

BOLSA FAMÍLIA PROGRAM
FUNDING FAMILIES FOR DEVELOPMENT
A CASE STUDY

Key Topics Discussed:

SOCIETAL RESULTS, CO-PRODUCTION AND CIVIC RESULTS

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil faces enormous challenges: it is the fifth largest country in the world and home to deep income inequality.² It is also extraordinarily complex to govern: coordination is needed among 26 states, 5,564 municipal governments and one federal district—each of vastly differing capacity but subject to the same rules governing the implementation of public policy. Municipalities, for instance, have populations that range from 800 people to 11 million people and a total yearly GDP that ranges from US\$1,000 to US\$77 million.³

Yet despite these challenges of size, poverty, and complexity, recent Brazilian governments have pursued simultaneous agendas of social inclusion, reduction of inequality, strengthening of democracy, macroeconomic stability and acceleration of sustainable growth.

This case study presents one of these initiatives: *Bolsa Família*, a program of conditional cash transfer to poor families. It is an enormous undertaking that has made important strides in addressing poverty and complexity in Brazil's reality.

SOCIAL POLICY IN BRAZIL: A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The colonial past left an immense social debt in Brazil. During the formative years of the nation, millions of people were forced from their homelands in Africa to work as slaves in Brazil. Indigenous populations were decimated to a mere fraction of their original numbers. Furthermore, as the country declared independence in 1822, abolished slavery in 1888 and became a republic in 1889, no inclusion mechanisms were put in place for either indigenous peoples or descendants of slaves, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that still has lasting negative effects.

As a republic, Brazil has a history of political patronage and clientelism that characterized its social policies during the majority of the 20th century. In the 1930s and 1940s, the first social rights were introduced in the form of pensions, maximum daily work hours and paid vacation time. However, these rights were restricted to the few urban labour groups, such as the railroad, port

and telegraph workers, that could mobilize and affect economic activities in a decisive manner. It was not until the 1970s that pension rights were extended to workers in the rural sector, partly to alleviate potential social unrest in the countryside.

From the 1960s until the turn of the millennium, the main approach to poverty alleviation was based on a belief that growth is good for the poor. A *coup d'état* gave rise to a military dictatorship in 1964 and, for the following ten years, the economy expanded rapidly, with annual growth rates reaching peaks of 14 percent. But as the country grew, income concentration worsened. Supposedly an “economic miracle,” very few actually benefited from the changes. Government officials insisted that a cake must rise before it can be shared.

The second half of the 1980s was marked by the end of the authoritarian period. Drafting a new Constitution was an important cornerstone of the process of democratization. The 1988 Constitution at last introduced legal guarantees to a broad set of social rights, including rights to healthcare, education, social protection, pensions and housing, among others. However, despite the legal mandate, policy implementation has shown mixed progress.

In the 1990s—the first decade under the new constitution—public policy emphasized structural adjustment reforms focused on macro-economic stabilization, fiscal austerity measures and privatization of services. From 1993 to 1995, previously rampant inflation finally came under control, which made a significant dent in poverty rates.⁴ However, for the eight years that followed, average real incomes stagnated and poverty and inequality rates remained high. While important social programs were introduced during this period, they still had limited reach.

By 2001, over 58 million Brazilians lived in poverty, earning approximately less than US\$2 a day per capita.⁵ Of those, 25 million lived in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than US\$1 a day per capita.⁶ These figures provide the overall initial scenario in which the *Bolsa Família* program was designed and implemented.

FORMATIVE YEARS: FROM LOCAL LEVEL INITIATIVES TO A NATIONAL POLICY

The success stories associated with Bolsa Família in the national and international public policy communities frequently overlook the importance of the learning and experimenting process that took place with earlier basic income policies in Brazil.

The first Brazilian initiatives of conditional direct cash transfers to poor families took place at the local level. In 1995, the local governments of the cities of Campinas and Brasília pioneered initiatives that made cash payments directly to the families as an incentive to make sure that their children attended school regularly. In both cities, the programs were called *Bolsa Escola* (School Fund). From these early experiences, variations started to appear in various city, state and federal administrations. By 1998, at least 24 sub-national income transfer initiatives were in progress with varying scopes and ranges.

At the federal level, conditional cash transfer programs took place in a highly fragmented fashion during the Cardoso administration (1995-2002) and in the first year of the Lula administration (2003). In 1996, the federal government started the *Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil* (Child Labour Erradication Program), which made payments to poor families whose children were at risk of engaging in labour activities, with the purpose of keeping them in school instead of at work. In 2001, the federal Ministry of Education launched a program called also *Bolsa Escola*, giving cash to poor families whose children attended school regularly. Also in 2001, the Federal Ministry of Health launched a program named *Bolsa Alimentação* (Food Fund), which provided cash to poor families who were at risk of undernourishment. In 2002, the federal government launched yet one more cash transfer program for poor families under the name *Auxílio Gás* (Cooking Gas Aid) that supplemented the incomes of those registered for other social programs with a small stipend to compensate for rising prices in cooking gas.

At the end of the Cardoso administration (December 2002), at least four different government agencies were transferring cash to poor families to alleviate poverty.

Each agency was using its own registry, payment mechanism, administrative procedure and, perhaps more interestingly, the same policy to justify the pursuit of different organizational missions—education, health, child labour and energy.

Around this time, President Lula was elected on a platform that focused heavily on the reduction of poverty and inequality: it was the first time that the Workers' Party had managed to win presidential elections. In his inaugural speech, Lula announced the *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) policy, stating that the human right to adequate food and the fight against poverty were the key priorities of his presidency.

To implement the Zero Hunger policy, President Lula created a government agency that was named the Extraordinary Ministry for Food Security and Fight against Hunger, known in Portuguese by the suggestive acronym MESA, which means “table.” José Graziano, a long-time activist in the fight against hunger and a close ally of the president, was appointed as the first minister to head the agency responsible for implementing the policy. Its first relevant initiative in early 2003 was the creation of yet one more form of cash transfer to poor families, called *Cartão Alimentação* (Food Card).

The Food Card was not conditional on behaviour (for example, going to school), but families had to spend the funds on food. The control mechanisms were local committees of organized citizens, called *Comitês Gestores* (managerial committees) that were to oversee family expenditures. Behind this design was the idea that managerial committees and the ensuing discussions would empower citizens, strengthening critical thought and self-awareness.

Administrative and political problems arose very soon, however. At the time, Brazil had no system comparable to the United States of America's Food Stamps program, which electronically restricts the disbursement of funds to pre-authorized items. One proposal was that poor families prove their spending by publicly displaying their grocery store receipts. A huge controversy followed. An interview given by Minister Graziano to the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* vividly illustrates the public debate:

FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO: One of the criticisms

of the requirement to present receipts is that it would not only create a market of counterfeit sales receipts, but it would also generate excessive red tape.

GRAZIANO: I repeat that we have no fiscal objective. At the discretion of the local committees, the proof of [food] purchases could be made with a formal sales receipt, handwritten notes from the owner of the grocery store or even the testimony of the salesperson.

FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO: Did the government have access to the survey that indicates that families in basic income programs already spend 70 percent of their money on food purchases?

GRAZIANO: There are several studies showing that families spend 70 percent or even 80 percent of their funds on food. These data suggest that the discussion has been focused on details only. In our view, it doesn't matter how the expenditure was made. The important issue is how people organize through participation in the Food Card program committees. The difference between the Food Card and the School Fund is not the link with the type of expenditure. The difference resides in the fact that one program promotes schooling while the other one creates the embryo of local organization: the citizen oversight committees. And, with the Food Card, which associates income with food purchases, beneficiaries will have more money to build their own citizenship.⁷

In late 2003, the federal government already had at least five cash transfer programs, including the policies initiated by the previous administration and the new Food Card program. Once more, such programs had differences in requirements, amount of funds transferred, administrative structures, governance structures and oversight mechanisms. But all of them had one key overlapping characteristic: they were poverty alleviation programs focused largely on the same target population: people living below the poverty line.

The programs were managed by five different ministries, each trying to use similar tools (cash transfers) to achieve different public policy results in the fields of

social work, health, education, food security, energy and child labour. As the controversy over different programs, agencies and requirements grew into a public debate (and with no real evidence linking them to poverty reduction), President Lula launched a task force to unify all the cash transfer programs and their databases into one single program. From the citizens' perspective, the organizational distinctions did not make sense: people are not divided into ministries.

According to one of President's Lula top aides at the time and currently the federal Minister of Planning, Miriam Belchior, the role of presidential leadership was crucial in the decision to unify the programs and in its success:

The second point is the issue of leadership. An issue that does not value a matrix framework will not succeed in making the administration achieve goals of such magnitude. Then, what role did the President play? The President of the Republic arrived at the [Interministerial] Social Policy Commission and said: the income transfer programs must be unified. "Wait, but..." No, there is no "wait, but." The programs must be unified, but they must be unified in a way that takes into account the views of all of the ministries that are involved with the issue. There must be an open dialogue. And a process in which everyone may express their views and contribute to the overall construction.⁸

The result of that presidential determination was the creation of Bolsa Família in October 2003, merging the previously existing Bolsa Escola, Bolsa Alimentação, Cartão Alimentação and Auxílio Gás.⁹ In the new program, families had no restrictions on how to use funds, but payments were preferably to be made to the women in the household, and conditions were linked to the use of health and education services. In response to problems of compliance, the design of the program was made *more* flexible, rather than stricter. Instead of assigning the infant Bolsa Família to one of the ministries responsible for the parent programs, the President decided to create an executive secretariat located within his own office to manage it.

However, the underlying differences of opinion in the

overall approach to poverty alleviation and to the implementation of Fome Zero—the strategy that later became an international trademark of President Lula’s administration—did not end with the integration of programs. An important debate over the role of civil society in the oversight of the program persisted even after the merger.

Some presidential advisors insisted that the management of the cash transfers (including the selection of beneficiaries, audit and control) be conducted mainly by citizens organized in the managerial committees. They argued that such a design would help alleviate poverty through cash transfers and also increase social mobilization and citizen empowerment. Yet, a second group of presidential advisors defended the idea that the management of Bolsa Família should strengthen the federal pact rather than civil society. These advisors proposed that states and municipalities should be responsible for managing the program and verifying legal compliance.

This dispute was made clear in a letter sent in December 2003 from Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo (known as Friar Betto, one of the top presidential advisors) to José Dirceu, who was then Chief of Staff of the President’s office:

Bolsa Família: in my view, the duplicity over Bolsa Família and Zero Hunger has not been properly resolved. It seems as if they are different programs, and that the one which was announced later [Bolsa Família] replaces the other one [Zero Hunger]. I hope that the [impending] ministerial reform settles this issue.

It is important to maintain the managerial committees in each municipality composed of a majority of the civil society. It is important to stress that these committees should not lose their powers related to the selection of registered beneficiaries. My proposal is that the current criterion should be kept (...): two thirds of the committee members should be representatives from organized civil society and one third should come from government. (...)

I believe in the role that states and municipalities have in the development of the program, but it is essential to maintain balance, especially in all of

the municipalities in Brazil, and the managerial committee favours such balance.¹⁰

In fact, the managerial reform anticipated by Friar Betto took place soon afterwards. In January 2004, a new ministry was created, integrating functions of social assistance, food and food security, and income transfers, absorbing Bolsa Família’s responsibilities. This new agency was named the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger. Patrus Ananias, federal congressman and former mayor of Belo Horizonte, was invited by President Lula to be the minister.

Also in January 2004, the provisional measure that created Bolsa Família was converted into Federal Law number 10836. The law established that the existing cash transfer programs would be unified. The cash benefit would be paid directly to the families on an ATM card issued by Caixa Econômica Federal, a public bank owned by the federal government. The beneficiary would preferably be female and, to receive the benefits, the families should be below the poverty line and comply with a set of conditions. The law also stated that municipal governments would be responsible for designing the mechanisms for social control and participation in the program. Therefore, it meant the end of the proposed managerial committees with a majority of representatives from civil society. Instead, the mayors were the main authority responsible for managing the program at the local level.

FROM EARLY STAGES TO PERMANENT NATIONAL POLICY

When Bolsa Família was created in the last quarter of 2003, its parent programs served 3.6 million families through cash transfers. During 2004, Bolsa Família was submitted to intensive scrutiny from the press. It was far from being seen as a unanimous success.

In October 2004, during Bolsa Família’s first anniversary, televised media prepared a series of investigative reports showing so-called inclusion and exclusion errors: some relatively wealthy families who should not be receiving the transfers had benefited, while some

extremely poor families were still excluded. The contrasting images of rich and poor made for strong public opinion against Bolsa Família, and the report was mentioned by President Lula in a public speech:

I thought that the news report that came out on TV recently was important to us. Some people thought that the report was a criticism. I think that we have to learn to accept things as they are. It is true that all of us politicians would like that, every day, the headlines in the news were favourable, but we are not like that even in our private lives. So why should we ask others to do so? What we have is just the consciousness and the certainty that we are doing our best and that we are sensitive enough to correct the mistakes as we find them, understand that they are mistakes, and correct our path.

Every now and then people say, “But the registry of beneficiaries of Bolsa Família does this, [and] does not do that.” Well, if even a large chain of supermarkets such as Pão de Açúcar accepts the possibility of one percent of losses to shoplifting, imagine what can happen to a program that works with five million ATM cards. There could be some fraud. There could be.¹¹

In his speech, the President also referred to potential problems in the registry of beneficiaries. From the beginning, the program relied on a registry called *Cadastro Único* (Single Registry), a massive database that contains data on all families in the country that are at risk of poverty (defined as being below an income threshold). This registry is maintained by the federal Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, but municipal governments are responsible for collecting data on poor families and entering data into the registry. This practice was one of the sensitive points that led to the creation of Bolsa Família: some in government wished to assign to civil society organizations the responsibility of selecting the beneficiaries and entering them into the registry, while the other officials wanted municipal governments to perform the task. The latter idea prevailed.

After being entered into the registry, families are selected to receive the benefit by the federal government. The

funds are then directly paid to the families with the use of an ATM card issued by a federal bank, and the money may then be withdrawn from banks, post offices, lottery shops and other forms of banking services. Families may use the benefits freely and are not required to report their expenses. In approximately 95 percent of cases, the ATM cards are registered under a female in the household. The average value of the monthly benefit is US\$65, but it may reach US\$137, depending on the characteristics of the family.

To receive the benefits, families must comply with conditions that are designed to build human capital. The education conditions require minimum school attendance rates of 85 percent for children aged six to 15 years and 75 percent for teenagers aged 16 or 17 years. The health conditions require that children aged zero to six years be immunized and receive growth monitoring, and also that pregnant women attend sessions of pre- and post-natal care. Finally, social assistance conditions require that children at risk of being used as child labour participate in afterschool activities. All these services are universally available and free of charge.

Despite the complex program design in the early implementation stages, the press focused much of its attention on two issues: the errors of inclusion and exclusion, and the role of school quality and attendance. Kathy Lindert, a Social Protection Specialist working at the World Bank, undertook an extensive analysis of media coverage of the program.

From the point of view of the PBF’s [Programa Bolsa Família] objectives and expected roles, however, it can be said that the press coverage sometimes is out of focus, as in the case of reporting on inclusion vs. exclusion errors or on its role in promoting school attendance (via conditions) vs. school quality (out of the realm of the PBF). Similarly, from a technical point of view, there are important differences between administrative errors and intentional fraud (both of which are present to some degree in all programs), but these concepts are sometimes blurred in reporting on the program. The analysis should be useful to help the press itself identify new hooks for its reporting and to better understand the program’s broad nature and role, as well as key implementation

aspects.¹²

Having survived a difficult first year of intense media scrutiny, the biggest test came with the presidential election of 2006—the first national election since the creation of Bolsa Família. At the time of the election (October 2006), the program had already reached its target coverage of 11.1 million families estimated living under the poverty line.

Candidates running in the election publicly mentioned their support for the program. For President Lula, it meant one big success story in the reduction of poverty and inequality—one that translated into electoral support in his campaign for re-election. For his main opponent, Geraldo Alckmin, the votes of 11.1 million families could not be ignored, and he could not dispute the “paternity” of the program since it had originated from initiatives of previous administrations at federal and sub-national levels. Rather than attacking the program, opposition parties declared that they would expand and improve it. Electoral results made clear that a large fraction of civil society saw the program as an asset they wanted to keep.

As of March 2011, Bolsa Família has reached 12.85 million families in every Brazilian municipality and the federal district, with an annual budget of approximately US\$5.7 billion. The program costs nearly 0.4 percent of Brazilian Gross Domestic Product each year. Another round of presidential elections was held in October and November 2010 and, once more, all major candidates publicly declared their support for the program. Current president, Dilma Rousseff, publicly renewed her commitment to the program, approving an average increase of 19.8 percent in the amount of the benefit in March 2011.

DOCUMENTED IMPACT

Bolsa Família is considered one of the largest programs of its kind in the world,¹³ benefiting approximately 50 million people in the entire country. Its stated rationales are fighting deprivation and hunger as a means of short-term alleviation of the most urgent effects of poverty; breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty through health, education and social assistance conditions;

promoting access to public services, also by the means of conditions; and finally, integrating and rationalizing the social safety net.

It seems to be working. Several studies have documented the impact of Bolsa Família on poverty and inequality reduction,¹⁴ improvement of the local economy, reduction of child undernutrition and other food security outcomes.¹⁵

Perhaps the most important public policy impacts have been the reduction of poverty and inequality. Between 2001 and 2008, the average annual growth rate of per-capita family income was a little under three percent for the entire population.¹⁶ However, when the data are disaggregated, one important distinction is revealed: the income of the poorest ten percent grew at an average of nearly eight percent per year, while the income of the richest ten percent grew at a much lower average of nearly 1.5 percent per year. The continuation of this trend has produced an important reduction in income inequality, which has reached the lowest levels since baseline data began in 1976.¹⁷

Despite the great importance of the reduction of inequality, partially attributable to Bolsa Família and other social policies, evaluations also point to positive outcomes in other domains, such as food and food security. A cross-sectional study done when the program was expanded in 2005 documents that the prevalence of undernutrition among children from six months to one year of age in families that were *not* beneficiaries of the program was 2.65 times higher than in beneficiary families.¹⁸

Representative surveys of beneficiaries show that their top expenditures of Bolsa Família funds are on food (indicated by 87 percent of the families), school supplies (mentioned by 46 percent of the families), and clothing (37 percent of the families). These results are significant, given the early debates about ensuring that the families spent the money on food purchases. The results also reinforce evidence that women are more careful spenders than men. In 95 percent of the cases, the benefit is paid directly to a female in the household. Another important consequence captured in the surveys was that 40 percent of women reported an increase in decision-making power in their household after receiving the funds.

The global economic crises of 2008-09 provided a further test for the claim that social policies may act counter-cyclically to mitigate the effects of external shocks through incentives to internal markets and household consumption.¹⁹ The country was considered one of the least affected by the global crisis.

FINAL NOTES: BROADENING THE EXPANDED PUBLIC SPACE

Perhaps as important as the traditional impact evaluations is the possibility that Bolsa Família may promote an integration of public and civic results. Above and beyond the program's stated rationale and intended results, it became clear that the success of Bolsa Família depended on a broader set of changes, both in the public and civic spheres. The strong leadership behind the implementation of the program created momentum for other items on the social policy agenda, and so contributed to the expansion of the public space in several domains.

First, a considerable percentage of the poorest Brazilians had no form of official identification and therefore were denied access to public services. In an interview given in 2005, then Minister of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, Patrus Ananias, laid out the difficulties and achievements experienced:

It is a matter of citizenship to make sure that people obtain their official registration. We are making partnerships with social organizations to help people get their identification papers. Several families that strictly comply with the program rules still do not receive the money because they do not exist from a civic perspective. Those are people that have never had a birth certificate, a marriage certificate, or anything comparable. I do not see a political or electoral interest in this. We have partnerships with every single local government in the country.²⁰

Second, the new spending power of poorer families had an important influence on the economic dynamics of the

country. Large food corporations have made new investments in factories in the poorer Northeastern region of the country to serve these new markets. Even the food products themselves have changed, with packages being made in smaller portions and simpler wrapping materials to make them more affordable to people with low incomes.²¹

Third, the main mechanism of payment used by the Bolsa Família program—the ATM cards—paved the way for several other public initiatives. The bank is starting to convert some of the ATM cards into simplified banking accounts. In this program, families gain access to a new set of financial products, such as small loans, savings accounts and other services that help include them in the formal banking system.²²

Fourth, the discussion about accountability and control over the payment of benefits created strong incentives for greater transparency. Anyone with Internet access may check whether any given person is a recipient of Bolsa Família (and other government programs as well) at www.portaldatransparencia.gov.br.

Finally, the main electronic database used to manage the program, the Single Registry of Beneficiaries, has enormous potential for the design, implementation and evaluation of other social policies. Once the database was built, new initiatives were planned using geospatial analysis techniques to identify needs and monitor delivery of public services to the population. So far, these possibilities have not been explored to their full potential, but their future impact may be very important.

Within the New Synthesis expanded public space, Bolsa Família may suggest interesting possibilities. It is the story of a policy that was initiated by local governments, made its way up to a national policy, then was incorporated as an asset of civil society. From the perspective of social and civic results, the program has promoted an integration of policies and had an impact that surpassed its original purposes, showing that funding families at the micro level may be a way to achieve developmental outcomes on a much wider scale.

ENDNOTES

1. Frederico Guanais is Health Senior Specialist at Social Protection and Health Division of the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC. When the drafts of this paper were written, he was Head of the International Cooperation office at the Escola Nacional de Administração Pública (ENAP) in Brasília, Brazil. The findings, interpretations and conclusions do not necessarily reflect the view of the Brazilian government or the Inter-American Development Bank.
2. Brazil has a population of approximately 191 million, 84.3 percent of which is urban. Its gross domestic product of US\$1,573 trillion in 2008 (approximately 8,414 per capita) places the nation within the ranks of middle-income countries. However, despite remarkable progress in recent years, extremely high levels of inequality mean that the absolute number of poor citizens remains high. In 2009, the top one percent own 12.1 percent of income; while the poorest 50 percent take home only 15.5 percent, according to 2010 data (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, 2010).
3. Rounded value for an exchange rate of US\$1.00 = BRL 1.76 (April 2010). All figures in US dollars in this paper follow this rate.
4. Inflation in consumer prices for the year of 1993 was 2,489% (two thousand four hundred and eighty nine percent).
5. Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, “IPEADATA.”
6. Ibid.
7. Salomon, “Graziano indica que Vale-Gás e Bolsa-Renda podem acabar.”
8. Belchior, “Professionalism and consolidation”. Note that the Interministerial Social Policy Commission is a working group coordinated by the President’s Office to integrate different social policy areas.
9. The Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil remained separate until 2005 when it was also merged with Bolsa Família.
10. Betto, *Calendário do Poder*, 255-256.
11. Lula, Speech at the Meeting of CONSEA.
12. Lindert and Vincensini, “Bolsa Família in the Headlines.”
13. Similar experiments have been implemented in most Latin American countries. Like Bolsa Família, Mexico’s wide-scale and largely successful conditional cash transfer program is called Oportunidades.
14. Rocha, “Transferências de renda federais;” Soares, *O Ritmo de Queda na Desigualdade no Brasil É Adequado?*; and Kakwani, Neri, and Son, *Pro-Poor Growth and Social Programmes in Brazil*.
15. Santos, Paes-Sousa, Silva and Victora, “National Immunization Day.”
16. Paes de Barros, *Sucessos e Desafios para a Proteção e Promoção no Brasil*.

17. Ibid.
18. Santos, Paes-Sousa, Silva and Victora, “National Immunization Day.”
19. Ananias de Sousa, “El combate al hambre y el nuevo marco de las políticas públicas”; Soares, *Volatilidade de Renda e a Cobertura do Programa Bolsa Família*.
20. Kriger, Interview with Minister Patrus Ananias.
21. Pacheco, “Crise afeta menos a base da pirâmide.”
22. According to January 2011 data provided by the Ministry of Social Development, 1.9 million beneficiaries (15 percent of the total number of families that receive Bolsa Família) already receive their cash payment through a personal bank account.

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FROM NS6 TO NS WORLD

THE NEW SYNTHESIS PROJECT

The New Synthesis Project is an international partnership of institutions and individuals who are dedicated to advancing the study and practice of public administration. While they hail from different countries, different political systems and different historical, economic and cultural contexts, all share the view that public administration as a practice and discipline is not yet aligned with the challenges of serving in the 21st century.

THE NEW SYNTHESIS 6 NETWORK

In 2009, Madame Jocelyne Bourgon invited six countries to join the New Synthesis Network (NS6), composed of officials, scholars and experts from Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Committed to supporting practitioners whose work is becoming increasingly difficult, this network has engaged close to 200 people from more than 24 organizations. Their efforts have resulted in five international roundtables, five post-roundtable reports, and 17 case studies. Collectively, this work has generated significant insights into preparing governments to serve in the 21st century.

The Network's findings have been captured in the publication of a new book entitled *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, and is available in print and electronic formats from McGill-Queen's University Press. Its signature contribution is the presentation of an enabling governance framework that brings together the role of government, society and people to address some of the most complex and intractable problems of our time.

TOWARDS NS WORLD

So where to from here? Reconfiguring and building the capacities of government for the future cannot be accomplished through the publication of a single book. It is a continuous journey which requires the ongoing sharing and synthesis of ideas, as well as the feedback, learning and course adjustments that can only be derived by testing ideas in action.

And so the journey continues and the conversation expands. Our goal is to build upon the rich partnership of the original six participating countries by opening up this exchange with others—wherever they may be located. We seek to create an international community that connects all leaders—from government, the private sector and civil society—committed to helping prepare governments for the challenges ahead.

Next stages of this work will include virtual exchanges supported by web 2.0 technologies, as well as possible thematic and regionally-based networks and events. But no matter the vehicles, success can only be achieved through the active participation and collaboration of those passionate about making a difference.

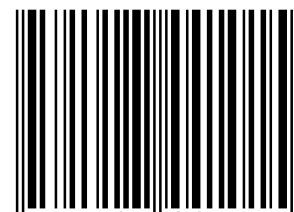
We encourage you to stay tuned to nsworld.org for more information about how to get engaged.

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