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The Boom of Money Transfers Subject to Conditions. How Are These Social Programs Beneficial to the Boys and Girls of Latin America?

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Objectives: To analyze the money transfer social programs subject to conditions of school attendance and/or health in Latin America.

Methodology: Review of reports and program evaluations for transfer of money in Latin America countries.

Results: The authors begin by describing the main features of the money transfer programs in Latin America, which give cash to poor families with school-age children, under the condition that the children visit health centers and/or attend school. The authors mention six of the primary objectives in these types of programs: to increase the number of children attending health centers and schools, in order to reduce poverty in the future; to reduce present poverty; to reduce child labor; to prevent families from falling into conditions of extreme poverty further; to offer additional aid to schools and health centers, and finally, to change the behavior of “the poor” toward education and health care. The authors note that while these measures may improve the conditions of hunger and emergency situations, they do not provide long-term solutions to help create sustainable societies. For example, the authors explain the case of Brazil (a country with the largest number of beneficiaries of such government schemes) and its program “Bolsa Familia”, where, despite some studies which report the Gini Coefficient falling by 2.7 points, inequality is not falling. The authors believe that these conditions are related more to the logic of market than to the logic of universality. They consider that social protection policies should be broader and take a practical and holistic approach that goes beyond the valuation of income or economic growth. Finally, the authors doubt that the observed changes that uphold the promoters of these programs are actually attributable to "a change in conditions" or the "effect of improvements" and not to the context in itself.

Conclusions: The authors conclude that, despite the fact that these programs have shown in some cases been efficient and have helped to alleviate the economic situation of the benefiting family, they require modifications to become a mechanism capable of increasing equality as well as the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.