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Sometimes, a simple solution can be the right kind of medicine to an illness. Jonathan Tepperman, a managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, discusses Brazil’s medicine, Bolsa Família, in his article “Brazil’s Antipoverty Breakthrough.” Former president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, implemented the social welfare program Fome Zero. The most popular core program is Bolsa Família. It is an initiative that helps millions of individuals with few costs by simply handing out money. Many scholars have both praised and criticized the program. I believe that Lula’s Bolsa Família initiative is a major key to Brazil’s rising prosperity, but it has some minor weaknesses including government dependency and lack of infrastructure programs that may grow larger in the future.

Brazil is the major actor. Brazil’s economic history is signified by major improper distribution of wealth. Tepperman discusses how the majority of Brazilians live in poverty. Additionally, statistics are provided to represent the destitution of the country, “At the turn of the millennium, about a third of Brazil’s population languished beneath the international poverty line (surviving on $2 a day), and about 15 percent was indigent (living on less than $1.25 a day)” (Tepperman 1). The author points to a few problems in addition to poverty that Brazil experiences like political corruption and inequality.

Former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made it his mission to revamp the system. Lula is a prime example of a self-made man. Coming from a poor large family (the seventh of eight children), Lula is self-educated, a former São Bernardo do Campo Metalworkers’ Union member, and the founder of the leftist Workers’ Party (Tepperman 2). His predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso had “unpopular structural reforms” which led to Lula’s election. Lula soon associated himself with other educated professionals and intellectuals to discuss plans to benefit all Brazilians. Tepperman highlights some of his actions, “. . . he started hacking away at Brazil’s bloated national budget, cutting spending by about $4 billion in his first year and imposing an even stricter budget-surplus target than the International Monetary Fund recommended” (Tepperman 2). Lula’s initial actions greatly aided Brazil’s economy.

Bolsa Família plans were in the making meanwhile. Tepperman mentions that Cardoso began a similar program, but it was poorly implemented. Lula doctored Cardoso’s initial experiment, designing it to “simply hand out money” (Tepperman 3). Of the three points that Lula and his fellow advisors realized, I find his second point to be the most noteworthy. He claims “. . . the people who best understood what the poor really needed were the poor themselves” (Tepperman 3). This idea is reminiscent of Pope Francis’s suggestion in his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* in which“many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres and power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor with little direct contact with their problems” (McKibben 7). Lula’s own personal experiences are a necessary component to the foundation of Bolsa Família. While this program was enacted before the Pope’s statement, Bolsa Família is an example for other countries’ development on the international level. This connection to the poor contributes to the success of the initiative.

Bolsa Família has made moves towards alleviating both poverty and human development issues. The positive effects of the program are plentiful. The statistics demonstrate, “In its first three years, Bolsa Família cut extreme poverty by 15 percent, and by 2014, the percentage of Brazilians living in indigence had been slashed to less than three percent-a level the World Bank considers equivalent to eradication” (Tepperman 6). In addition to these effects, the cost of Bolsa Família is very cheap compared to other antipoverty programs. More national benefits are decreases in malnutrition, rises in minimum wage, and much more. Hunger has diminished in Brazil. On the human developmental aspect, Brazilians also can clap to an increase in literacy rates. Female empowerment is even a key constituent to its success. Both the orthodox and alternative views of poverty (Evans and Thomas) are addressed through Bolsa Família. Clearly, the program is beneficial and has become a model for other countries around the world. Bolsa Família is an important step towards international development. The attempts of previous government programs can now be alleviated. A large part of the world is poor, and through the example of Bolsa Família countries can mimic the program to further aid themselves. I believe the program should continue to be implemented in Brazil since it is already so successful.

The program has also aided in hopefully reversing the improper distribution of wealth. The rich did not grow richer in comparison to the poor. Tepperman states, “The income of the poorest 20 percent of Brazilians rose by 6.2 percent between 2002 and 2013, while that of the country’s richest 20 percent grew by only 2.6 percent” (Tepperman 6). Brazil is working towards creating stability. By doing so, I believe this would in return fix other social issues such as corruption and crime. Moreover, I reason that if the program succeeds in creating this stability, Brazilians gross national happiness can grow as well, benefiting everyone’s well-being.

Brazil’s current situation is concerning. Under president Dilma Rousseff, Brazil is in its worst crisis ever. *The Economist* notes, “She spent extravagantly and unwisely on higher pensions and unproductive tax breaks for favoured industries. The fiscal deficit swelled from 2% of GDP in 2010 to 10% in 2015” (“Brazil’s Fall”). I think it is important to know if this affects how Bolsa Família affects participants.

Moreover, my initial criticism of Bolsa Família, which Tepperman also summarizes, is that it would create dependency on the government. However, Tepperman provides that the designers of the program have taken this into account. There are responsibilities, or contrapartidas as the article suggests, that the participants have to meet. These details are listed, “. . . ensure that all their children between six and 15 years old attended school at least 85 percent of the time, make sure that any of their children under seven got immunized, and guarantee that both mothers and children got regular medical checkups” (Tepperman 4). Along with these requirements, there are consequences if participants fail to satisfy these requirements. This safety net for Bolsa Família aids in its success and makes it popular for those who once criticized it. On the contrary, there is a specific instance in the criticism that concerns me. In a recent article by *The Economist*, the magazine stresses that Bolsa Família may have a “rural bias” (“Brazil’s Fall”). In other words, the program is not as effective in cities than it is in rural communities. This is important to note since much of Brazil is urban. Moreover, other social investments need to be taken into consideration. *The Guardian* examines a specific case in Rio di Janiero where a family is in close proximity to the location of the World Cup. The cost of living has doubly increased. The mother does not know whether there will not be a day that the family will no longer need the money because she uses all of her salary for housing. She can pay for food through Bolsa Família (Nobrega). Perhaps more needs to be done for Brazil to really get off its back. Since the program is so cheap, the government could use the extra money to build more solid homes for those who need one.

Bolsa Família is an ingenious program that benefits many and should continue to be reassessed every year for weaknesses. Lula’s connection to the poor makes the program so triumphant. The program is an example for other countries, who are hopeful to rise similarly out of their deep debts.

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