



## **BRAZIL:**

### **BOLSA ESCOLA HELPS MOTHERS SEND CHILDREN TO SCHOOL**

#### **In a Nutshell**

Brazil has taken a new route to modifying a subsidy regime in education, with dramatic impacts in terms of school enrolment, attendance and community participation. The government, through its municipalities, offers mothers a stipend for enrolling and keeping their children in school – a modest sum of about \$6 per child that is met through a federal tax.

This incentive has inspired strong commitment among parents, and also helps to keep the subsidy from going to the potentially leaky state educational machinery. Crucial to the programme's success has been the broad-based partnership forged between state, municipal and private sector organizations, as well as considerable support across the political spectrum.

#### **The Story**

About 11 million Brazilian children aged 6 to 15 live in poverty and achieve little in school. In 2001, to reduce poverty and at the same time boost school enrolments, the Brazilian federal government launched a national initiative guaranteeing an income transfer for disadvantaged families, known as the Bolsa Escola (School Stipend) National Programme. It entails a monthly sum for families with an income that is lower than roughly \$30 per person, and whose children in the 6-15 age group are attending primary school.

Bolsa Escola came about as a result of the lessons learned from the pilot Programa de Geração de Renda Mínima (Minimum Income Programme), which began in 1997. It also drew upon similar programmes, such as the pioneering Federal District Bolsa Escola implemented in 1994 by Minister Cristovam Buarque, and the experiences of other Brazilian municipalities. With increased budget availability in 2001, Bolsa Escola was able to start offering a continuous source of funds, averaging approximately \$505 million per year. The benefits of the programme have been readily apparent, as indicated by the promptness with which the Brazilian Congress has enacted legislation in support of it. For financial year 2002, \$600 million was reserved in the federal budget.

Currently, Bolsa Escola is running across nearly all 5,561 Brazilian municipalities. An allowance of \$6 is made for each child, with a maximum of \$18 per family, and on the condition that children attend a minimum of 85 per cent of classes. Attendance rates are checked every three months by the federal government before the money is released. The children's mothers then take a magnetic card to withdraw the allowance at ATM machines or at bank branches. The decision to entrust the mothers with the administration of these resources came about after a study of social and economic patterns revealed that they are more efficient than

fathers in making the best use of the allowance. Despite the small amount, it is nonetheless an extremely important addition to the family income in many economically deprived regions.

Bolsa Escola's success can be attributed to the following:

**Financial sustainability:** Programme funds are met by a federal tax collected by the banking system. Known as the Fundo de Redução da Pobreza (Poverty Reduction Fund), the tax is guaranteed by federal legislation for the next ten years.

**Targeting the poorest:** The programme attempts to reach the poorest people by according priority to municipalities presenting the lowest human development indicators, as well as those affected by natural calamities like drought and reporting high rates of violence. It also mobilizes municipalities participating in the Comunidade Solidária – a federal programme that involves the distribution of basic food baskets.

**Partnerships and networks:** A network of partners supports the initiative, from the federal to municipal levels. They include:

- Ministério da Educação (Ministry of Education): coordinates Bolsa Escola and provides cash income to the beneficiaries or caregivers
- UNDP: contributes to analysis of programme impact on families, communities, schools and students' performance; the development of managerial and monitoring systems; and the establishment of technical cooperation with similar programmes
- Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Institute of Applied Economic Research): designs and tests programme evaluation
- União Nacional dos Dirigentes Municipais de Educação (National Association of Municipal Educational Managers): a key partner in programme implementation and monitoring at municipal level, it provides input to the design of evaluation methodologies as well as strategies and performance indicators
- Municipal authorities: responsible overall for beneficiary selection and programme management at the local level, and contribute to the evaluation process
- Conselhos Municipais de Controle Social (Municipal Social Control Councils): register and select recipients of Bolsa Escola, monitor school attendance and assess local performance.
- Caixa Econômica Federal (Brazilian Savings Bank): makes monthly payments to recipients through its nationwide network of agencies and ATMs

**Community participation, social control and after-school activities:** To be included in the programme, municipalities are required to select eligible families and supervise the allocation of grants. They are also responsible for running

social and educational programmes after school hours and for setting up a Municipal Social Control Council comprised of members of the local community. The involvement of the community in supervision greatly reduces patronage and misuse of funds; to ensure diverse participation, legislation has restricted municipal staff from taking more than half the council seats.

### **Results and Critical Factors**

Bolsa Escola is now recognized, including in a number of manifestos among Brazil's political parties, as playing a fundamental role in retaining children at school and thus democratizing education in Brazil. The programme currently benefits over 5.1 million families and more than 8.42 million children, and has brought over a million children back to school.

Although an extensive evaluation has yet to be completed, some conclusions can be drawn based on preliminary studies conducted by the Secretaria Nacional da Bolsa Escola (National Secretary of Bolsa Escola) in 2002. These suggest that Bolsa Escola is:

- Raising awareness among families of the importance of placing their children in school – leading to extended enrolment
- Improving access to schooling and attendance for those segments of society most affected by lack of formal schooling
- Involving families in the process of educating their children, which fosters positive attitudes towards education among segments of society traditionally excluded from schooling
- Assisting in combating child labour and discouraging the option of living on the streets as a way of life for poor families, thereby reducing exposure of children and adolescents to situations of personal and social risk, particularly those associated with drugs, sex work, violence and crime
- Improving the quality of life and financial status of families with very low per capita incomes, restoring the dignity of excluded segments of the population, and stimulating self-esteem and the hope of a better future for their children

Almost all successful programmes in education draw from some common principles. Bolsa Escola proves what is needed: a high level of political commitment; involvement of the community (and especially parents) in management; assured and sustained funding; the participation of local government; and a high degree of coordination among multiple agencies. In this case, an innovation – turning the subsidy regime around to bypass school machinery and directly reach the beneficiaries – has also proven to be a pillar of Bolsa Escola's accomplishments.

### **Further information**

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*Education to Confront Poverty*

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