

Chapter title	CHAPTER 24 – USE OF EVIDENCE IN POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR RURAL PRODUCTIVE INCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA
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DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.38116/978-65-5635-070-7/chapter24

Book title	PUBLIC POLICY AND USE OF EVIDENCE IN BRAZIL: CONCEPTS, METHODS, CONTEXTS AND PRACTICES
Editors	Natália Massaco Koga Pedro Lucas de Moura Palotti Janine Mello Maurício Mota Saboya Pinheiro
Volume	-
Series	-
City	Brasilia
Publisher	Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea)
Year	2024
Edition	-
ISBN	978-65-5635-070-7
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.38116/978-65-5635-070-7

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USE OF EVIDENCE IN POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR RURAL PRODUCTIVE INCLUSION IN LATIN AMERICA¹

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1 INTRODUCTION

The challenge of reducing poverty and including people in economic life through labor has received increasing attention from policymakers. Among the factors that have driven this debate are the limits faced by cash transfer policies (World Bank, 2020); the economic and employment crises experienced by emerging countries (World Bank, 2019); the recent dynamics of global capitalism, supported by labor-saving technologies and sectors (Albuquerque et al., 2019); and the intensification of previous problems due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (Vahdat et al., 2020). It is in view of this context that different programs have been designed with goals such as providing technical and vocational training, connecting workers with job openings, and offering credit and other resources for establishing small businesses. This set of interventions has often been called productive inclusion or economic inclusion interventions.

Even though the public debate is often dominated by the challenges experienced in urban centers, most of the actions undertaken in these interventions take place in rural areas, where most of the people living in poverty are still concentrated. On a global scale, almost two-thirds of the population in this situation live in rural areas. In Brazil, while 84% of the population live in areas considered urban, among the people in poverty, 50% of them are located in rural areas (IBGE, 2012).

1. The information and analyses assembled in this text were assembled by the authors in the framework of activities conducted in the scope of the Itinerant Chair on Rural Productive Inclusion, an initiative of the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning (Cebrap), in partnership with the Arymax and Tide Setubal Foundations and the Humanize Institute.

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As for the interventions promoted in the field of productive inclusion worldwide, according to the mapping of the Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI), promoted by the World Bank, 88% of the initiatives devote their attention to rural areas.⁵

By analyzing the state of productive inclusion programs around the world, PEI identifies that establishing a broad evidence base is a critical challenge for the greater effectiveness of what is being done. In this sense, the report reinforces that we need to keep learning about the first-hand experiences being produced by countries that have also had to respond to changing contexts of poverty and different social trends (Andrews et al., 2021). For this learning to take place and result in continued improvements in interventions, it is critical to deepen reflection on how evidence is being used and what can be improved in this particular field.

Despite the growing appreciation of the use of evidence in public policy-making, the available literature highlights, from the standpoint of theoretical formulation, the plastic character of the concept – it involves many dimensions and includes a certain diversity of interpretations. One of the available definitions describes evidence as any informative tools, assembled by policymakers and other interested social players, employed in public policy decisions, in a given contextual framework (Pineiro, 2020). Koga et al. (2020) point out that, when addressing the use of evidence, it is important to avoid both the rationalist position – which assumes that the simple use of evidence would allow for the proper instruction of public action based on the best available information, without worrying about other conditions of decision-making – and the hyper-politicizing position – which argues that the practice of planning and policy management could do without a justification supported by knowledge about the problem addressed and the learning obtained from other forms of intervention on similar realities. Pineiro (2020) suggests adopting an intermediate position, in which evidence is taken into consideration, but without losing sight of the contextual framework within which they operate.

This chapter has a double purpose – one of a theoretical nature and empirical one. From the theoretical angle, it aims to show that for the use of evidence to meet its goal of informing the decision-making process, three interdependent questions must be answered. First, one must ask: *evidence about what?* This is not just about defining the area of an intervention or policy. The point of this question is that there are different ways of defining the problem on which one wants to act. Using the same denomination – for example, rural productive inclusion – one can delimit the causes of the problem in different aspects of reality: the available technology, the level of capitalization, the access to markets, the basic living conditions,

5. PEI Data Portal – landscape dashboard. Available at: <https://www.peiglobal.org/pei-data-portal>. Accessed on: Apr. 2, 2021.

and combinations of these various dimensions. And this will play a crucial role in defining what evidence needs to be considered. Next, one has to ask: *evidence for what?* That is, there are different ways to act on the problem outlined. And each path implies different repertoires of actions that also call, each of them, for certain types of evidence in support. For example, multidimensional actions call for evidence about the interdependencies among the mobilized areas, and not only about the object of each of them, while top-down and unidimensional actions tend to require only evidence about the monitoring of their implementation. Thus, it is only after exploring these two questions, and in light of the choices they force us to make, that we could try to answer the question: *what evidence to assemble?*

From an empirical perspective, we aim to demonstrate that, by devoting our attention exclusively to the issues of *evidence about what* and *evidence for what*, the Latin American experiences in the field of productive inclusion have relied only partially on evidence and, in doing so, have achieved limited results. To demonstrate this argument, we analyzed the experiences of rural productive inclusion programs in five Latin American countries, which represent some of the main efforts made in the region in the past decade. One implication of the conclusions drawn from this analysis is that a future generation of policies on this topic will have to assemble different types of evidence and, to do so, respond to the triad mentioned above if it wants to move beyond the limits of the previous generation.

Framing the issue of evidence with these inquiries allows us to place the discussion regarding its use in an inseparably cognitive, structural, and contextual approach. That is, we believe that in this way one can operate with Pinheiro's (2020) warning, taking into account that there are political options involved in shaping interventions and selecting what kind of information counts as evidence, but also avoiding a hyper-politicizing view, since, conversely, the quality of data and information used as evidence affects and is affected by the repertoire of values and practices of managers and professionals involved with a public policy or program.

To develop these arguments, this chapter is organized into three sections in addition to this introduction. Section 2 focuses on the question of *evidence about what?* The discussion presented indicates that the evidence, in the cases of the policy initiatives and strategies for rural productive inclusion analyzed, was assembled especially to support the targeting of the efforts on the poorest. This was accompanied by a multidimensional approach to poverty and, as such, covered several domains beyond the constraints on household monetary income. But looking at the interventions specifically, the use of an approach based on the interdependencies among the various dimensions of poverty proved to be only partial, in most cases. This adaptation, as will be shown, has shaped the repertoire of actions put into practice in each of the countries. This is why section 3 introduces the question of

evidence for what? In this section, the discussion shows that, despite acknowledging the need for multi-component approaches, the interventions had great difficulty overcoming the fragmentation of the components assembled. They were implemented in a juxtaposed manner, with little or no coordination and integration. This was reflected in the way evidence involving the implementation of policies was assembled in the implementation of initiatives, with separate monitoring for each component, focusing on its isolated aspects (number of families served by initiative, amounts spent), but without paying attention to the ways of combining the mix of components made possible by policies and programs or the results that would indicate effective changes in the productive condition (increase in productivity, occupations, labor income etc.).

As it may have been clear, the answer to the question of *what evidence was or should have been assembled* is an unfolding of the answers obtained for the two previous questions. Therefore, at the end of sections 2 and 3, we discuss the implications of the considerations presented for the use of evidence by the programs. Additionally, section 4 brings the final considerations of this text, discussing the gaps identified and indicates the need to assemble other types of evidence in order to enhance interventions in the field of productive inclusion more coherently and consistently, with a multidimensional and relational approach, i.e., supported by interdependencies. It is precisely this that will make it possible to avoid a certain technicality in the discussion on the use of evidence, and also a hyper-politicizing or even voluntaristic version of the use of evidence.

2 EVIDENCE ABOUT WHAT?

To begin the discussion on evidence, it is important to define the problem that is being addressed. In this sense, in the case of productive inclusion, it is useful to consider how the discussion on poverty reduction in rural areas has evolved in the past decades until reaching contemporary approaches and the current or recent ways in which programs in the region understand the problem of economic exclusion. It is based on this analytical movement that we will be able to understand what the programs have sought to assemble as evidence and what are the consequences of this.

2.1 The emergence of the rural productive inclusion approach

The concern with rural development and poverty reduction in the countryside has evolved over time, giving rise to different approaches. In the case of Brazil, for example, until the mid-1950s, the strategy adopted for rural areas was based on a policy of expanding the agricultural border in fertile lands, through an extensive production pattern and cheap labor, without paying closer attention to other dimensions of development (Santana et al., 2014), it was also expected

that migration to the cities would be enough to absorb the surplus labor existing in the countryside. With the acceleration of the country's urbanization from the mid-1950s on, pressures on the development pattern of rural areas arose and two perspectives dominated the public debate: one that favored agrarian reform as the central strategy to expand production, and another that advocated for technological modernization, based on the Green Revolution framework (Buainain, 1999). The second perspective ended up prevailing and gained strength in the 1970s, creating a link between credit and the adoption of technological packages, which led to *compulsory modernization* among rural producers. The result was extremely unequal: while some establishments became integrated and increased their competitiveness, the vast majority were marginalized and hundreds of thousands disappeared (Souza Filho and Buainain, 2010).

To support small producers in rural areas, projects inspired by the idea of integrated rural development (IRDP) were promoted in the 1980s. This approach recognized that the Green Revolution had not managed to benefit small farmers and, therefore, proposed a set of interventions that emphasized the productive aspect of rural development and paid special attention to improving the supply conditions of rural producers (Garcia, 2003). Typically, the interventions were organized around three complementary axes: i) infrastructure development, especially the construction and improvement of roads; ii) technical assistance services to help farmers implement technologies; and iii) credit lines to make the necessary investments feasible. Unfortunately, the IRDP projects failed in their goals. They were too expensive and were not able to reverse the selectivity that the modernization of agriculture had set in motion. The fiscal crisis experienced by Latin American countries in the same period undermined this perspective, creating a vacuum for the time to come.

In a period that started in the 1990s and lasted until the early 2000s, a new approach to rural development emerged, supported by cash transfer programs and other social benefits and by offering specific production support policies to family farmers. Considering once again the Brazilian case, the 1990s saw the extension of social security rights for rural workers. The Bolsa Escola and Vale Gás programs were also created, later expanded with the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) in the 2000s, shaping a national conditional cash transfer policy (Castro and Modesto, 2010). In turn, policies were created to address different economic needs of rural areas, particularly family farming, addressing a broader set of challenges than before. Some examples of policies in this period are: in 1996 the National Program for the Strengthening of Family Farming (Pronaf) was created to improve access to credit for producers; in 2003 the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) was created to improve access to markets through public purchases, overcoming the exclusive focus of policies on supply conditions; in 2004 the Agricultural Activity Guarantee

Program (Proagro) was created, which sought to provide insurance services for family farming (Guanziroli et al., 2019). A similar pattern can be found in other Latin American countries (Sabourin and Grisa, 2018).

Through the adoption of these sets of policies and in a context of economic growth, Latin America has made significant progress in reducing poverty. According to the World Bank, between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty in Latin America (including rural and urban areas) dropped from 25.5% to 10.8%, while the population living in poverty dropped from 42.8% to 23.4% (World Bank, 2019).

However, at the end of the 2000s, amid the fiscal crisis of the countries, it became clear that there were also limits to the policies undertaken. On the one hand, cash transfer policies, successful in alleviating poverty, did not have the same success in what is conventionally called an *escape hatch* from dependence on these benefits, given that they were not able to guarantee better job opportunities for this population and also due to the limited results in reducing the so-called *intergenerational poverty* (World Bank, 2020; Araújo, Bosch and Schady, 2017). On the other hand, support policies for rural producers in many cases were mostly accessed by the better-structured producers, while the weaker ones remained on the margins (Aquino and Schneider, 2015).

Thus, a *hard core* of poverty was found to exist in several countries, which persisted despite the expansion of public policy efforts. Added to this panorama, the economic and employment crisis experienced particularly by emerging countries in the middle of the last decade led to setbacks in the progress achieved (World Bank, 2019) as well as a weakening of labor relations. According to the World Bank, although Latin America has reduced poverty in the period from 2002-2016, the percentage of economically vulnerable people rose from 34% to 38% in the same period (World Bank, 2018).

The productive inclusion programs emerged within this context, depending on the country, between the mid-2000s and the early 2010s, aiming precisely to respond to the challenges that presented themselves. Seeking to reach the extremely poor, productive inclusion programs assumed that it was only by increasing household income through work that poverty could be reduced in the long term (Rigolini, 2016; World Bank, 2020). At the same time, the approach is inspired by the proposal of unmet basic needs, disseminated by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Latin America. According to this approach, it is necessary to combine productive inclusion mechanisms with mechanisms to solve other needs that affect people's chances of inclusion. Therefore, productive inclusion programs were inserted as components of broader anti-poverty programs, conducted by ministries or secretariats dedicated to social development, which sought to offer, in a coordinated manner, different types of interventions.

Several Latin American countries have undertaken programs based on the productive inclusion approach. In this chapter, they are used as cases to support the discussion on evidence use: the rural productive inclusion route of Plano Brasil sem Miséria (Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan), created by the Brazilian government in 2011; the Chile Solidario and Ingreso Ético Familiar (IEF) programs, created in 2002 and 2012, respectively, by the Chilean government; Peru's Haku Wiñay program, created in 2014; the Oportunidades Rurales program, whose origins date back to the late 1960s, but which was extensively reformulated in cooperation agreements between the Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola (Fida) and the Colombian government throughout the 2000s; and the Mexican government's Programa Territorios Productivos (PTP), which began in 2015. The current status of each of these programs at the beginning of the third decade of the century is variable. Therefore, the information used concerns the stages of design and implementation of each of them over the last decade, and not their current condition.

And it is also important to note that the initiatives analyzed in this study are of different orders. Some are specific programs, as is the case of Peru and Colombia. Others are strategies or rationales that bring together different programs, as is the case of Brazil and Chile. In some of the discussions it might even be more appropriate, for example, to compare the Haku Wiñay program with the Programa Fomento Rural, which is a component of the rural productive inclusion route strategy of Brazil Without Extreme Poverty. However, the very decision to unify the actions in a single program or keep them distributed seems relevant to the analysis presented here. Thus, despite the existing differences, discussing the experiences precisely by exploring these contrasts is a path that offers a rich panorama for the purposes of this chapter, which intends to show how the use of evidence is not, at risk of being redundant or self-evident; on the contrary, it is something variable and dependent on contexts and choices, conscious or not, explicit or implicit in decision-making processes.

2.2 The different definitions of the programs for the problem of economic exclusion in rural areas

Typically, productive inclusion interventions have aimed to support the population in extreme poverty to enter the labor world. When considering rural areas, it is important to acknowledge that most of the population living in poverty is already inserted, often in weakened productive units seeking to ensure their subsistence. Thus, more than inserting this population into the labor world, the general goal of productive inclusion interventions, in this case, is to support populations living in extreme poverty to improve their production conditions or market participation.

Even though the programs considered in this study share this general goal, there are differences in the way they define the problem of economic exclusion. By comparing the selected programs in the region, it is possible to identify at

least two differences: i) the existence (or not) of a distinction in the lines of work aimed at rural areas in comparison with urban areas; and ii) the fields of issue identified as relevant in overcoming economic exclusion. These two matters will be addressed below.

Productive inclusion programs are often based on the premise that the challenges experienced by rural areas differ from those in urban areas, which leads to the definition of differentiated strategies for each type of space. Among the experiences analyzed, only the Chilean programs did not offer a distinguished look at rural areas. In the case of these programs, it was assumed that extreme poverty is equally distributed among the population and, therefore, the same program could serve different contexts. Fernández et al. (2016) point out that, even though the type of productive activity typically carried out in each space differs, Chilean programs were markedly urban and did not consider the particularities existing in rural areas, such as the distances that need to be covered by these populations to reach markets or the difficulty in accessing services and infrastructure.

In the other programs that have taken a specific look at rural areas, it is interesting to observe that the predominant perspective establishes an equivalence between rural spaces and agricultural activity. This is especially the case in Brazil, as well as in Peru and Colombia, which assume that productive exclusion is mainly the result of insufficient agricultural production to generate income. This is particularly relevant because literature has pointed since the 1990s to the declining trend of farming in the incorporation of labor and in the constitution of rural families' income, due to the increasing adoption of technologies (Ramírez, 2019). With this, the importance of the so-called *non-agricultural rural opportunities* (Graziano da Silva, 1999) and multiactivity (Schneider, 2003). Nevertheless, even though there are a few exceptions, the efforts of the programs have been directed at equipping family establishments to improve their production and insertion in agricultural markets (Mello et al., 2014; Fida, 2007; Asensio, 2021). Thus, as much as a difference can be established with the approach adopted for urban areas – typically focused on technical training and labor intermediation programs – it is possible to say that the initiatives designed have maintained traces of a traditional, or sectoral, view of rural areas.

The only exception to that is the Mexican program, which acknowledged the role of agricultural and nonagricultural incomes for rural areas. The PTP was based on the understanding that there is a declining trend in the importance of agricultural income for the economic reproduction of rural families, which are increasingly dependent on other occupations (Berdegué et al., 2015). In its operation, Territorios Productivos sought to understand the weight of these other activities in the composition of family income, the diverse strategies of economic reproduction, and the rural-urban flows that are established (youth migration,

commuting etc.) and, based on this reading, to encourage synergies between these spaces (Berdegué et al., 2015).

As for the problem areas considered by each initiative, in addition to the economic dimension itself, there is a relative consensus that it would be necessary to address both basic needs and productive capacities to support rural families. If from the productive angle, a traditional vision restricted to agricultural activities was repeated, here there is something new. Reflecting the understanding that poverty is a multidimensional problem, and not only an economic one, the programs sought to address a variety of needs, such as access to basic sanitation, water, housing, electricity, education, health and official registration services, and the transfer of income – either through the programs themselves or through complementary actions. The argument here is that the precariousness of these basic conditions affects the capacity of families to better use their assets – knowledge, labor power, land, and natural resources – to develop the productive dimension. The Chilean programs differed from the others in this respect as well, by identifying the need for people experiencing poverty to develop capabilities and attitudes that promote the families' autonomous development (Larrañaga, Contreras and Cabezas, 2015).

Regarding productive capacities, the programs analyzed coincide in highlighting the challenges of lack of technical training and poor access to financial resources. However, there is a difference regarding the type of knowledge that is considered necessary to be assembled. While the programs in Brazil, Chile and Mexico recognize the importance of knowledge provided by technical assistance services, the cases of Peru and Colombia have pointed out the need for interventions to be culturally adapted as well. In this sense, the Haku Wiñay program relied heavily on the figure of local experts, called *yachachiqs* (*that who knows*, in Quechua), who seek to retrieve indigenous knowledge to incorporate it into the interventions and, by being inserted in the socio-cultural dynamics of the communities, have privileged knowledge of the area, its features and the needs of rural families (Asensio, 2021). In the Colombian program, it was also acknowledged the importance of mobilizing local talents – who belong to the communities themselves and have outstanding and applied knowledge to solve common problems – and promoting the exchange of experiences, in a process that values local knowledge in the search for adapted solutions (Procasur, 2017).

Also, with regard to productive capacities, the programs analyzed differ in the attention they give to the difficulty of accessing markets. Most of the programs implicitly assumed that, as farmers improved their productive conditions (with access to technical assistance and credit), they would be better able to increase their production and productivity and access markets. In this context, the attention to markets is indirect. The Peruvian and Mexican programs have additionally acknowledged the

need to promote diversification and the creation of innovative enterprises in rural areas. The Colombian program, on the other hand, contemplated the possibility of conducting market studies and therefore included components to foster the training of producers in this sense (Asensio, 2021; Berdegué et al., 2015; Fida, 2007). The only country that seems to have adopted a component that more directly addresses the issue of market access was Brazil, through public procurement policies (Mello et al., 2014). In this case, the policy was expected to provide a relatively stable market opportunity under good conditions and to act as an initial impulse to, as a next step, enable households to access other opportunities in conventional markets, even in the absence of specific instruments for this second type.

Finally, one last issue that the country programs addressed differently is the role assigned (or not) to territories. Some country programs identified the importance of territories in that they recognized that the challenges that exist in one place differ from those that exist in another and that the texture of territories matters for these differences. This brings demands for flexibility and adaptability to the interventions implemented and for institutional capacity at the local level to support decision-making. This is especially the case for the Peruvian and Colombian programs (Asensio, 2021; Fida, 2007). In these programs, there was not exactly a differentiation of strategies for different types of territories, but a prominent role was given to local instances of governance to adapt policy instruments to local conditions. Mexico's Territorios Productivos program took a deeper look at territories, pointing out that the economic exclusion of rural areas is also associated with the lack of participation and synergy among local actors and institutions, as well as with the underutilization of the linkages between urban and rural areas (Berdegué et al., 2015). The Chilean programs and the Brazilian program⁶ have given little or no attention to the territorial dimension, focusing essentially on the challenges experienced by individuals and families in poverty (Favareto, 2019; Fernández et al., 2016).

2.3 Evidence-assembling for defining the target audience

Once the problem of economic exclusion is understood, an important challenge is to define the target audience. To move in this direction, the programs sought to assemble different types of evidence, in order to target the interventions. The choices made indicate that there is a link between the definition of the problem of

6. Even though the Brazilian program did not adopt a territorial logic in its planning, there was a concern about paying attention to the needs presented by different regions. The Água para Todos program, for example, was one of those that made up the mix present in the Rural Productive Inclusion Route of Brazil Without Extreme Poverty, and it had a special focus on establishments in the Northeast region. The same can be said about the Bolsa Verde program, which was targeted at the Amazon region. The design and implementation of these programs required the assembling of different types of information to plan the interventions, from a better mapping of the existing infrastructure to the identification of the target audience. It should also be remembered that in the same period, there was a national territorial policy, but the execution of the productive inclusion policy did not involve the governance spaces of that initiative.

economic exclusion, the strategies for identifying and defining the target audience, and the evidence assembled.

As previously discussed, the focus of the programs in Brazil and Chile was on individuals and families living in poverty, and therefore, the definition of the target audience in these cases involved assembling evidence on different vulnerabilities based on the countries' national registries. In Brazil's case, eligible families were already targeted by the Plano Brasil sem Miséria, paying special attention to the population living in extreme poverty and including families with incomes of up to half a minimum wage per capita. To identify these families, information from the Unified Registry for Social Programs of the Federal Government (Cadastro Único) was used, systematized from a set of initiatives that also included the active search for families by social assistance professionals in the municipalities (Campello, Falcão and Costa, 2014), and the use of other information systems, such as the Pronaf Aptitude Declaration (DAP). It is worth remembering that the very creation of the Unified Registry had been an important innovation, unifying databases and information on beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, which were previously scattered in individual databases by program, with inconsistencies between them.

In Chile's case, similarly, data from the Registro Social de Hogares was used, from which the analysis of the profiles of families in different dimensions of vulnerability was carried out. Based on quantitative criteria, those below a defined score were considered eligible for the program. The Chilean initiatives added a second stage to the definition of the target audience, in which families were visited by social workers who perform a qualitative situational diagnosis and confirm whether the families can be beneficiaries of the program (Larrañaga, Contreras e Cabezas, 2015).

In the cases of Peru and Colombia, additional evidence on the space in which families are inserted was included, indicating a greater concern with the territorial dimension of productive inclusion. In the Peruvian case, the definition of the target audience took place in three stages. First, at the national level, population centers were identified in the rural areas of the country with a high incidence of poverty, a predominance of families that depend on practices characterized as subsistence economies,⁷ among other vulnerability factors, such as child malnutrition. In the Colombian case, in particular, the attention to areas marked by armed conflict is especially relevant. In the second stage, the offices at the zonal level conducted a new socio-economic assessment of the population centers, during which they sought the opinion of the municipalities, and evaluated the budgetary capacity of the zonal level for program execution. Finally, in the locations that were selected to receive the intervention, any inhabitant can enroll in the program if they wish, and

7. The definition of subsistence economy is based on the indicator of land use, which must be predominantly agricultural, and households with less than 1.3 hectares that use at least 75% of domestic labor in these activities (Asensio, 2021).

there are no restrictions related to property size or participation in other programs (Asensio, 2021). In addition to identifying the regions with predominantly rural characteristics and in which of them there is a concentration of families living in poverty, the Colombian program assessed whether there are social organizations capable of implementing the project's actions (Fida, 2007).

Finally, in Mexico's case, evidence was assembled to allow the identification of *functional territories* where the program would be implemented. First, the sites where the National Cash Transfer Program (Prospera) was in operation and there was a significant presence of small agricultural production units (less than 20 hectares) were identified. Among the sites mapped in each state, those with a higher number of Prospera beneficiaries and with more than four hundred inhabitants were identified, which would be prioritized to receive the program. The functional territories encompassed a set of municipalities, including a headland and the municipalities that are within a radius of up to 10 km and that also had a relevant presence of small properties and a minimum number of Prospera beneficiaries.

With that, it was expected that functional territories would be spaces that present intensity in economic and social interactions between inhabitants, local organizations, production units, and companies. To confirm the previous analyses, based on the country's databases, surveys were conducted to validate the territories and to analyze the existence of local organizations and their development potential (Berdegué et al., 2015).

This quick look at the diversity of rural productive inclusion experiences in Latin America shows how different ways of defining the condition of exclusion imply, consciously or not, different types of evidence to be assembled. In some cases, this involves the geographic scope of the actions – whether the evidence needs to cover the region and the relations between rural areas and urban centers, the socioeconomic conditions of the municipalities, or just the dimension of the vulnerability of the families. The same could be said about the topics that the assembled or necessary evidence should cover: if only those related to infrastructural conditions or also to the behavioral dimension, among others. And, finally, specifically on the productive dimension, whether the evidence relates only to the problems and conditions *inside* the establishments, or whether it should also involve information on the potential markets for the work and production of the families; and whether this work is limited to primary activity labor or whether the evidence should also cover the domains associated with the multiactivity of these poor families. All this, in turn, will also have repercussions on the modalities of actions to be implemented and, of course, the type of evidence that policies and interventions will also require. This is the focus of section 3: evidence for what kind of practices?

3 EVIDENCE FOR WHAT?

After defining the outlines of the problem of economic exclusion and the target audience that will be addressed, each of the programs has advanced in defining the instruments of intervention and the structures responsible for them. Next, comments will be made about how the outlines of these forms of intervention were defined, implemented, and, as a result, what repercussions these options had for the production and use of evidence.

3.1 A set of policies along a pathway

By looking at the productive inclusion programs, it is possible to note that most of them addressed the overcoming of economic exclusion through a set of policies that are organized along a pathway. The only case that does not seem to have included the idea of a pathway is the Colombian program, in which local associations formulated technical assistance or financing projects to be approved by the program management committees, but there does not seem to have been an expected sequencing. For the other countries, the notion of a pathway – or productive inclusion route, as in the Brazilian case – worked as an organizing element for the set of policies offered. However, this notion was expressed in different ways, maintaining a strong relationship with the way the problem of economic exclusion is conceived in each case.

In the Chilean and Brazilian cases, both countries designed routes that should be taken by individuals and families, reflecting their approach to productive inclusion. The pathways in this sense would be associated with two possible tracks: that of establishing a small business or that of obtaining a formal job. For rural areas, the first case is the most frequent.

In Chile's case, the path to be followed should constitute an action plan to be trodden by the families with defined deadlines and requirements. After deliberating with the social worker responsible for accompanying the family on whether they would follow the track to entrepreneurship or formal employment, a standardized pathway was defined to be completed by the families within three years. The track to entrepreneurship involves evaluating different options, defining which business to start, obtaining the required technical training or receiving technical assistance services, and purchasing equipment and inputs. For each of these steps, families should meet minimum requirements to move on to the next and have access to the benefits. If these requirements were not met, the families could be expelled from the program. The Chilean model is criticized precisely because it adopts a standardized pathway that does not give space to the particularities of each case (Fernández et al., 2016; Larrañaga, Contreras e Cabezas, 2015).

In Brazil's case, while the Programa de Fomento followed a similar logic to the Chilean program, it is interesting to note that the Rural Productive Inclusion Route, defined by the country's federal government, also served as an organizing scheme to bring together different interventions that were previously dispersed, but without establishing a sequencing with the families. Or rather, in the planning, the route envisaged a sequencing, even considering that the families would not necessarily receive all the interventions, since not all of them suffered from the same constraints. The *rural route* consisted of a combination of programs that sought to meet the different needs of small farms. First, programs would be offered to meet basic needs (water, electricity, and income); then, attention would be given to productive needs (credit and technical assistance); and, finally, the insertion of farmers into institutional markets would be sought. However, since the implementation of programs for each of these needs was done separately, sometimes by different ministries, and only the monitoring of goals and problem-solving was done by a centralized structure, each of these programs or actions reached different groups of poor farmers in a random order, distorting the original conception (Mello et al., 2014; Mello, 2018).

For the Peru and Mexico cases, the program stages were related to their implementation in a site, rather than focusing on the families. These programs are described below.

The Peruvian program defined three stages, each lasting one year, during which the aim was the maturation of the families' businesses. In the first stage, considered the most intense, the program's local experts would support the families in implementing productive technologies and practices selected by the local population, as well as improvements in the infrastructure of their homes, especially regarding sanitation and health. In the second year of the program, the local experts would work on strengthening technological ownership and solving possible problems arising from its use, as well as promoting financial capacity building. In the last year, the work of the local experts with family establishments should be reduced and focused on collective enterprises, which should also receive the support of commercialization experts in order to improve their financial results (Asensio, 2021).

Finally, the Mexican experience organized its trajectory around a territorial development plan. After identifying the forms of collective action existing in the territory, a diagnosis of the site's main problems and obstacles to progress would be made. Based on the diagnosis, a three-year development plan and a one-year work plan would be prepared. The plans were to be built in a participatory manner, with community members, local organizations and government agencies. The projects undertaken would aim to identify and stimulate the main economic axes of the territory. The implementation would be done with the support of government

agencies and would also count on the participation of the community and local organizations, which would also participate in its monitoring (Berdegué et al., 2015).

3.2 The need for coordinating the actions

In order to offer the different types of interventions involved in productive inclusion programs, a high degree of coordination is required, especially with regard to two aspects: i) the programs that make up the pathways need to reach the same families in the territories; and ii) they need to be delivered in the right sequence to ensure cumulateness. Without this, the idea of a pathway is just an abstraction. And for this to happen, coordination is needed between levels of government and between areas of government, since each component of the intervention routes or pathways is typically located in a government structure, often in different agencies, with their own implementation and governance mechanisms.

Overall, programs have assumed that policy instruments are provided at the national level and coordinated at the local level; however, the implementation of this arrangement has taken different forms and has not always been conducive to coordination at the local level.

To provide policy instruments at the national level, some countries have used pre-existent programs, while others have created new ones. In Brazil's case, for example, the programs that were mobilized to make up the rural productive inclusion route already existed and were operated by different ministries. To foster their mobilization and coordination around program beneficiaries, interministerial situation rooms were created for monitoring the programs (Mello et al., 2014). In the Chilean case, it was identified that including Chile Solidario beneficiaries in programs that already existed in the country, such as agricultural technical assistance services and support services for enterprise development, would bring many difficulties to these programs. Therefore, it was decided to duplicate some of these initiatives, creating parallel programs directed to the needs of the targeted audience. This arrangement is criticized for not favoring the connection of the enterprises with the most specialized services in the country and with more dynamic markets (Fernández et al., 2016).

As mentioned earlier, most country programs recognized the need to assign a coordinating role to the local level. However, different arrangements have been adopted to this end. In Chile, although program planning was initially centralized in the national government, over time this role was transferred to the municipalities, in recognition of the importance of paying greater attention to local needs. Municipal governments have also relied on the support of assistants who accompany families in two areas: psychosocial and labor (Larrañaga, Contreras and Cabezas, 2015). In the Peruvian and Colombian cases, coordination was established through

an interaction between local civil society organizations – management councils of groups of forty to eighty families in Peru and local producer associations in Colombia – with regional or zonal government bodies. In the Haku Wiñay program, coordination has also been strengthened through the figure of *yachachiqs* – responsible for providing direct accompaniment to families (Asensio, 2021). In Mexico's case, operating units were created with representatives from government and local organizations (Berdegué et al., 2015). In the three latter, these local organizations were responsible for managing resources, identifying and requesting the supply of necessary policies, monitoring the implementation of actions, and in some cases participating in their evaluation.

The exception in this latter discussion is the Brazilian program, since, unlike the social assistance network, which has municipal capillarity throughout the national territory, the country does not count on structures at the local level to undertake the productive support policies. In the case of the PBF, for example, the Municipal Council of Social Assistance (CMAS) monitors the application and the situation of families. In the case of productive inclusion, however, there is no local council. The former Municipal Councils for Rural Development (CMDRs) were almost totally dismantled. Instead, Territorial Councils were created in many places, but they did not operate at the municipal level. As a result, important programs such as technical assistance, credit, among others, did not undergo any municipal management structure, remaining exclusively under the coordination of national structures, very distant, by their very nature, from the subtleties and specificities of the local contexts of implementation, and this, obviously, made it very difficult to coordinate these instruments at the moment of their implementation with the beneficiaries (Favareto, 2019).

3.3 Evidence assembling to monitor program development

To follow up on the actions undertaken by the programs, the countries assembled different types of evidence. By observing the different cases, it seems possible to identify two distinct situations. The first is the Brazilian and Chilean programs, which sought to monitor the execution of each of the components but paid less attention to their coordination and the results of the programs. And another situation, in which we find the Mexico and Peru initiatives, which have incorporated evaluation strategies in their program design.

The programs in Brazil and Chile chose to monitor the programs' components, thereby privileging the monitoring of the reach of the interventions and their impacts in aggregate terms, for example, on the country's poverty indicators. In Brazil's case, largely maintaining the logic of each intervention, it was measured, for example, how much of the program budget was actually being invested, how many people received technical assistance, or how many cisterns were installed.

But there was no evidence as to whether these investments were reaching the same families or whether they were being pulverized, or whether the idea of a route-based access sequencing to programs was taking place. The information was assembled for monitoring and eventual support by the management structures coordinated by the Brazil Without Extreme Poverty plan, which amalgamated all these other programs dispersed among different ministerial structures. In the Chilean cases, emphasis was also placed on the scope of the interventions, monitoring, for example, the number of visits made by social workers, how many families started vegetable gardens, or how many received the inputs to start animal farming. By only following up on the actions of each of the components, these programs faced difficulties in establishing the coordination of interventions and were not able to make the necessary adjustments to improve their complementarity and, therefore, their effectiveness (Fernández et al., 2016; Favareto, 2019).

It is important to mention that, at the beginning of the implementation of these initiatives, some of the actions undertaken had to face the challenge of the lack of data or information about the families they sought to assist. It was during the implementation process that some of this information was captured and later used to redirect the actions. In this sense, there was not necessarily a deliberate decision to monitor the execution of the programs individually. There was an institutional inertia that favored the fragmentation of the focus and the emphasis on the scope of the policies. Even so, the follow-up of each of the programs was what finally allowed the identification of the lack of convergence of actions. In the case of the Brazilian rural route, for example, it was observed that most of the beneficiary population received only one or two interventions of the defined set, so the cumulative pathway that had been imagined was not implemented (Mello, 2018).

In the cases of Peru and Mexico, the governments of both countries commissioned and carried out impact evaluations. For the Mexican program, follow-up committees were established at the national, state, and territorial levels to receive and discuss the evidence provided by local experiences, which would be reported and monitored by an evaluation system developed for the program both in the planning and implementation process and at the end of the three-year cycle (Berdegué et al., 2015). In addition, the program contemplated the implementation of pilot projects that would function as learning spaces in which strategies, methods, and instruments would be tried out and a system of systematic monitoring and learning would be maintained. The decisions to expand and follow up on the program would be based on the results obtained. The evaluation and monitoring system also included a learning component, which would allow the identification of critical elements that hinder the proposed operating process and the expected effects of the program (Rimisp, 2015).

This review of the programs shows that the use of evidence can be quite diverse, depending on at least two aspects: i) just as the way of defining the problem shapes the managers' gaze to seek certain types of evidence in their support and focus definition, the use of this evidence also has repercussions on the repertoire of actions selected to compose the programs and the rural productive inclusion strategies; and ii) the evidence on the actions and their implementation has also been diverse, as to the purposes – to monitor formal execution, to generate learning or to subsidize decisions on linkages or bifurcations of pathways, to improve management and seek complementarities and synergies, or to assess impacts.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Resuming the ambitions announced for this chapter, the main purpose was to offer theoretical and, mainly, empirical reflections on the use of evidence, based on the analysis of selected experiences of Latin American governments in promoting rural productive inclusion.

From the theoretical standpoint, we have tried to develop the argument that the use of evidence operates in the interdependencies between technical and cognitive decisions. That is, there is a starting point that is given by the agents' cognitive bias, by framing the problem that is the focus of public interventions in a particular way, which, in itself, already conditions the type of evidence to be sought. This creates a kind of path dependency, in which the choice of evidence, in turn, conditions the repertoire of actions to be included in the programs. With regard to action implementation, both the agents' cognitive bias and the type of institutional culture are relevant, which may favor more evidence that allows for follow-up and accountability on spending and goals, or some kind of constructivism and generation of institutional learning supported by the monitoring of results or effectiveness of actions.

The consequence of all this for analyses about evidence is that one cannot understand the ways they are produced and used decontextualized from these political, cognitive, and institutional dimensions. However, this does not mean overemphasizing the political and cultural dimensions but rather drawing attention to the interdependencies between these and how the technical aspects provoked by evidence act to reinforce or challenge these biases. For all these reasons, it is necessary that the question *what evidence* is preceded by the questions *evidence about what* and *evidence for what*. Because they raise the level of reflexivity not only about the use of evidence but about the practices of managers and about the objects of their interventions, reconnecting what certain evidence-associated automatisms or technicalities associated may generate.

Also in this conceptual dimension, it is important to note that the term evidence has been used to refer to different types of information. Among the most common types of evidence are: registration data, information on existing infrastructure, social worker diagnoses, data on policy implementation, and the results of impact evaluations. The role that each of these types plays in social interventions should be acknowledged, but it is equally important to differentiate them and understand the purpose of their use and the implications they have for public management. Especially when it comes to analyzing the effectiveness of interventions, it is essential to pay attention to the validity of the evidence, which has been discussed more broadly around the concept of scientific evidence, which is characterized by greater rigor and reflexivity.

Two challenges are posed for the expansion of its use. On the managers' side, the challenge is to create conditions for the use of *scientific evidence* in the various phases of policy design and management, in addition to consulting experts. This involves the promotion or incorporation of good studies on the lessons learned from similar experiences that were previously implemented, diagnoses and situational characterization of families, and the elaboration of baselines supported by state-of-the-art knowledge about the problems and the complexity surrounding their interdependencies. On the part of researchers and the scientific community, it is necessary to improve the adaptability of the methods that ensure rigorous knowledge to the time constraints and the concrete needs of public managers. This involves modeling the language and the aim of research and prioritizing the problem-based approach, among other aspects.

From an empirical perspective, it should have become clear that the use of evidence, particularly in some countries, lacks reflection. The great effort to reach populations traditionally not served by public policies, about whom information was often lacking, seems to have limited the possibilities for a more deliberate and structured effort to use evidence throughout the stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of policies. In this sense, not using evidence in some cases was not an option, but a contingency to be faced. A lot of data on target audiences had to be produced during implementation, and thus attention to targeting and monitoring of each intervention prevailed, while the evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions received little or no attention.

Furthermore, the analysis presented also revealed a crucial gap: for the best design of the initiatives, there is a lack of evidence that would help identify the obstacles and factors that have effectively favored the escape from poverty and productive inclusion. It is curious that, in all the analyses and evaluations that have been made about the programs, there are no consolidated lessons that seek to show, for example, how families have managed to break out of productive exclusion. There is no systematic follow-up of those who leave the productive inclusion programs. There is a lack of evidence on how to achieve higher levels of coordination between

levels and areas of government or between different programs. In a word, much effort is focused on the initiatives' means and little on their ends.

All this is especially important given the moment these experiences are taking place and the growing relevance that the use of evidence is having in public management. The several studies mentioned here, and also some syntheses, such as that produced by PEI, seem to suggest that it is necessary to inaugurate a new generation of rural productive inclusion initiatives (Andrews et al., 2021). Perhaps the evidence about what worked or did not work in these programs may create a favorable environment for better use of this instrument in the new programs that will be shaped in the coming years.

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The manuscripts in languages other than Portuguese published herein have not been proofread.

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