

## South –South Cooperation: Lessons from Brazil on Conditional Cash Transfers

Source: <http://www.tl.undp.org/nloct09/>

In the spirit of South-South Cooperation, the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS) has facilitated a visit to Brazil to learn about the Latin America's country's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs. The development is a first step in supporting capacity building of the Government of Timor-Leste in running the CCT pilot scheme. The seven-member team was in Brazil from 12-16 October 2009.

The study tour was aimed at promoting knowledge sharing on cash transfer programmes, through training of Timorese government officials to improve the implementation of ongoing conditional cash transfer (CCT) scheme of the Ministry of Social Solidarity - "*Bolsa Mãe*".

Members of the team were; Ms. Antônia Carmen da Cruz, National Director of Social Reinsertion (DNRS) and officer in charge of the Implementation of the Bolsa Mãe Programme, Ms. Joana da Cunha, Chief of the Department of Women Victims and Social Reintegration of Vulnerable Families, Mr. Lucas Tois, Coordinator of the Bolsa da Mãe, Mrs. Maria Madalena Dias, Adviser to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, Ms. Esperança Gonçalves, Member of the Bolsa da Mãe in charge of finance and João Paulo, member of Bolsa da Mãe, communication officer. UNDP was represented by Programme Officer, Alexandre Sarmiento.



*The delegation held a series of consultations in Brazil.  
Photo archive*

During the mission, a broader partnership was discussed, including 'long distance' support through electronic and online services, the identification of a consultant who will be based in the country for 6 months and the fielding of a technical assistance mission to Timor-Leste by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG).

The CCT programme aims to reduce poverty through cash transfers to poor families while at the same time making these transfers conditional upon the recipients' actions. Individuals targeted by the CCT receive money only if they meet specific criteria such as ensuring that their children attend school or regularly use preventive health care services.

"I found the study tour to be quite interesting in the sense that it forged the new partnership and collaboration between the two governments of Timor-Leste and Brazil. This is a concrete contribution of UNDP Timor-Leste and its sister organization International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in promoting south-south learning initiatives and exchange of lessons learned and best practices," said Alex Sarmiento, UNDP Programme Officer. He explained that the experience of Brazil in conditional cash transfer showed that although the conditions of receiving cash are tied to school attendance and visit to the clinics, "*Bolsa Familia* has been designed and implemented with great flexibility and minimum, easy-to-meet conditionalities with less punitive actions to the non-compliance of conditionalities." Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* programme "demonstrated the government's determination to invest in vulnerable families as important nuclei of the society due to the impacts a family can bring to the society as opposed to the vulnerable families being liabilities to the government," said Alex.

"The beneficiaries of the programme are extracted from the "single registry" database system (Cadastru Unico/CadUnico) which contains the socio-economic profile of population whose income is up to 50% of the established minimum wage. Due to the advance in technology and human resources in Brazil, its programme has improved its system of identification of beneficiaries, monitoring and evaluation and payment process."

Alex points out that in the case of Bolsa Mãe of Timor-Leste there has not been any central data base system in place to cross check the beneficiaries of other social protection schemes. "There has not been a good monitoring and feedback mechanism in place to assess the impact the program has had in alleviating the poverty. The inter and intra ministerial coordination remains a challenge and should be addressed to achieve greater synergies and impacts among various programmes," says Alex adding that it is precisely these challenges that Timor-Leste needs to learn more from the experiences of other countries like Brazil.

Thanking UNDP Timor-Leste "profoundly" for assisting the government of Timor-Leste in improving the existing Bolsa Mãe Programme aimed at reducing poverty in the country, Carmen Da Cruz, National Director of Social Reinsertion Department of MSS described the trip to Brazil as an eye-opener.

“The knowledge that we have gained about the identification of beneficiaries through “single registry” payment system and monitoring and evaluation has all opened up a new horizon and enabled us to discover some of the weaknesses and challenges of our program that we need to address in order to redesign the Bolsa Mãe program with quality,” said Carmen, adding: “We are currently preparing the study tour report that would contain some recommendations to the government and UNDP that will require political will particularly about the plan to establish “single registry” type of data base system tailored according to Timor-Leste context.”

UNDP in Timor-Leste together with other UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and IOM) is supporting a programme for promoting ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Timor-leste,’ where a cash transfer programme is being designed. The CCT started in Timor-Leste as a pilot programme in March 2008 under the name Bolsa Mae programme. This programme provides cash payments to eligible beneficiaries on the condition that the identified child attends and successfully completes each level of schooling. The main purpose of this pilot scheme is to enable poor households headed by women to cope with illness, death, loss of income or other hardships that may incline young girls to migrate and be more vulnerable to exploitation.

From its inception, the number of beneficiaries receiving Bolsa Mae payments has increased from 7,200 to 9,739, with the Ministry of Social Solidarity increasing the allocation of resources from US\$ 663,750 to US\$ 876,153 in 2009.

Under the joint Programme Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Timor-Leste, UNDP Timor-Leste is expected to provide capacity building support to the MSS for effective implementation of Bolsa Mae. Considering IPC-IG’s expertise in cash transfer programmes and its work in capacity building, especially in Latin America and Africa, IPC-IG will assist the Timorese government to expand and improve its cash transfer programme in the framework of a broader social protection system.



*UNDP Programme Officer Alexandre Sarmento (third right), accompanied the team to Brazil.  
Photo: archive*