

The Single Registry as a tool for the coordination of social policies¹

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In recent years, the role of the *Cadastro Único para Programas Sociais* (the federal government's Single Registry for Social Programmes) has been strengthened as a tool for coordinating a wide range of public policies in Brazil. In fact, from its very inception, the *Cadastro Único* was to be used as a tool for identifying and classifying the socio-economic characteristics of low-income families. Its use was "mandatory in selecting beneficiaries and in integrating the social programmes put in place by the federal government for that specific target population."⁴

Created in 2001, the *Cadastro Único* was expanded significantly in 2004, when it became the foundation for targeting beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* programme. Starting in 2011, with the launch of the Brazil without Extreme Poverty (*Brasil Sem Miséria*—BSM) plan,⁵ use of the *Cadastro Único* by other social programmes expanded exponentially. Today, 38 federal programmes use it: 27 to select beneficiaries for various initiatives aimed at low-income populations—cash transfers, fee waivers, technical assistance etc.—and 11 for monitoring and tracking results and activities.

The *Cadastro Único* offers these programmes two major features: i) its implementation network; and ii) information about registered families. The implementation network is a decentralised national structure that abides by the norms set by the Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development (*Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Agrário*—MDSA) at the federal level, including direct participation by all 5,570 Brazilian municipalities in registration and other services provided to citizens. This network is one of the biggest draws of the *Cadastro Único*, particularly for programmes that have few or no decentralised structures to meet citizens' demands for information and services. The registry data set contains information about 26 million vulnerable families interviewed and registered by the network; the primary information in the database can be used in a variety of social policies.

Four key aspects proposed by Barca and Chichir (2014) were considered when analysing the potential of the *Cadastro Único* to integrate data and information systems for social protection purposes: i) institutional and administrative; ii) operational and related to implementation; iii) technological; and iv) related to costs and financing. According to the analysis, the operation of the *Cadastro Único*—structured around procedures for registering and updating registry information—is used by a growing number of user programmes.

Certain measures must be taken to accommodate this multi-user scenario. These include: prior standardisation of the basic concepts⁶ used by the *Cadastro Único* and the different programmes; the availability of electronic and decentralised tools to access data about registered households and individuals; the implementation of data confidentiality and control mechanisms; and the availability of tools for the registration network, to enable it to provide information to citizens about user programmes.

The possibilities and limitations of the *Cadastro Único* for coordinating social programmes can be analysed using two extreme models proposed by Barca and Chichir (2014): on the one hand, as a single registry that serves various policies and programmes and enables beneficiary selection based on established criteria; and, on the other hand, as an integrated information management system, which provides an integrated view of all the benefits and services received by citizens and enables the coordination of various activities, as it integrates programme selection and management systems.

In a preliminary assessment, the *Cadastro Único* would seem to be closer to the single registry model because it identifies a target audience for policies aimed at low-income populations (potential beneficiaries) and allows each user programme to select and monitor its beneficiaries. However, it goes beyond the single registry model, as it features an inherent component not sufficiently addressed in the classification scheme proposed by Barca and Chichir (2014)—its implementation network. In addition to feeding the processes involved in registration and updating information, the network can use the data autonomously to guide public policies at the municipal and state levels, rather than making the data available solely to user programmes. Armed with a qualified and updated database, the *Cadastro Único* shows great potential for the coordination of social policies—although it has not yet become an integrated information management system according to the definition provided by the authors.

Several alternatives are available to the *Cadastro Único*. The most conservative alternative would be to maintain its role of identifying target populations for various policies. A more daring approach would be to incorporate information layers/systems for managing user programmes, and integrating them to enhance the quality of the monitoring and evaluation processes. A third possibility is to fully integrate the *Cadastro Único* with data from user programmes. This would enable the coordinated planning, organisation and delivery of programmes offered at all three levels of government, acting to reduce vulnerabilities according to the socio-economic profiles of each family. In terms of integration, the *Cadastro Único* would become a strategic tool for diagnosing, planning and even redesigning social policies throughout the country.

Reference:

Barca, V., and R. Chichir. 2014. *Single registries and integrated MISs: De-mystifying data and information management concepts*. Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government.

Notes:

1. This publication is part of the project supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) entitled: "Brazil & Africa: fighting poverty and empowering women through South-South Cooperation".

2. Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development (*Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Agrário*—MDSA).

3. Institute for Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa e Economia Aplicada*—Ipea).

4. Definition provided by article 2 of Decree 6.135 of 26 June 2007.

5. Established by Decree 7.492 of 2 June 2011.

6. For example, 'family' and 'income'.