Cadastro Único: a Registry Supported by a National Public Bank

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The Cadastro Único is the main registry for programmes and policies directed at low-income populations in Brazil. It was formally created in 2001, through the consolidation of a number of different cash transfer programmes. The registry intended to unify, in a single database, the individual registries of these programmes, thus minimising data collection efforts for each individual programme. Before the Cadastro Único registries were kept apart even within the same ministry or agency. There was a great variety of databases which basically housed the same data, no quality control and scarce communication between them. Taken separately, each database was relatively small, which did not justify updating them individually, or inclusion and systematisation efforts. Taken together, the policies were not coordinated. As a result, some families received multiple benefits, while similar families which were never included in the databases, never received any cash transfers or services. Today, the Cadastro Único is a unified registry which supports all the main programmes of several ministries of the central government (at least 20) and at subnational levels.

Hence, the Cadastro Único is a national reference source, and it also practically serves as a census of the Brazilian low-income population (those living on half a minimum wage per capita—US$6/day or US$170/month). The registry contains basic personal and household identification and profile data, grouped into six basic sets of data: personal identification, family identification, household characteristics, schooling, as well as work and income information. Other supplementary data are collected, such as household expenditures, programme participation, characteristics of traditional communities, and conditions of vulnerability (homeless, engaged in child labour etc.).

The registry contains data on over 23 million low-income families and 78 million people. Estimates based on the 2010 census data show that there are 20 million low-income families in Brazil (67 million people) or 35 per cent of the total Brazilian population. Therefore, there is 114.5 per cent coverage. Its biggest programme is the conditional cash transfer called the Programa Bolsa Família (PBF — Family Grant), which is transferred monthly by a magnetic card to 13.9 million families throughout the country, making it the largest conditional cash transfer programme in the world in terms of the number of monthly payments. This is a huge undertaking, given that Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world (8.5 million km²).

The most important feature of the Cadastro Único, differentiating it from most targeted registries around the world, is that income is declared by the families themselves. Founded on a relationship of trust, programmes that most targeted registries around the world, is that income is declared by the families themselves. Founded on a relationship of trust, programmes that