



PROTECTING PEOPLE AND THE FOREST

Bolsa Verde, Brazil

Bolsa Verde – or the Green Grant – is one of the few government social protection schemes that simultaneously improved the lives of many thousands of rural people living in poverty and reduced deforestation. The programme encouraged the preservation and sustainable use of forest resources by providing extremely low-income Brazilians living in the Amazon Forest with cash payments and livelihoods training. The Amazon is a vital global, national and local resource and the value of the carbon reduction benefits alone was estimated to be about three times the cost of the programme. The case study highlights the intrinsic links between poverty and the environment and the importance of supporting local populations to be forest guardians.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bolsa Verde (BV) – or the ‘Green Grant’ – was a pro-poor environmental incentives programme implemented in the Brazilian Amazon. It was designed as a hybrid social and environmental project that aimed to simultaneously improve the lives of rural people living in poverty and to reduce deforestation by encouraging the preservation and sustainable use of forests through cash payments and livelihoods trainings.

The Brazilian Amazon is a vital global, national and local asset. Globally, it is a mega-biodiverse region that makes up half of the Earth’s remaining rainforest area and is a significant carbon sink for tackling the climate crisis. Nationally, it is a crucial natural resource for growth, while also underpinning an array of other ecological processes such as the water cycle and soil quality. Locally, it is fundamental to people’s subsistence livelihoods, culture and survival. Half of those living in extreme poverty in Brazil (7.5 million people) reside in rural areas (Bindo, 2012).

By understanding what drives deforestation and by valuing the forests where these communities live, BV provided multiple benefits: forest protection to preserve the natural resource base, additional household income, and employment opportunities through sustainable forestry use. It provided around 74,522 extremely low-income Brazilian households with cash payments to maintain forest cover. A recent study has shown that deforestation in BV areas was between 44% and 53% less than the counterfactual, creating carbon reduction benefits valued at around \$335m between 2011 and 2015, which was about three times the cost of the programme (Wong et al., 2019). Qualitative evidence suggests that the programme contributed to increased income and livelihoods. As such, it was a critical pro-poor conservation initiative for environmental protection; it also fostered sustainable collective practices.

As BV was driven by the Brazilian government, it was relatively easy to scale vertically and functionally by building on existing policy schemes. However, despite being culturally, environmentally and socially sustainable, government-funded schemes such as this are vulnerable to political change, and BV was terminated in 2018 after a change of government.

Key insights

BV was notable for:

- Recognizing that poverty and environment agendas cannot be treated separately, and that the local populations must be treated as forest guardians rather than as its destroyers;
- Recognizing that local ownership, capacity building in sustainable activities and social support are essential for poverty reduction, not just income generation;

- Seeking simultaneously to improve social as well as ecological protection;
- Encouraging protection through a community contract as well as rewarding individuals to move away from unsustainable practices;
- Being contract-based, but with local managers designing area-relevant trainings and approach non-compliance through discussion with people affected and not through punishment;
- Its integration with existing government policy initiatives, Bolsa Família (BF) and Brasil Sem Miséria (BSM).

Certain design features of BV enabled effective scaling in terms of its reach and impact on deforestation:

- It was government-led, which enabled coordination of multiple actors and ministries to achieve scale (but was politically volatile).
- It was built on existing policies and institutions.
- Participants were enrolled automatically if they met simple eligibility criteria.
- BV cash ended if participants graduated out of extreme poverty by supplementing their income via BF payments or through training provided by the programme in alternative income-earning opportunities and livelihood practices that were sustainable by design (MDS, 2016; ECLAC, 2019).

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

THE CHALLENGE

The Brazilian Amazon is an essential global, national and local asset. Globally, it is a mega-biodiverse region that makes up half of the Earth's remaining rainforest area, and it is a significant carbon sink for tackling the climate crisis. Nationally, it is a crucial natural resource for growth, while underpinning an array of other ecological processes such as the water cycle and soil quality. Locally, it is fundamental for people's subsistence livelihoods, their culture and their survival.

Half of those living in extreme poverty in Brazil¹ (7.5 million people) live in rural areas (Bindo, 2012). These are exceptionally remote areas where livelihoods are intimately tied to the natural environment and access to natural resources allows communities to survive. Although the causes of deforestation are multiple and complex (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999) and rural livelihoods depend on factors other than the environment (Barbier, 2010), reliance on the natural environment to support livelihoods can degrade the natural resource base if forest use is unsustainable. Likewise, environmental degradation can worsen poverty by depleting the amount or quality of resources that poor households rely on. This is

particularly acute during times of stress: for instance, drought or flooding may destroy the environment that support livelihoods, forcing households to obtain food and income by other means. This can also occur during economic shocks or price fluctuations; people living close to the poverty line may have to supplement their incomes by changing activities, but these may result in forest degradation (Andrade, 2018).

Given that families, such as those participating in the BV scheme, mainly work in family field, animal husbandry and/or extraction activities (WWP, 2017), supporting the growth of alternative income sources or sustainable practices and livelihood diversification is key to reducing poverty. Because they have modest incomes and limited savings, Brazil's rural poor often struggle to recover from changes in the natural environment (ILO, 2015).

Bolsa Verde

Bolsa Verde (BV) – or the ‘Green Grant’ – was a pro-poor environmental incentives programme implemented in the Brazilian Amazon region. It was designed as a hybrid social and environmental project that aimed simultaneously to improve the lives of rural people living in poverty and to reduce deforestation by encouraging the preservation and sustainable use of forests through cash payments and livelihoods trainings.

Bolsa Verde's goals were to:

- Encourage the conservation of ecosystems (maintenance and sustainable use);
- Promote citizenship and improve living conditions;
- Raise the incomes of those living in extreme poverty and who carry out natural resource conservation activities in rural areas; and
- Encourage the participation of beneficiaries in environmental, social, technical and professional training activities.

To be eligible for the scheme, beneficiaries needed to:

- Be earning less than R\$77 (Brazilian reais) per month, later increased to R\$85 per month;
- Live in a priority rural area² (identified in the Forest Code as a sustainable use zone, national forest, agrarian reform settlement or indigenous territory).

Participants were identified using the Cadastro Único social registry based on these criteria. They received R\$300 (\$100) every quarter on signing a contract agreement, which lasted for two years, with an option for extension. This agreement stated that forest cover must be maintained above 80%, as set out in the Forest Code. Crucially, if the coverage fell below this level, all beneficiaries in the area would lose their cash payments.

Participants could attend training sessions on alternative land uses, sustainable production and enterprise development, and marketing of eco-friendly products, if the manager of the Conservation Unit³

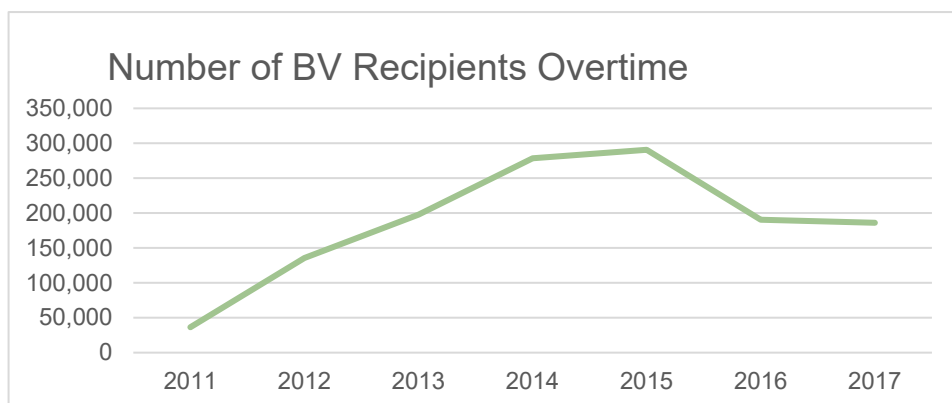
succeeded in obtaining funds to support the training. The scheme offered opportunities for employment in latex extraction, artisanal fishing and handicraft production (ILO, 2015).

BV was trialed in a smaller area before being rolled out to all areas of forest cover. Monitoring and testing took place at the local level; this was conducted by local managers, and varied depending on area, type of forest cover and population density. From a broader perspective, the existing Bolsa Família (BF) acted as an ongoing test that monitored poverty levels and improved social protection scheme mechanisms over time, paving the way for the working infrastructure of BV.

REACH AND POVERTY REDUCTION

In 2011 BV covered priority areas² spanning 61% of the forest area in the Legal Amazon⁴ region of Brazil (Bindo, 2012), accounting for 28.7m hectares in total (WWP, 2017), and by 2012 it had been expanded to priority areas nationally (Schwartz et al., 2016; ECLAC, 2019). Meanwhile the number of individuals enrolled in BV increased from 36,400 in 2011 to peak at 290,636 in 2015. The subsequent drop in the number of recipients was due to a cut in funding following a change of government in 2016.

Figure 1: Number of BV recipients over time, 2011–17



By December 2015, 74,522 previously neglected households had received conditional cash benefits of R\$300 per month (UNRISD, 2016), or 290,636 individuals (ECLAC, 2019). Qualitative research has shown that BV alleviated immediate poverty by supplementing BF benefits and providing recipients with a guaranteed income (MDS, 2016). This security was important, given the vulnerability of rural livelihoods to shocks and seasonal fluctuations. The BV scheme also contributed to poverty alleviation through the normalization of pro-environmental activities and the creation of new job opportunities through the training provided. More significantly, it enabled participants to buy additional household goods and 'tools' that could accumulate value and help them to increase their incomes over the long term e.g. the purchase of equipment for fishing (nets, hooks) and production inputs, such as machetes, boots, clothes

and school materials for their children. Some recipients also noted that additional income enabled them to travel to cities (often several hours away by boat) to sell products and generate a greater income.

Poverty reduction can also be inferred by comparing changes in productivity (indicated by increased access to new 'tools') between BV recipients and non-recipients (Andrade, 2018), through qualitative data (MDS, 2016) and through improvements in access to electricity (Andrade, 2018; MDS, 2016). Data from the years 2011–15 show that BV recipients had a probability 14.8–22.1% higher of acquiring new tools. This is statistically significant, and is associated with increased productivity of between 39.6% and 44.7% in BV areas. Furthermore, in making new livelihood behaviours a shared norm, there was potential for these to become entrenched and be sustained for long-term poverty alleviation.

Carbon reduction

A recent study⁵ has shown that deforestation in BV areas was between 44% and 53% less than the counterfactual, creating carbon reduction benefits valued at around \$335m between 2011 and 2015. This was about three times the cost of the programme (Wong et al., 2019).

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Rather than just providing cash payments, BV actively sought to tackle the structural causes of poverty in rural areas including unsustainable practices which were contributing to the depletion of natural resources, and lack of skills and tools to find alternative livelihood sources.

Livelihoods were improved in the short term via recipients' access to cash payments that provided security and supplemented BF income. These payments, in turn, meant that essential materials and supplies could be bought, such as more efficient tools and travel to cities, improving productivity and income opportunities (MDS, 2016). In the longer term this additional cash helped to shift livelihood practices away from deforestation (with forest resources often being used as an additional source of income in times of economic stress).

Furthermore, the livelihoods trainings, though not reaching all areas, provided beneficiaries with skills and opportunities in sustainable activities such as latex extraction, artisanal fishing and handicraft production (ILO, 2015) to increase and diversify their incomes and discourage environmentally degrading practices, as these were then seen as less economically viable (Schwartz et al., 2016).

Another key aspect of changing recipients' behaviours and practices was the scheme's contractual agreement (Wong et al., 2019). The fact that all participants would lose their cash payments if forest cover fell below agreed levels encouraged an area-wide change in behaviour, such as increased reporting of illegal logging, and created a sense of community

in helping to set up local, sustainable small-scale industries (Wong et al., 2019). Wong et al. (2019) suggest there is evidence that the incentives provided by BV to report illegal activities contributed to the adoption of sustainable community behaviours that reduced deforestation.

Inclusivity

The BV scheme benefited previously neglected people living in extreme poverty in the Amazon region. To be eligible for the scheme, people had to be earning less than R\$77 (later R\$85) per month and be living in a priority rural area (identified in the Forest Code as a sustainable use zone, national forest, agrarian reform settlement or indigenous territory). None of the available data were disaggregated by gender or ethnicity.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

An essential component of transformative poverty alleviation schemes is their ability to sustain positive impacts over time. The picture for BV is mixed (Table 1).

Table 1: Sustainability of impacts of BV over time

Component	Sustainable?
Culturally	Yes
Environmentally	Yes
Politically	No
Institutionally	Yes/No
Financially	Yes/No

BV was considered environmentally sustainable because of the decrease seen in deforestation and the incentivization of sustainable activities by participants (Wong et al., 2019). However, a challenging aspect of the scheme was its vulnerability to domestic political change. A government with a social democratic agenda was a key part of the enabling environment in the run-up to and roll-out of BV. Although top-down, government-led poverty alleviation schemes can be beneficial in terms of scaling up and coordinating multiple actors, they can also be swiftly withdrawn. BV, as a component of Brasil Sem Miséria (BSM), was associated with a large amount of social spending in Brazil and an increase in public debt, which rose from 51.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012 to more than 73% in 2017 (World Bank, 2017; Nucifora and Raiser, 2018). Following the election of a new government in 2016, the BV programme was cancelled.

Financially, BV had been considered administratively cost-effective by the government and the treasury (SIOP, 2014) because its integration with existing schemes meant that little new infrastructure or few institutions needed to be created. It was also seen as cost-effective in being sustainable for beneficiaries (Ibid.). BV cash payments ended if recipients graduated out of poverty, and the programme provided them

with training in alternative job opportunities and livelihood practices that were sustainable by design.

Institutionally, the stakeholder arrangement of BV was highly sustainable. A specific description of actors' roles meant that there were clear guidelines and responsibilities, which allowed for coordinated effort at different scales. Furthermore, in being part of the wider BSM programme and building on BF, BV was part of existing frameworks, meaning that there were few challenges involved in its design and making it easy to implement. However, as was seen in the cuts to BV, a change in government can result in such institutions being swiftly dismantled or removed altogether.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENED

SCALING PATHWAYS AND STRATEGIES

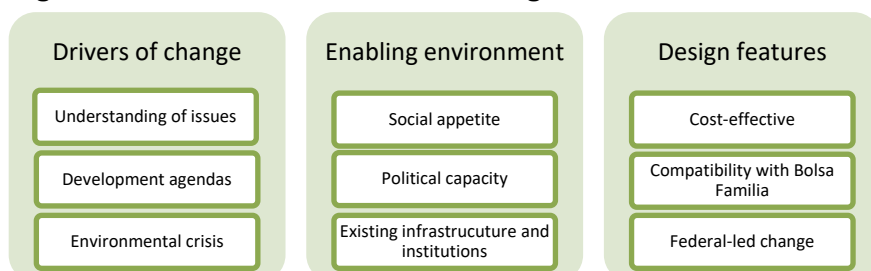
BV was an intentional strategy driven by the federal government, extending over the period 2011–15. The decision to implement it was not taken spontaneously but was the result of various drivers of change, together with an enabling environment and key design features that enabled BV to emerge as a concept and to be put into practice. The programme was subsequently terminated due to a change of government and the introduction of austerity policies.

The pathways to scale were vertical and horizontal. Vertical scaling was relatively easy as although BV involved new government legislation and funding, it built on and extended existing institutional programmes (such as Bolsa Familia). The programme also encouraged horizontal scaling of more sustainable farming behaviours via the collective contracts.

CONTEXTUAL DRIVERS

A number of long-term contextual factors and actors initially enabled scaling (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Contextual factors and design characteristics of BV



New understanding and policy paradigms

New understanding, visions and policy paradigms relating to the causes of poverty and deforestation were key drivers of BV. The decision to focus on remote areas of the Amazon was part of a widespread recognition and new understanding that in Brazil poverty is largely rural and existing social protection schemes have been ineffective in targeting these areas. Both national and international development agendas have included discussions around these needs, and there was also social appetite for change.

BV also represented a new vision and understanding about the importance of the environment for access to resources and services, sustainable livelihoods and hence poverty reduction. As a leader in social protection schemes and a pioneer of conservation protection mechanisms, Brazil used this understanding to pay citizens to protect the environment, which is important for the way the government – as well as global conservation and development communities – understands how to incentivize pro-environmental behaviour.

The vision underpinning BV was also informed in part by wider academic literature on the environment and development and growing public awareness about the interconnections between poverty and the environment.

Political factors

BV was part of a wider shift in political commitment in Brazil at the time to social inclusivity and a political consensus that action must be taken to tackle poverty. This shift was apparent at multiple levels of society, from party leaders (who were striving to be innovators of change) to civil society (whose members demanded greater government action) and people actually living in poverty.

In 2002 Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva was elected as President, putting a more socialist government in office. The new government introduced a number of redistributive policies, including in 2004 launching BF, which has become the world's largest social protection scheme (Sarwar, 2018). Both BF and subsequently the BSM and then BV schemes resonated with the public and were aligned with the majority political view at the time that extreme poverty is linked to a lack of service provision and support. They were also closely aligned with ruling political values focused on social responsibility, innovative poverty alleviation efforts and inclusion. This, combined with an increasing number of global environmental agendas and commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), created a conducive political environment for the scheme.

Institutional policies and practices

National environmental agendas in Brazil evolved alongside international policies and frameworks. Of particular importance for BV were the Forest Code (revised in 2012; Tollefson, 2011), the introduction of Sustainable Development Reserves (SDRs) (1999), the Amazon Region Protected

Areas Program (ARPA) (2003), The Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon , PCCDAM (2004) and the Management of Public Forests and Protected Areas Law (2006), which recognized the urgency of forest conservation and sought to include local land owners.

There was a suitable existing infrastructure that allowed BV to be adopted into existing schemes. Caixa Econômica Federal – a bank providing monitoring services and infrastructure for social registration – played a key role in this (Sarwar, 2018). Brazil has a history of anti-poverty programmes, most notably BF, which provides conditional cash transfers to improve health and education; to receive payments, participants must carry out certain actions, such as vaccinations and attending school.

BSM, of which BV formed a part, was introduced by the Rousseff government in 2011 and targeted poor households as part of a wider commitment to end extreme poverty within four years. BSM is based on three pillars:

- A guaranteed income, for immediate relief from extreme poverty;
- Access to public services, aimed at improving conditions for the education, health and citizenship of families;
- Productive inclusion, with the aim of improving skills and increasing job opportunities and income generation among the poorest rural and urban families.

BV extended the work done by BF and BSM by directing more money to the poorest regions to improve inclusivity, and by targeting aspects of livelihoods beyond health and education by looking at environmental protection and ensuring the rights of citizens.

Individuals

The political context of BV was a key component of change, including the political parties and specific individuals in power. President Lula was a key figure in promoting the idea of BF in the 2002 elections and subsequently in keeping social protection schemes controlled at the executive level to avoid corruption. BF was the centrepiece of his social policy and was launched in 2003 after he took power, by amalgamating existing social funds. Like BF, BSM and BV were subsequently used as tools for political legitimacy (Sarwar, 2018); Dilma Rousseff made them a key agenda item during her campaign for election as President in 2011 to bolster support for the ruling party and to attract voters in rural northern states (Ortiz, 2011). Initiating BV alongside a change of government in 2011 acted as a window of opportunity for rolling out a new policy in a context of social appetite, political will and ability.

Economic/market forces

The causes of poverty and deforestation in Brazil are many and complex. Among other factors, increasing globalization and growing demand for forest and animal products have been associated with driving deforestation (WWF, 2018; Fearnside, 2017), while corporate dominance

in rural Brazil has been criticized for undermining local livelihoods and exacerbating extreme poverty (Buys, 2007; Parayil and Tong, 1998).

Climate change crisis

The climate crisis has also focused growing attention on the environment. Conserving the Amazon is widely recognized as a vital and urgent action that must be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preserve biodiversity and allow the global ecosystem and human societies to function.

FURTHER DETAILS

The decision to extend Bolsa Verde was based on the success of an initial pilot, covering priority areas in 61% of the forest area and 36,400 people, in reaching its intended participants and having a positive and immediate impact on poverty and deforestation. Additionally, the scheme's design features made scaling up relatively easy and appealing. For instance, BV was considered to be administratively cost-effective: in the 2014 Budget, R\$3.6m was allocated for administrative costs compared with R\$102.6 million for benefit payments, meaning that administration accounted for just a 3.4% share of the costs (SIOP, 2014). Scaling was also enabled by BV's compatibility with existing schemes such as BF, which meant that the social protection infrastructure and institutions necessary for scaling already existed.

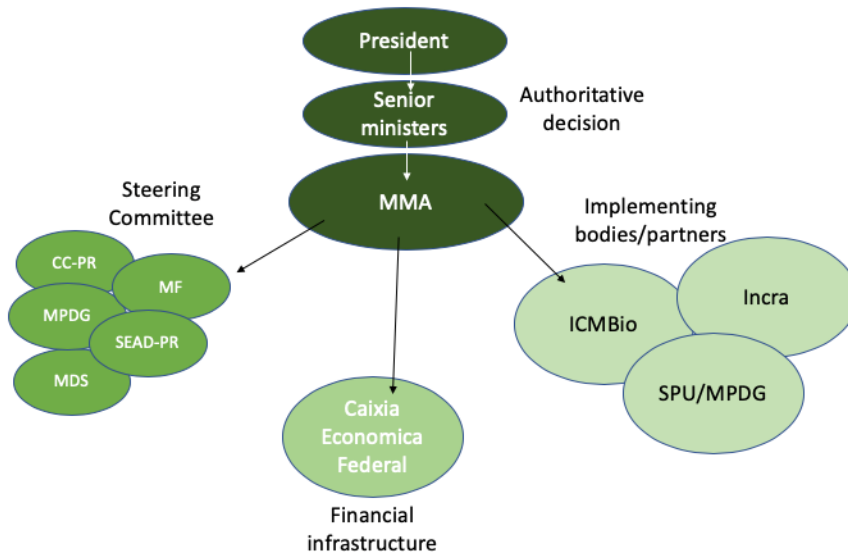
In addition, BV was led by the federal government, which had the power and capacity to extend it; in Brazil social policies are universal competencies that are coordinated horizontally and vertically between departments and with more localized government regimes (Kull et al., 2017). The top-down nature of change meant that the government was able to shift funds accordingly and update policy to roll out the programme on a wider scale (Schwartz et al., 2016). This scaling involved increasing the number of local managers who acted as on-the-ground contacts and monitors and automatically enrolling eligible people already on BF schemes into BV in target areas.

As well as the government, other essential actors were involved in Brazil's social protection schemes; there was a clear action plan in terms of the responsibilities and roles of different institutions, from the national to the local level (WWP, 2017).

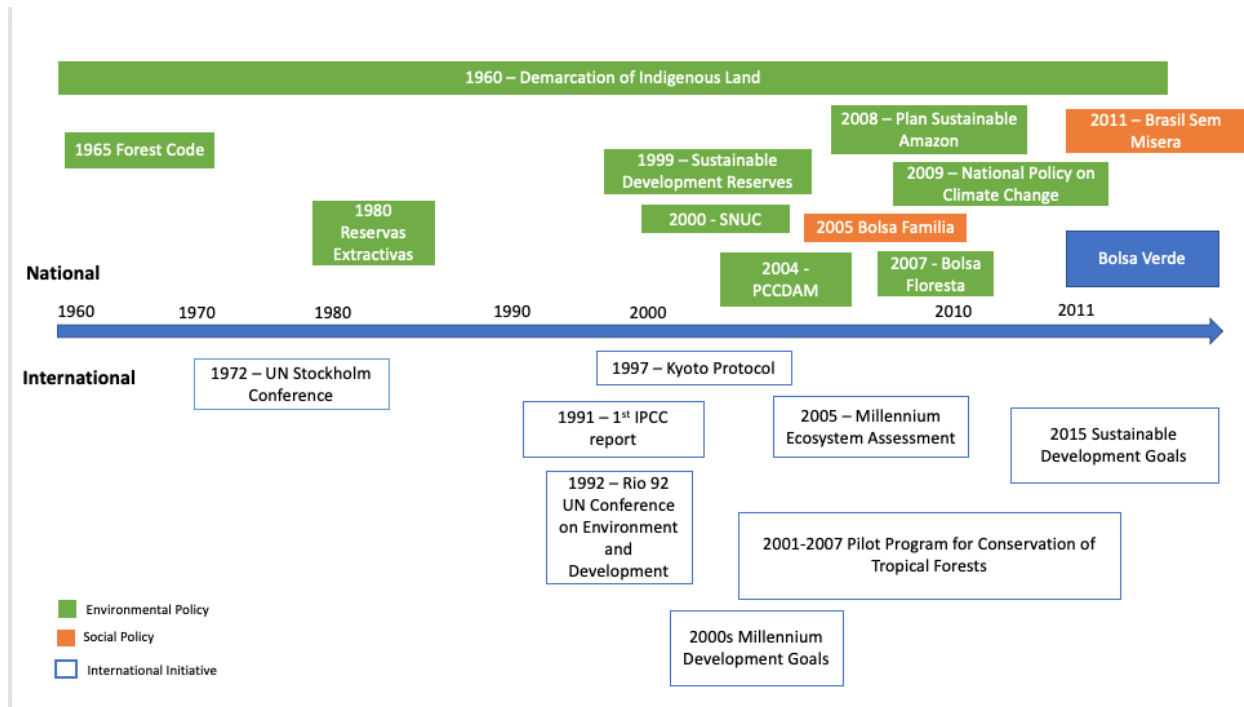
- The Steering Committee⁶ monitored and selected beneficiaries, while the Ministry of Environment (MAA) led the execution of projects; universities were also part of the monitoring and evaluation process.
- The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) identified beneficiaries, coordinated actions with municipal social assistance institutions and planned the training of technical teams in order to promote access to social assistance services and infrastructure offered by the Single Social Assistance System (SUAS).

- Caixa Econômica Federal performed the transfer of BV funds, working with implementing partners⁷ and local management bodies which monitored compliance and enrolled and trained participants. These partnerships also made it easy to reach populations in extremely remote areas.

Figure 3: Decision-making structure in the implementation of BV



TIMELINE



ANNEX: AT A GLANCE

<i>Case study name and key organization</i>	<i>Bolsa Verde</i> (Green Grant), a government-led and implemented initiative that aimed to reduce deforestation and extreme poverty simultaneously, through conditional payments and livelihoods training.
<i>Geographical location</i>	Brazil – Legal Amazon region.
<i>Country indicators</i>	<p>Brazil</p> <p>Income – upper-middle-middle-economy, but high unemployment. (World Bank, 2020).</p> <p>Inequality – high inequality, Palma ratio of 4.06 in 2018 (UNU-WIDER, 2019).</p> <p>Human Development Index – high HDI ranking, at 79th of 189 countries (UNDP, 2019).</p> <p>Gender gap – ranked 92nd of 153 countries (WEF, 2020).</p> <p>Civic space: rated as ‘Obstructed’ (CIVICUS, 2020)</p> <p>Fragility – Elevated Warning (Fund for Peace, 2019).</p> <p>Climate risk – ranked 88th of 181 countries for 1999-2018 (Eckstein et al., 2020).</p> <p>Ecological threat – Low exposure (Ecological Threat Register, 2020)</p>
<i>Time period</i>	2011–18.
<i>Systemic challenge</i>	Climate change and resource depletion. Economic inequality.
<i>Type(s) of poverty reduction</i>	Increased income More secure access to resources Sustainable livelihoods. Reduced deforestation
<i>Scale of poverty reduction</i>	74,522 previously neglected families living in extreme poverty in the Amazon received conditional cash benefits. Deforestation in BV areas was between 44% and 53% less than the counterfactual, creating carbon reduction benefits valued at around \$335m between 2011 and 2015. This was about three times the cost of the programme.
<i>Structural changes</i>	Improved/new government safety nets More sustainable farming behaviours and practices Strengthened farmers skills Greater access to tools.
<i>Routes to scale</i>	Vertical, functional and horizontal
<i>Limitations</i>	Politically unstable.
<i>Quality of evidence</i>	The quality of evidence about the programmes outcomes, impact and contribution is medium-/low-quality. The study has not accessed government data but has drawn on data from evaluations, academic research and other sources.

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NOTES

- 1 Defined as households with a monthly income of below R\$77.
- 2 Priority rural areas were identified by the Ministry of Environment as 900 key areas for conservation, between 1998 and 2000 (MMA, 2007)
- 3 Conservation Units were created as part of ongoing land reform (Law 11.284/2006) where public land has been designated to local communities, that form part of protected areas. These are managed by the Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (Chico Mendes Institute for the Conservation of Biodiversity (ICMBio)), a federal government agency linked to the Ministry of Environment. Conservation Units matter to BV because it means that local families that are responsible for the forest; they are the 'forest guardians'
- 4 The Legal Amazon is a socio-geographic division in Brazil, covering 5,032 million km², including 9 states in the Amazon Basin: all of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins, most of Mato Grosso in the Center-West Region and the western part of Maranhão in the Northeast Region.
- 5 Based on a sample of BV recipients living in the Legal Amazon region over the period 2011–15.
- 6 The Steering Committee consists of the Presidency's Chief of Staff Office (CC-PR); the CC-PR's Special Secretariat for Family Agriculture and Agrarian Development (SEAD-PR); the Ministry of Social Development (MDS); the Ministry of Finance (MF); and the Ministry of Planning, Development and Management (MPDG).
- 7 The Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio); the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA); and the Secretariat for the Union's Heritage under the Ministry of Planning, Development and Management (SPU/MPDG).



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