

Teaching Note

Cross-sectoral partnership in social policy: the control of school attendance in the Bolsa Família Program

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The purpose of the case study on the monitoring of education conditions by MDS and MEC is to extract elements for the analysis of cross-sectoral relationships and coordination among public organizations in the scope of social policy. This section summarizes the key elements of the case and presents guidelines for the use of the case study highlighting the relationship among the organizations involved in the analyzed program and contributions of the literature on coordination in public administration. At the end, there are activities suggested for the students.

1. The central elements of the case

The management of conditions of Bolsa Família is an innovation in the context of public policies in Brazil. It involves a partnership between two ministries, including the joint development of projects, processes and systems, the articulation of governmental networks in each of the sectors in the three levels of government (federal, state and municipal) and a regulation that establishes the duties of each one of the actors.

Since the creation of PBF, the monitoring of the commitment to education of the families has gained relevance. The commitment to health and education of family members composes the set of conditions necessary to maintain the benefit.

First, it was necessary to define the objectives and processes, create space in the organization charts and teams in the ministries involved

with the program. Then, there was a continuous effort to put the topic of the speech of the authorities into practice within the public agencies and in the practice of managers and agents of the implementation. However, the monitoring of school attendance and its relationship with overcoming poverty was not an immediate priority in the institutional agendas. There were other issues of Bolsa Família that needed to be addressed and that required greater efforts from the government.

The perception of the objectives and significance of the monitoring of school attendance for the social protection policy was not a consensus among the sectors involved, the managers of the income transfer program, the social assistance policy and education policy. An inter-institutional work was conducted in order to generate convergence.

The conditionality management system did not find a previous model in the country or in social protection experiences from other countries to be based on. For its structuring, it was – and still is – necessary to address the fragmentation of the public management among areas of policy and ministries, the compartmentalization within the same organization. There are still differences concerning organizational culture, engagement to policy guidelines, institutional capacity, political conflicts, pro-activity and dynamism among management units.

The cross-sectoral coordination for the management of the monitoring of school attendance requires political and technical elements that must be clear and agreed. The trajectories of the professionals involved have also had an important role in the federal government, as well as the networks of personal interaction that they established in the planning and implementation of the programs.

The format of the management of conditions was not obtained at once and its current characteristics are subject to change. Bridges were built. And continued efforts are needed so that these bridges be effectively used, that is, for the initiatives of integrated social policy to transit in two-way bridges.

2- Guidelines for the use of the case study

When using the narrative, it is recommended that the teacher take into account the following points about the relationship among public organizations involved in the program analyzed and on the topic of cross-sectoral coordination in public administration.

The relationship among public organizations involved in Bolsa Família:

The rules imposed for the compliance with the education conditionality seek to stimulate the presence of poor students in school

and combat dropouts. In general, this strategy brings the responsibility not only to the family but also to the public agents of several sectors, with the goal of turning education into an effective instrument for overcoming poverty and reducing inequality.

For the strategy adopted by the program to be effective, there is a broad effort of coordination and intergovernmental and cross-sectoral action. The articulation, aside from conducting appropriate operational routines, mobilizes efforts from all areas involved and, in this case, particularly MEC and MDS.

The collaboration at local level can be encouraged by the existence of agreements and the effective articulation between the two main ministries involved. That is, the coordination at the federal government level (between the ministries) contributes to promote the integrated action at the local level, since it transmits example, guidelines, encouragement and order, while signals the existence of a commitment on the part of the highest authorities of the area and their responsibility with the articulation.

In order to achieve the result of monitoring approximately 17 million students benefited from the program, it was necessary to establish joint regulations and institutional mechanisms of collaboration, to set operating procedures and to adopt incentive structures. The elements developed at a macro management level, that is, in the federal government, provide guidelines and guide the coordinated work that is expected to exist at a local implementation level in each municipality.

The management of conditions is not limited to the registration of information on their conformity and effect on the benefits. It is a strategy to identify families who are at higher vulnerability and social risk, which requires closer monitoring by other policies in order to act on the determinant dimensions of the vulnerabilities that go beyond the income deficit.

There are several tensions in the monitoring of conditions:

- MDS, which is responsible for the management of the program, does not have a hierarchical position that gives it the authority to require a behavior from another ministry and from the public agents associated with it. There may be divergent interests and motivations. Despite the legal provisions that give to this ministry the role of promoter of the actions of the federal government agencies involved with the program, it is essential to make agreements and work with a shared management.

- A similar situation occurs in the relationship of the federal government with other federal entities (states and municipalities, and city halls, education secretariats and schools) that monitor the compliance of the families with the commitment to education.

- Bolsa Família interferes with school culture and propels the challenge of cross-sectoral approach, because the reasons why children and adolescents have difficulties in attending school normally go beyond the only educational boundaries. It becomes necessary to talk to other areas of public policy, especially Social Assistance and Health, in order to take measures to assist in the inclusion and permanence in school.

- The monitoring of the families of students who do not comply with the minimum school attendance rate, to be performed by the teams of Social Assistance in conjunction with other public actors, has just started in most municipalities. The federal manager set standards and procedures. However, the expectations on social work far outweigh the installed capacity of the service units. Social Assistance teams have questioned the fact that, at all levels of government, there are sectors that require from this specific policy the sole presentation of solutions to social risks and vulnerabilities of households in extreme poverty.

The coordination in public management:

In order to encourage the analysis of the case, it is recommended that the teacher consider some contributions of the literature on public management:

The increasing complexity of the social service sector and isolation make it necessary to focus on horizontal integration. It becomes important to share information, synchronize the action and harmonize organizational missions with one another.

On a scale from “strongly fragmented” to “fully connected”, coordination implies a connection of medium intensity among several elements, among which are: finding common ground; level of commitment; indispensable “understanding one another”; sharing information and strategic insight on its use. (Keast, Brown e Mandell, 2012).

Coordination is a political and technical process at the same time. It allows you to generate agreements aiming at strategic objectives and, as an element for the achievement of the main objectives of social policy, it aims at: avoiding or minimizing the duplication and overlapping of policies; reducing inconsistencies of policies; ensuring political priorities and promoting cohesion and coherence; mitigating the political and bureaucratic conflict; promoting the holistic perspective that goes beyond the sectoral and narrow view of the policies (Peters, 1998).

Coordination requires the creation of synergy in the following dimensions: cognitive; of process and activities; of

resources; of authority. It is not exempt from power struggle, resistance to changes in organizational cultures or fear to accept new practices of cross-sectoral action (Peters, 1998).

The development of collaborative capacity among agencies has a tangible component (formed by space, budget and human resources) and an intangible component (formed by interest and willingness of people to work together) (Bardach, 1999).

Parameters of political and technical capabilities are essential for the articulation and coordination of (intergovernmental and cross-sectoral) policies. Decalogue of coordination: basic criteria: 1- Political cohesion and will; 2- Definition of strategic objectives; 3- Structures and mechanisms of coordination (with goals and concrete and clearly defined functions); 4- Participation of actors; 5- Legitimate institutionalism; 6- Coordination and leadership ability; 7- Spaces for dialogue and deliberation; 8- Synergies; 9- Culture of cooperation and encouragement; 10- Information, communication, monitoring and evaluation systems (Licha y Molina 2006).

3-Suggestions of activities and issues to be proposed to the students

a) Identifying and analyzing:

The distribution of roles and tasks among organizations involved in the monitoring of school attendance.

How each of the ministries was organized or adapted to comply with their duties.

The strategies chosen and the elements that facilitated the partnership.

The technical and political elements required in the cross-sectoral coordination of the program.

The difficulties or obstacles encountered. How were they overcome? If not, why?

The critical success factors and the weaknesses or limitations.

The changes within organizations throughout the process. Distinguishing between: - those that had a positive or negative impact on the articulation among sectors; - those that resulted from the management of conditions and/or cross-sectoral articulation.

Possible obstacles and resistances encountered. How are they faced?

If there were impasses, crossroads or dilemmas related to the process. How were they faced?

Differences in points of view and the understanding of the objectives. Were convergences generated? How?

What organizations involved in the case under analysis have learned.

The elements that indicate that there is a consolidation of the partnership developed; the elements that promote the sustainability of the partnership.

b) Group discussion on the following statements expressed by people responsible for the management of conditions at MDS and MEC:

“The way Bolsa Família was designed, it cannot function if there is no horizontal relationship. However, it is not easy to develop a horizontal relationship in Brazil.”

“As both ministries are at the same level, it is important to have a central coordination. The bilateral relationship is necessary, but not enough.”

“No cross-sectoral management happens if there is not a lot of sweat and inspiration.”

“People create networks. Interpersonal relationships are very important in the partnerships.”

“The information system is a crucial tool for the process. In fact, it occupies a central place in the interaction between the ministries.”

Groups can also discuss the following ideas on cross-sectoral partnership, which we sometimes find among agents of public policy:

Each one does his/her part and does not disturb the other.

Each person conducts the process until part of the path and passes the baton to the next person, giving sequence to the process.

c) Considering that the management of conditions “is an essentially relational work”, put yourself in the place of the general manager of conditions and examine the following requirements and skills:

- “understanding the logic of the other policy”
- “knowing the culture of the organization”
- “opening up to one another”
- “taking windows of opportunity”

- being “diplomatic”
- “knowing to give the stage to the partner”
- “not being authoritarian”
- “being proactive”
- “having a business profile”

After examining them, discuss with the group:

What do you understand by each of the expressions?

How to develop the skills mentioned?

Do you think you have these skills? How did you develop them?

d) Put yourself in the position of each of the professionals that interact directly with the program beneficiaries, at school or in social work. Analyze how the “cross-sectoral coordination” happens or not, from the standpoint of each of these professionals. Examine the impact of this situation in your work.

e) According to Keast, Brown and Mandell (2012), on a scale from “strongly fragmented” to “fully connected”, coordination normally implies a connection of medium intensity among several elements, among which are: finding common ground; level of commitment; indispensable “understanding one another”; sharing information and strategic insight on its use. Analyze whether these elements are present in the case presented.

f) Do you consider that the case of the relationship between MEC and MDS concerning the education conditionality of Bolsa Família is useful to reflect on the theme “cross-sectoral coordination” in other programs and policies? Why? What are the elements that might be useful?