and disarticulation of the action structure. Based on this reality, the field study performed in thirteen municipalities in the State of Maranhão made it possible to indicate some important aspects highlighted below.

#### **a) Follow up of the Health Conditionalities**

Health is the least structured area among those that follow up the “Bolsa Família” beneficiaries in the municipalities that made up the sample. Outstanding are the precarious infrastructural conditions to control the counterpart required from the families (precarious physical space and lack or insufficient equipment, material, human and financial resources). Furthermore, it was indicated that this activity is not recognized nor incorporated as part of the dynamics of routine provision of health services. Regarding this aspect, the most critical situations are those of municipalities in which there is not even someone responsible for the field of health to coordinate the process, or when they exist, they know little or nothing about the dynamics of following conditionalities, or they have a view of this follow up focused only on the management of their specific area, or only on handling the information system. This has helped lead

to improvisation of follow up actions of families in all municipalities covered by the study.

The beneficiaries revealed that often they do not manage to access the services due to lack of physicians and other professionals, scarcity of material and equipment at the health units: “One goes to the hospital but there is no doctor, or there is a very long queue.” From this standpoint, as a strategy to not lose the benefit, some beneficiaries appeal to the services in other neighborhoods, which, however, also have problems. For the families this means that there are mechanisms that “oblige” them to do their part in the “agreement” between them and the public power, without having ways of ensuring that the public power will have a commitment to this same “agreement”, i.e. one requires that the beneficiaries comply with the conditionalities, without the municipality itself managing to implement the right to health.

In the Maranhão municipalities that were covered by the study, including São Luis, which is the State capital, the follow up of the health agenda is done without any integration with the other areas. The municipalities act with a limited amount of staff, in improvised, inadequate rooms, often without sufficient materials and equipment to develop the work. Furthermore, the follow up of compliance with the conditionalities by the families has not proved an instrument that can (re) orient the Public Policies, since the data collected are not used as subsidies for other initiatives, such as those related to Primary Health Care or in the work developed by health agents. In this respect, the conditionalities appear to be followed up rather as a strategy to control the beneficiaries (who are subjected to several punishments) than to ensure social rights through access to basic services. In addition, it is difficult to locate the beneficiaries, since the families are constantly changing to other addresses without the due communication to the Office of Social Welfare or to the Coordinators of the “Bolsa Família” and due to errors in the Follow up Map sent by the MDS and due to difficulties involve database problems.

As regards the impacts of the health conditionality, the interviewees emphasized the lack of contribution to their own well-being. Significant modifications that could be considered effective and permanent in their lives are not recorded. They are at most a compliance forced by the agencies involved in follow up, motivated by the families’ fear of losing the benefit. However, it was recorded and reported in the study “that mothers are already seeking out the health agents, sometimes, to write down the children’s weight or vaccination.” Changes can also be seen in the way the families deal with their health. Outstandingly, they are more aware of breastfeeding and

vaccination. This awareness is also seen in the more frequent antenatal visits, which is credited to the educational work performed with the communities at the centers of Family Health Strategy.

#### **b) Follow up of the Education Conditionality**

In the municipalities visited, the area of education appeared more structured than health to perform the follow up process regarding compliance with the conditionalities of the “Bolsa Família”. The physical space and material conditions appeared more favorable, since there were no complaints about them from the coordinators of that field. Thus, controlling school attendance presents good follow up indicators. This situation is favored because checking on school attendance is done by printing forms that are sent and received after completion by the schools, and the problems of lack of attendance are mainly the responsibility of the school principals. However, some municipal managers of the “Bolsa Família” in education appear to have a broader concept of following up, not limiting themselves to checking on school attendance, nor simply feeding the system, nor even only supplying quality information, since “it is not enough to generate data, we must do something for these children who are not attending, who are dropping out, who generally have problems, such as their parents’ alcoholism, which are situations that lead children to miss school.” There is also the attribution of responsibility for complying with the conditionality only to the beneficiaries, insofar as some managers believe that not attaining the minimum percentage of school attendance is due to the lack of a clear understanding by the families as to the benefits of keeping their children in school and that, consequently, it is enough to explain to them the importance of keeping them in school for the Program to achieve the expected success.

According to the interviewees, the main impacts generated by the requirement of conditionality in the area of education are: increased attendance and diminished dropping out. The diminished dropping out and increased school attendance among the students who are program beneficiaries are seen as the result of the concern of some families regarding the future of their children, but at the same time they consider that the encouragement given by parents to the students to attend school regularly and take their studies seriously would be based on the wish to obtain or not lose the stipend: “It is the fear of losing the benefit which, ultimately, has kept the students in school.” Thus,

the issue of quality of education and the conditions under which the school system operates also do not appear in the debate as a component of the right to education. Reflection is restricted to the idea that it is enough to include the student in the system and that if the child or youth does not attend school, it is their or their parents' responsibility.

**c) Follow up of the Social Welfare conditionality**

The conditionality of social welfare is restricted to creating a cadaster and to validating and updating the family cadasters. The participation of families in the educational actions performed at the so-called Social Welfare Referral Centers [Centros de Referência da Assistência Social – CRAS], an institutional space to provide attention to families served by the “Bolsa Família”, is not considered a conditionality, nor is attendance at activities of the Program to Eradicate Child Labor, which, according to the interviewees, “devalues the educational work performed by CRAS.” This aspect greatly emphasized the almost non-conditionality character ascribed to the follow up developed by social welfare, because it does not have any penalties and the management of the social welfare itself is presented as depending on the performance of the other conditionalities.

The technical staff of the CRAS are tasked with carrying out family follow ups within the sphere of the so-called Unified System of Social Welfare [Sistema Único de Assistência Social – SUAS], which must be articulated with other sectorial policies aiming at contributing to overcome the social vulnerabilities that prevent or make it difficult for the families to comply with the commitments included in the Program. Meetings and informative talks are the follow up strategies most used by the municipalities.

It is important to highlight the fact that, independent of the municipality presenting or not good conditions to operate, the technical people, in general, point to difficulties in performing the follow up of families satisfactorily, above all because of the limited number of professionals available to perform this work.

As far as the possible impact of family follow up is concerned, it was mentioned that a significant number of participants entered other social programs and the labor market, as well as a significant reduction in the number of children and adolescents on the streets or in child labor.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

It should be considered that moving from a targeted program to a universal one is a complex process, since it involves different interests and ways of reasoning of the various subjects involved. In this sense, often in the media, in the legislatures and among segments of society, two unfavorable arguments are presented: a) the amount of resources needed is very high, which is an economic argument; b) a universal income transfer program has a strong potential to discourage working, which is an ideological argument. On the other hand, the advocates of the Citizenship Basic Income highlight a number of favorable arguments, such as: elimination of the excessive bureaucracy required by targeted programs; it does away with the stigma and shame that mark the beneficiaries of targeted programs; it eliminates the possibility of dependence; it raises the level of freedom and dignity; it is easy to understand; it is transparent and helps reduce inequality and eliminate poverty.

In Brazil the debate on Basic Income has been sustained in various forums, and its main advocate is Senator Suplicy. As to practice, there are two local experiences. First a pioneering experience in Vila Quantinga Velha, in Mogi das Cruzes, São Paulo. This experience began in 2009, run by the ReCivitas NGO, transferring a benefit of R\$ 30.00 monthly to 61 persons. At the same time, an experience is being developed in Santo Antonio do Pinhal, São Paulo, also instituted in 2009. This was the first Brazilian municipality to create an experience of Universal Basic Income, and it was to be implemented in stages, according to the criteria of the Municipal Council of Citizenship Basic Income, giving priority to the more needy segments of the population (Suplicy, 2010), i.e. the proposal already sanctioned at a federal level, but not yet implemented, has been implemented just on a local level.

Making a general evaluation of the implementation of a Citizenship Basic Income - on the basis of my empirical experience with the reality of the income transfer programs in Brazil, the development of several studies on these programs since 1995, when the first municipal experiments were implemented in Campinas, State of São Paulo, and in Brasília, the Federal District, and also my empirical experience and scholarly approach as a researcher of social policies in Brazil, besides the insertion and follow up of different moments in the situation of Brazilian reality - I think that the implementation of a Citizenship Basic Income in Brazil is still a process to be

constructed and accomplished. I perceive the persistence of a wide space for the circulation of conservative arguments against a proposal of this nature, having as their main protagonists the media, segments of the legislature and segments of Brazilian society itself. Furthermore, the very nature of the “Bolsa Família” as a targeted program - although a significant capacity of the “Bolsa Família” has been noted in terms of reaching the target public: poor and extremely poor families - and the adoption of conditionalities mean serious limits to the adoption of a Citizenship Basic Income, with an unconditional character, along the lines of the analysis developed in this paper. This is so because targeting, as well as the establishment of inclusion criteria and conditionalities as obligations to be complied with by the families, under pain of being eliminated from the program, in themselves represent structuring elements that are in conflict with a Basic Income, which is, by its very nature, unconditional. In this sense I consider it inappropriate to indicate that the “Bolsa Família” may represent a first step to implement Citizenship Basic Income in Brazil. One might discuss the possibility of extinguishing the program or of transforming it in such a way as to implement an unconditional Basic Income in Brazil. This is if we want to get out of a rhetoric that rather appears to express a political strategy to delay the implementation of the Citizenship Basic Income created by Law Bill n. 266/2001, drafted by Senator Eduardo Suplicy and sanctioned by the President of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on January 8, 2004, which was to begin implementation in 2005, initially serving the poorest. This is a national program of unconditional transfer of income, aimed at all Brazilians and foreigners who have lived in Brazil for over five years, regardless of work or any other requirement.

This does not mean pessimism, nor giving up a struggle to diminish inequality and eradicate poverty in our country, but one must be aware of the challenges to be faced.

One cannot deny the ascension of a significant number of Brazilian families that are now above the poverty line and are included in the lower middle class (the so-called C middle class)<sup>7</sup>. This ascension is shown, for example, by the fact that these families are consuming more, have more job opportunities and an increased income from work.

---

<sup>7</sup> A communiqué by the Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV) [Getúlio Vargas Foundation], a Brazilian research institution, of September 10, 2010 informed that 29 million Brazilians entered the middle class in the last few years; a communiqué issued by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA) [Institute of Applied Economic Research] on July 13, 2010 indicated that 12.8 million Brazilians had left the level of absolute poverty between 1995 and 2008.

But pillars of a structural nature such as the concentration of income from work and the concentration of property, as well as the increased income from capital, remain practically unaltered.

However, it is important to highlight that other factors besides the “Bolsa Família” have contributed to the socio-economic changes that have been experienced in recent years and very widely disseminated at the national and international level. Some of these factors that should be highlighted are the annual increase of the minimum wage above the inflation rate, the economic growth with the subsequent decrease of unemployment and the increase of regular jobs; the income transfer programs that pay one minimum wage, such as the Benefício de Prestação Continuada [Continuous Benefit] and the Aposentadoria Social Rural [Rural Social Security], as well as the establishment of the minimum wage as the lowest benefit paid by the Social Security in Brazil since the Federal Constitution of 1988. In addition to these factors there has also been a rise of public expenditures in social programs, particularly from 2003 onwards.

#### REFERENCES

BARROS, R. P. de et al. **A Queda Recente da Desigualdade no Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro: IPEA, 2007-a (Texto para Discussão, n. 1.258). Disponível em [www.ipea.gov.br](http://www.ipea.gov.br)

BARROS, R. P. de et al. **A Importância da Queda Recente da Desigualdade na Redução da Pobreza**. Rio de Janeiro: IPEA, 2007-b (Texto para Discussão, n. 1.256). Disponível em [www.ipea.gov.br](http://www.ipea.gov.br)

IBGE. **Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD 2009)** de Janeiro: IBGE, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_. Dados preliminares do Censo 2010. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2010.

INEP. Censo Escolar 2010. Brasília: INEP, 2010.

CACCIAMALI, Maria Cristina; TATEI, Fábio; BATISTA, Natália Ferreira. Impactos do Programa Bolsa Família Federal sobre o Trabalho Infantil e a Frequência Escolar. **Revista de Economia Contemporânea**, v. 14, n. 2, Rio de Janeiro, maio/ago, 2010.

FONSECA, Ana Maria. M. da. **Los Sistemas de Protección Social en América latina: um análisis de las transferências monetárias condicionadas**. Trabalho apresentado no Seminário Internacional da FAO, dezembro de 2006.

IPEA. **Pobreza e Riqueza no Brasil Metropolitano**. Brasília: Comunicação da

Presidência, n. 7, agosto de 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Desigualdade e Pobreza no Brasil Metropolitano Durante a Crise Internacional:** primeiros resultados. Brasília: Comunicação da Presidência, n. 25, agosto de 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Pobreza, Desigualdade e Políticas Públicas.** Brasília: Comunicação da Presidência, n 38, janeiro de 2010-a.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Dimensão, Evolução e Projeção da Pobreza por Região e por Estado do Brasil.** Brasília: Comunicação da Presidência, n 58, julho de 2010-b.

KERSTENETZKY, Célia Lessa. **Redistribuição e Desenvolvimento?** A economia política do Programa Bolsa Família. DADOS- Revista de Ciências Sociais, vol. 52, n. 1. Rio de Janeiro, 2009, p. 53-83.

LAVINAS, Lena. Combinando compensatório e redistributiva: o desafio das políticas sociais no Brasil. In HENEIQUE, Ricardo (org.). **Desigualdade e Pobreza no Brasil.** Rio de Janeiro: IPEA, 2000.

LAVINAS, Lena. **Transferências Monetárias Diretas ou Provisão de Serviços Públicos:** trade-offs em questão. Anais do 11º Congresso Mundial da Saúde Pública – 8º Congresso Brasileiro de Saúde Coletiva. Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

MONNRAT, Gisele Lavinias; MAIA, Mônica de Castro; SCHOTTZ, Vanessa Rodrigues. **As Condicionalidades do Programa Bolsa Família:** questões para o debate. Trabalho apresentado no X Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Serviço Social, Recife, 2006.

MOURA, Alessandra Ballinhas de. **Avaliação da Eficácia do Programa de Transferência de Renda – Bolsa Família na Cidade de Pelotas – RS.** Dissertação de Mestrado em Política Social, na Universidade Católica de Pelotas, 2009.

SILVA, Daniela Cecília da Silva. **Condicionalidades e Enfrentamento à Pobreza:** intersectorialidade na gestão da Política de Assistência Social. Trabalho apresentado no XII Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Serviço Social. Rio de Janeiro, 2010-a.

SILVA, Maria Ozanira da Silva; LIMA, Valéria Ferreira Santos de Almada. **Avaliando o Bolsa Família:** unificação, focalização e impactos. São Paulo: Cortez, 2010-b.

SILVA, Sonia Margarida Anselmo Figueiredo da. **O Programa Bolsa Família:** um olhar sobre o cenário do município de Itaguaí/RJ. Trabalho apresentado no XII Congresso Brasileiro de Assistentes Sociais. Brasília, 2010-d.

SILVA, Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva (coord.). **O Bolsa Família no Enfrentamento à Pobreza no Maranhão e Piauí**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2008.

SIQUEIRA, Alaísa de Oliveira. **Programa Bolsa Família: autonomia ou legitimação da pobreza?** Dissertação apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Serviço Social da Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, 2008.

SOARES, Sergei. A desigualdade de Renda de 1995 a 2009e Tendências Recentes. Texto para Discussão n. 51, CEDE, 2011. Disponível em [www.proac.uff.cede](http://www.proac.uff.cede).

Suplicy, Eduardo Matarazzo. **Transição do Bolsa Família para a Renda Básica de Cidadania.**, Brasília, 2010 (mimeo.).

VALE, Ana Maria Borges do. **Programa Bolsa Família e Saúde**. Estudo qualitativo sobre a experiência das famílias beneficiárias. Dissertação de Mestrado Acadêmico em Saúde Pública da Universidade Estadual do Ceará, 2009.

ZIMMERMANN, Clóvis Roberto. **Os Programas de Transferência de Renda sob a Ótica dos Direitos Humanos: o caso do Bolsa Família do governo Lula no Brasil**. Revista Internacional de Direitos Humanos, n. 4, ano 3, 2006, p. 145-159.