



**GLOBAL COOPERATION NEWSLETTER**  
**May 2013**

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➤ **Featured article: Social Protection in Brazil**

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In Brazil, poverty reduction activities form part of the *Brazil Without Poverty* program, which involves actions carried out by various ministries and other actors. Poverty is viewed as a major social issue that goes beyond simply a lack of income and involves deprivation of basic capabilities; in this context a multidimensional approach is called for that considers factors beyond income, including some specific factors. Thus, the policy measures should take into consideration not only the transfer of income, but also the profile of the family, the district in which the family lives, as well as health, education, professional training and the generation of opportunities, among others. Based on that understanding, the state of Rio de Janeiro has been implementing the *Rio Without Poverty* plan, which includes the actions taken by the *Better Incomes* program. The plan envisions a range of benefits for families with children. By 2012, 251,000 families were assisted in 51 municipalities, and in 2013 the figure will be 270,000 families in 91 municipalities.

The *Rio Without Poverty* plan has three layers embracing short-, medium- and long-term goals, and involves all three levels of government (federal, state and municipal). The plan seeks, through intersectoral actions covering health, education and social assistance, to provide benefits to families with children, ensuring that such families have access to the above mentioned services and are able to meet the requirements defined in the program with regard to clinical follow-up, immunization and school attendance. The plan at the same time avoids putting blame on the families regarding the compliance procedures.

Apart from the income transfer envisioned by the above described social protection program, social assistance assumes the form of family support. This work is designed and implemented throughout Brazil by the *Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS)*. Social protection under the SUAS umbrella consists of, on the one hand, the basic social protection program, which aims at the prevention of risk situations, including the development of capacities and the strengthening of ties between individuals, their families and their communities, and, on the other hand, the special social protection program, which focuses on providing social assistance to individuals and families at risk due to some temporary or permanent threats to their health or livelihood.

SUAS works within the framework of the family and the community through activities provided by service units set up in the districts where the beneficiaries live. Those units include social workers and psychologists, who meet regularly with families and coordinate their services with other services provided to the population as entitlements under the existing public policy provisions. This work is carried out by the municipalities. The federal government and the state authorities help with the training of the service teams, provide part of the financing and monitor the actions taken. The municipalities are responsible for the actual implementation of services provided to families.

At the federal government level, the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Reduction (MDS) includes the National Secretariat for Social Assistance (SNAS), with responsibilities for a range of social protection services and for the deployment and implementation of the SUAS provisions. That part of the government is responsible for a range of policy measures, such as services, programs, projects, benefits and income transfers, which give specific form to the social security goals established in the National Social Assistance Policy of 2004, revised in the Basic Operational Norm of 2012. They include: child care, income, family and community life, promotion of independent living, and support and assistance in the event of temporary or permanent threats to one's health or livelihood.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro these actions are carried out by the Department of Social Welfare and Human Rights (SEASDH), responsible for implementing SUAS as well as programs aimed at the promotion, protection and advocacy of rights and the program for income transfers. The work is done through the sub-secretariats of the Department, which cover the entire scope of its activities and provide social protection in the state of Rio de Janeiro on two fronts: first, the direct transfer of resources to families, and second, the transfer of funds to municipal governments so that they can provide guidance to families with regard to the various dimensions in which people can strengthen the quality of their lives and their access to their entitlements.

The conditional cash transfer scheme in Brazil is part of the *Bolsa Família* program. In the state of Rio de Janeiro that program is reinforced and further complemented by the *Better Incomes* program. To overcome extreme poverty in the state of Rio de Janeiro the program includes among its objectives: bringing the income of extremely poor families over the extreme poverty threshold, helping to provide the conditions needed for such families during their life-course with greater autonomy and dignity, encouraging school attendance and successful secondary education completion by children of young families in extreme poverty, helping to increase their opportunities in terms of social and economic inclusion and expanding the social inclusion of low-income people, and strengthening their capabilities and enabling them to take advantage of economic and social opportunities. The basic premise of the plan is that each family has some potential that could be enhanced, and that the network supported by government and civil society should be designed to promote joint efforts aimed at reaching the vulnerable population groups, helping them to overcome multiple deprivations.

Given the multidimensional nature of poverty, the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro has also chosen to address one of the key structural problems affecting efforts to overcome extreme poverty, namely, education. In establishing a program called *Better Incomes for Young People*, it has sought to encourage young people under 18 years of age who live with their families in extreme poverty to remain in the educational system and complete high school successfully. The financial incentive that is provided assumes the form of a payment deposited in a savings account, which can be withdrawn directly by the young person using a special bank card. Besides schooling, young people can get access to financial education and vocational training courses that can expand their opportunities for social and economic inclusion along their life-course. Such measures certainly help to strengthen the self-esteem of young people and expand their ability to plan and enjoy a future with decent opportunities in the labour market.

Another aspect of the plan covers strategies for the management of social and economic opportunities, whose goal is to bridge the existing gaps, reduce disparities and improve access to such opportunities. For older persons in Brazil, income transfer is handled through the Continuous Cash Benefit program (BPC). In the state of Rio de Janeiro, 160,866 older people currently receive a minimum monthly allowance. They also benefit from extensive family support and community life improvement activities.

On the administrative side, this whole process of social protection design and implementation is supported by the Information Management System, which relies on questionnaires that must be answered systematically by municipal governments and are subsequently analyzed by both the state government of Rio de Janeiro and the federal government. The state authorities are deeply committed to poverty reduction efforts, seeing them as an essential element in achieve the reduction of many existing inequalities.

## **Some results**

There is no doubt that income transfer programs might be viewed with some suspicion; the opponents of such schemes believe, for example, that such schemes breed dependency and even provide disincentives for job seeking. I think we should look at the broader picture; what the families receive under such program is a relatively small supplementary income, given the scale of deprivations that they need to overcome in their lives. But this ongoing conditional cash transfer scheme has already proved its value and positive impact. The results of these programs speak for themselves: a new study, published in the May issue of the British journal *The Lancet*, reveals that the *Bolsa Família* program made a decisive contribution to the decline in the mortality of children under 5 years from 2004 to 2009, while child mortality in the sampled cities was reduced by as much as 17%.

Over the past eight years, 28 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty and 40 million people joined the middle class, which is a very significant outcome. Currently, there are more than 13 million households benefiting from the program, but the challenge remains, as there are still 16.2 million Brazilians living in extreme poverty. They will not move out of that group without intervention and active support. Public policies should be used synergistically to address that situation, and the federal government must improve its efforts in locating and registering those people who are eligible, providing required family support.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro 1.5 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty in the first half of 2012 thanks to support provided to families. Therefore, we can conclude that there have been good results, but they certainly could be better. Further efforts are required to lift people out of poverty and all stakeholders must join forces striving to overcome existing barriers and reduce poverty and inequality. This is an agenda for Brazil, but it is also a global agenda.

***Opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect views of the ICSW Management Committee***

➤ **OECD: Growing risk of inequality and poverty as the crisis hits the poor hardest**

Income inequality increased by more in the first three years of the crisis to the end of 2010 than it had in the previous twelve years, before factoring in the effect of taxes and transfers on income, according to a [new OECD report and data](#).

The analysis says that the welfare state has cushioned the blow for many but warns that further social spending cuts in OECD countries risk causing greater inequality and poverty in the years ahead.

After taxes and transfers, the richest 10 per cent of the population in OECD countries earned 9.5 times the income of the poorest 10 per cent in 2010, up from 9 times in 2007. The gap is largest in Chile, Mexico, Turkey, the United States and Israel, and lowest in Iceland, Slovenia, Norway and Denmark.

"These worrying findings underline the need to protect the most vulnerable in society, especially as governments pursue the necessary task of bringing public spending under control," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría.

"Policies to boost jobs and growth must be designed to ensure fairness, efficiency and inclusiveness. Among these policies, reforming tax systems is essential to ensure that everyone pays their fair share and also benefits and receives the support they need."

Poorer households tended to lose more or gain less than richer households between 2007 and 2010. The top 10 per cent of the population did better than the poorest 10 per cent in 21 of the 33 countries where data are available.

Using pre-crisis income levels as a benchmark, the number of people living in poverty rose during the crisis in most countries. Taxes and benefits helped mitigate the overall increases, but the impact varied. Between 2007 and 2010, average relative income poverty in OECD countries rose from 13 to 14% among children and from 12 to 14% among youth, but fell from 15 to 12% among the elderly. Until 2010, in many countries, pensioners were largely protected, while working households took the hit.

Child poverty has risen in 16 OECD countries since 2007, with increases exceeding 2 points in Turkey, Spain, Belgium, Slovenia and Hungary. This confirms a previously identified trend of young people and children replacing the elderly as the group most at risk of income poverty across the OECD.

Inequality was one of the key issues discussed at this year's OECD Forum, "Jobs, equality and trust", convened from 28-29 May in Paris. More details are available at <http://www.oecd.org/forum/>

[www.oecd.org/newsroom/growing-risk-of-inequality-and-poverty-as-crisis-hits-the-poor-hardest-says-oecd.htm](http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/growing-risk-of-inequality-and-poverty-as-crisis-hits-the-poor-hardest-says-oecd.htm)

➤ **Parliamentarians back democratic governance as a post-2015 development goal**

The results from a survey carried out during the 128th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in Quito, Equator have revealed that 80 per cent of MPs back democratic governance as a stand-alone objective for the United Nations Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nearly all (96 per cent) of the 240 MPs surveyed out of 619 MPs present in Quito, believed that the key elements of democratic governance – participation, transparency and accountability – should be embedded into the other SDGs to ensure their success. Men and women MPs from all regions and both developing and developed countries participated in the survey. They were also virtually unanimous (99 per cent) in their belief that democratic governance was necessary for sustainable development. This is an issue that resonates outside the political sphere. Respondents to the UN's MY World survey, which allows all citizens of the world to have their say on what the next set of development goals should be, have so far ranked the need for honest and responsive governments as the third most important goal, just behind education and health.

The IPU is advocating for democratic governance to be included as a stand-alone goal in the new SDGs, which will replace the current Millennium Development Goals when they expire in 2015. Its members adopted the Quito Communique on sustainable development at the 128th Assembly, which not only argues for development aimed at ensuring global well-being but also for strengthening the key institutions that can bring this about.

For more details please go to:

<http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/128agnd.htm#doc-quest>

➤ **Useful resources and links**

**The Global Enteric Multicenter Study (GEMS)**, published in The Lancet last week, provides health and policy experts with evidence to pinpoint areas where research for new vaccine candidates is urgently needed to combat diarrheal diseases — the second leading cause of death among children globally. It also reveals other important opportunities for intervention. GEMS, coordinated by the University of Maryland School of Medicine's Center for Vaccine Development, filled critical gaps in knowledge that had not been captured in previous studies by using consistent methodologies across seven of the highest-burden countries and enrolling more than 20,000 children over the course of three years. The study tested for almost 40 pathogens and confirmed that just four are responsible for the majority of moderate-to-severe diarrhea cases: *rotavirus*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Shigella* and ST-EPEC, a type of E.coli. Reducing the transmission of these pathogens by expanding access to treated water supplies and improving sanitation is feasible and within reach.

For more details go to :

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2013/5/prweb10726814.htm>

The "*Perspectives on Global Development 2013- Industrial Policies in a Changing World*" published by **OECD** discusses the renewed interest in industrial policies by developing economies as part of their development strategies to face the changing global economic landscape. Since the mid-1990s, economic growth rates in large and populous middle-income countries have substantially outpaced those in OECD countries. This has reshaped the global economy and favoured convergence in global income per capita.

For more details please go to: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/pgd/pgd2013.htm>

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