

## Zero Hunger and Territories of Citizenship: Promoting Food Security in Brazil's Rural Areas

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In his inaugural speech in 2003, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stated that he would consider his life's mission accomplished if every Brazilian were able to have three meals a day by the time he left office. "This is a cause that could and should belong to everyone, without distinctions of class, party, or ideology," he said, calling upon all elements of Brazilian society to embrace this goal. For the first time, the fight against hunger was placed at the top of the political agenda in Brazil.

President Lula was driven to eradicate hunger not solely for moral reasons but also because he believed that Brazil could not succeed as a nation without doing so. Hunger and poverty are the most visible faces of social exclusion, and a society cannot be united and cannot achieve true economic development when some members face such tremendous challenges.

In Brazil, food insecurity affects a significant portion of the population. Although the country's population is overwhelmingly urban, and therefore the total number of people living in food insecurity is larger in metropolitan areas, the problem is proportionally more significant in the rural areas, particularly in the traditionally poorer north and northeast regions. While 38 percent of Brazilians living in urban areas suffer from some degree of food insecurity, the problem affects half of all rural inhabitants—around 15 million people. Of these, more than 20 percent suffer from severe food insecurity. This underscores the paradox of rural Brazil: it is home to a dynamic and growing export-oriented agribusiness sector as well as to numerous small farmers who produce a substantial proportion of the food sold on

the domestic market, but they are hampered by low productivity levels and little access to technology.

In order to address some of these issues, President Lula launched the Zero Hunger strategy in 2003 and the Territories of Citizenship program in 2008. Zero Hunger and, to a certain extent, Territories of Citizenship, were inspired by Josué de Castro, who said that hunger was the biological manifestation of a sociological problem.

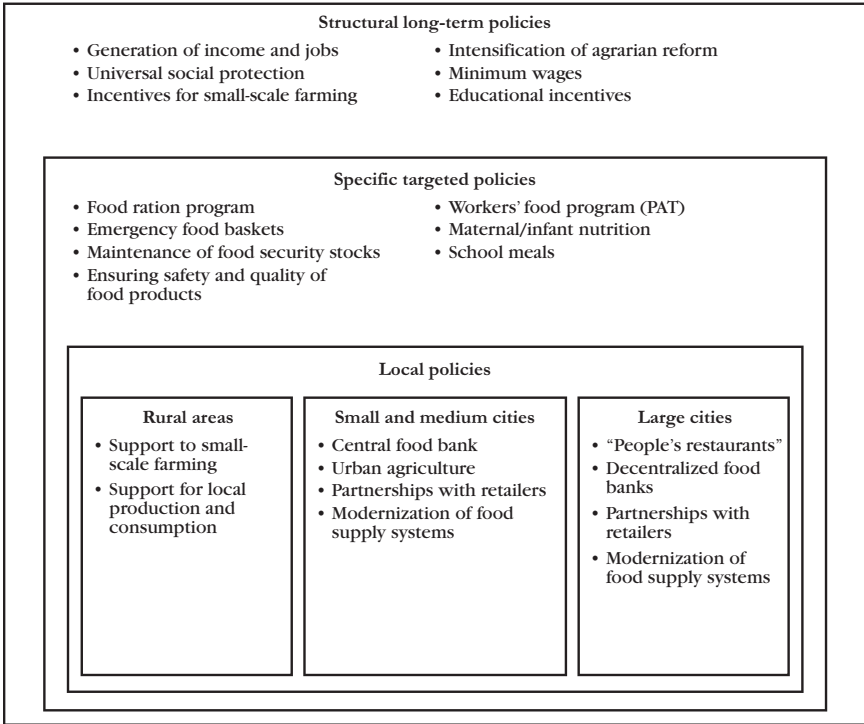
## Zero Hunger

The goal of the Zero Hunger strategy was even more ambitious than the first Millennium Development Goal and the goals of the 1996 World Food Summit: its aim was to eradicate hunger altogether. To do so, the strategy sought to integrate and coordinate various government programs and public policies to promote food security by combining immediate action with medium- and long-term programs. The first step was to create the Special Ministry for Food Security and against Hunger (MESA), an institutional framework capable of coordinating the more than 10 ministries and 30 programs involved. The strategy also encouraged the participation of state and municipal governments, along with civil society. In 2004, MESA and the Ministry of Social Assistance were merged into the Ministry of Social Development and the Fight against Hunger.

Zero Hunger simultaneously promotes emergency efforts to guarantee vulnerable populations access to food and works to implement structural changes that help them to overcome poverty, hunger, and exclusion (Figure 30.1). Its twin-track approach is in line with the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to promote food security, empower rural communities to improve farm performance, establish safety nets, and provide immediate help to families in need with medium- and long-term interventions.

To reach its goals, the program has targeted its activities depending on whether people reside in rural or metropolitan areas or in small or medium-size cities. Like many popular broad-based programs, Zero Hunger expected to achieve results quickly. However, because there was a need to establish new institutions such as MESA and expand programs to reach the poorest communities across Brazil, it got off to a slower-than-expected start, though it grew rapidly afterward. Between 2003 and 2007, Zero Hunger's budget more than doubled, from R\$6.2 billion (roughly US\$2.2 billion) to R\$13.3 billion (roughly US\$7.5 billion). The program is now close to meeting its short-term objective of ensuring that all Brazilian families have enough to eat every day. And significant progress has been made, albeit more gradually, in tackling the root causes of hunger and malnutrition on a sustainable basis.

**Figure 30.1 Main provisions of Zero Hunger**



Source: Projeto Fome Zero: Uma proposta de Política de Segurança alimentar para o Brasil, Instituto de Pesquisa e Estudos da Cidadania, São Paulo, October 2001.

Zero Hunger’s main short-term action to fight poverty and hunger was the Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer (CCT) program. As of March 2008, 11 million poor families received the transfers. By 2005, Bolsa Família CCTs had allowed around 36 percent of recipient families (with a monthly per capita income of up to US\$25.00) to rise above the poverty line.

The overall impact of the Zero Hunger program can be measured by the reduction in poverty in Brazil between 2003 and 2008. According to the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), the number of poor fell by 27 percent, from 15.4 million in 2003 to 11.3 million in 2008, while the number of extremely poor fell 48 percent during the same period. According to IPEA, there were three main reasons for the fall: economic growth, increased minimum wages, and cash transfer programs, all of which had been contemplated in the original Zero Hunger strategy.

Of the many activities undertaken by Zero Hunger, some had more immediate effects than others. This was the case with the safety net programs, especially the Bolsa Família program. The Bolsa Família initiative and others like it injected significant resources into local and regional economies and were widely accepted by the political, social, and economic establishments.

### Challenges in Rural Areas

The same was not the case for Zero Hunger's structural transformation policies, one of which was land reform, which the Lula administration considered an essential part of guaranteeing food security. But attempts at land reform met with continual political and judicial challenges. The Lula administration was also caught in the middle of a political struggle. Social groups that have historically supported President Lula's Workers' Party pressed for far-reaching land reform. Although the numbers of landless people settled fell short of expectations, the advances have been significant. Throughout Brazilian history (or at least as far back as records have been kept), 824,483 families have been given land, according to the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária of the Ministry of Agrarian Development. Of these families, more than half were given land between 2003 and 2007.

At the same time that the Lula administration was trying to appease the social groups pressing for extensive land reform, it was also trying to form essential political and social alliances with various sectors—including the rural establishment—to promote its policies. This meant that the administration often had to walk a fine line between extremes to create a necessary consensus on key themes. These particular challenges meant that Zero Hunger programs targeting rural areas were frequently more difficult to get off the ground than were those in more urban areas.

In addition, the existing institutional structure in rural areas needed to be improved. Before Zero Hunger programs could even begin to show results, it was necessary to strengthen, build, or rebuild institutions and instruments promoting the development of small-scale farming. In Brazil as in other Latin American and Caribbean countries, institutions that assisted the rural poor by promoting access to natural resources and stimulating small farm production had been underfunded and understaffed for many years.

From 2003 onward, the government sought to expand the incentives available to small-scale farmers. Under the National Program for Family Agriculture (PRONAF), farmers received about R\$2.3 billion in credit in 2002/03. By 2007/08, that figure was R\$12 billion. During that 5-year period, PRONAF signed more than 7.5 million credit contracts with small farmers. In 2003 the Lula administration also created the Food Procurement Program (PAA) to purchase food from

small-scale farmers. The PAA offers small farmers a guaranteed market for their products, thus stimulating production and assuring them of a fair price for their labor. Furthermore, the products bought by the PAA are distributed through the country's social protection network (for example, the National School Feeding Program), which helps to feed families suffering from extreme food insecurity. From 2003 to 2006, the PAA budget increased from R\$81 million to R\$200 million and the number of small farmers selling food to the program more than doubled, from slightly more than 40,000 to almost 90,000.

Despite these successes, the difficulties in implementing the needed structural changes, combined with the longer time frame required to achieve results, led Zero Hunger's focus to gradually shift toward the fast-acting CCT components. It was not that the Lula administration did not want to move faster in promoting structural changes and creating the conditions necessary for those who produce food to overcome food insecurity but rather that the means necessary to do so were not readily available. Despite respectable advances, the government recognized the need to do more on this front.

### Territories of Citizenship

The government has recently responded to this perceived need by implementing Territories of Citizenship, a regional development strategy that focuses on raising the living standards of vulnerable populations. Launched in February 2008, the strategy shares some similarities with Zero Hunger in that it, too, is a federal program involving multiple ministries that allows for synergy with state and municipal governments and encourages the participation of civil society. Its budget of R\$11.3 billion is also similar to Zero Hunger's 2007 budget.

However, the Territories of Citizenship program specifically focuses on communities with lower human development indexes, areas that have a high concentration of small farmers, families settled by land reform, fishing communities, indigenous populations, and communities formed by the descendants of slaves (*quilombolas*). Initially the program will focus on 60 areas in all 26 states and the Federal District, encompassing 17 percent of the nation's territory and benefiting around 24 million Brazilians.

Though Territories of Citizenship focuses on rural areas, its innovative design breaks from the traditional urban–rural duality and looks at territories in an integrated fashion. It recognizes that predominantly rural areas may encompass smaller urban areas or, in some cases, may extend to the outskirts of larger cities and that these also play an important role in the social and economic reality of the zone. Thus zones are formed by groups of municipalities that have similar economic and environmental features as well as similar social, cultural, and geographical identities.

Territories of Citizenship operates on three fronts: it stimulates productive activities, seeks to improve rural infrastructure, and promotes social, cultural, economic, and political rights. The strategy tries to address these three components in an integrated manner. For instance, it may link farming incentives to boost production with improvements in infrastructure, or it may recognize legal ownership of land by slave descendants or indigenous communities while at the same time supporting the organization of the community and facilitating access to public services such as health care and education.

Another important feature of Territories of Citizenship is the social participation it has fostered, which goes beyond that engendered by Zero Hunger. Within the scope of the programs and actions included in the Territories of Citizenship strategy and planned budget, the beneficiary communities help define the priorities and the regional development plans. The concept of shared responsibility also allows for state and municipal governments to participate as they deem necessary, increasing the budget and/or activities that can benefit specific zones. Social participation continues in the execution phase in that all activities can be monitored online through the Territories of Citizenship website.

### Relevant Lessons

A recent evaluation of Zero Hunger by the FAO found five key lessons that can be relevant to Territories of Citizenship and other food security programs in Brazil and Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole.

- First, the experience of the Zero Hunger program shows that, with sufficient political will, it is possible to bring about a rapid and significant decrease in the levels of poverty and hunger.
- Second, it shows that it is also financially feasible to reduce hunger in the short term: Bolsa Família benefits a quarter of Brazil's population but requires an investment of just over 2 percent of the federal budget and only 0.4 of the GDP.
- Third, it demonstrates that reducing hunger also appears to generate economic benefits to local development, especially in economically depressed rural areas.
- Fourth, it shows that institutional arrangements for any national food security system need to be bolstered by strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Fifth, it makes clear that placing an emphasis on decentralized local systems is important for food security because it is at this level that the best results are achieved and the most active social participation is engendered.

The importance of the decentralized nature of Zero Hunger and Territories of Citizenship, as well as the high degree of social participation incorporated in these strategies, cannot be overemphasized. Although no significant evaluations have indicated that decentralized identification of beneficiaries leads to a greater program impact than centralized identification and that social accountability via local social councils has a significant impact on performance, the FAO evaluation found strong evidence of the advantages of both of these approaches.

This premise is confirmed by a 2008 study by de Janvry, Finan, and Sadoulet that analyzed how local elections affected the implementation of Brazil's Bolsa Escola, a CCT program introduced years before the Zero Hunger program to reduce primary school dropout rates among the poor. The authors reported: "The decentralized implementation of publicly funded programs offers the promise of greater impacts than centralized implementation as it can take advantage of local information. This is, however, not sufficient for better program outcomes to obtain. Also needed are accountability mechanisms so local providers are induced to make use of these advantages for greater program performance." They concluded that "electoral accountability is a powerful instrument for efficient implementation of decentralized programs, but that other mechanisms of citizen control need to be put into place when electoral rules do not provide such accountability."<sup>1</sup>

The Zero Hunger experience also shows that combining short-, medium-, and long-term actions and different geographical approaches makes it possible to fight hunger and poverty on multiple levels, from providing immediate access to food to promoting long-term food security by giving the poor the means by which to satisfy their own food requirements.

Though Zero Hunger achieved important advances in fighting hunger and poverty, it was also deficient in some areas, which partially explains why the Territories of Citizenship strategy was implemented. It was designed to complement Zero Hunger, not work against it. Specifically, it redirects the focus to rural areas but with a twist: its territorial focus allows for a more integrated approach. Finally, by allowing the beneficiary communities to help define the priorities, the Territories of Citizenship strategy takes the notion of shared responsibility to a new level.

## Note

1. A. de Janvry, F. Finan, and E. Sadoulet, Local electoral accountability and program performance: Bolsa Escola in Brazil, draft, FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008, <<http://www.rlc.fao.org/es/prioridades/seguridad>>.

## For Further Reading

de Janvry, A., F. Finan, and E. Sadoulet. Local electoral accountability and program performance: Bolsa Escola in Brazil. Draft, FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008. <<http://www.rlc.fao.org/es/prioridades/seguridad>>.

Ministry of Agrarian Development. *Revista territorios de la ciudadanía 2008*. <<http://www.territoriosda-cidadania.gov.br/dotlrn/clubs/territoriosrurais/xowiki/revistaespanhol>>.

Ministry of Social Development (MDS). Catalog of indicators for monitoring MDS programs. <<http://www.mds.gov.br/sagi/estudos-e-pesquisas/publicacoes/livros/resolveUId/d3257856aadd548b15a7f83b8d59d38e?>>>.

NGO Apoio Fome Zero. Website. <<http://www.fomezero.org>>.

Núcleo de Economia Agrícola / Instituto de Economia—Unicamp. Pesquisa. <<http://www.eco.unicamp.br/pesquisa/NEA/index.php>>.