

# FIGHTING HUNGER IN BRAZIL

## MUCH ACHIEVED, MORE TO DO

*This case study introduces the policies adopted by the Brazilian government in order to prioritize poverty reduction and food security. It explores the reasons for the success of these policies, and concludes that key factors include government support at the highest level, an integrated approach that goes across departments and sectors, and an influential civil society movement.*

## INTRODUCTION

Brazil has made impressive recent strides in reducing poverty, food insecurity and hunger. Between 2000–2 and 2005–7, the proportion of people living in hunger was reduced by one-third in Brazil (FAO 2011). Between 2003 and 2009, the number of people living in poverty decreased by 20 million (United Nations High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis 2010). Brazil's successes in reducing poverty and increasing food security have notably outstripped those of India and China, despite the fact that economic growth in India and China has been faster.

Brazil's achievements in hunger and poverty reduction are widely considered to be the results of pro-poor policies introduced during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, including *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger), a national cross-sectoral strategy which was launched in 2003.

This case study describes the activities and approach taken by *Fome Zero*, and gives a brief analysis of the reasons underlying its success.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Brazil has a population of over 190 million and is the largest country in South America in terms of both area and population. While Brazil's gross domestic product is relatively high (US\$10,900 per capita), extreme inequalities mean that more than 16 million people still live in extreme poverty (Government of Brazil 2011) – although the number of people in extreme poverty has more than halved in the past decade.

Brazil is the world's fourth-largest food exporter, and has sufficient productive capacity to meet its internal and external demand. Nevertheless, in 2009, 30 per cent of Brazilian households – some 66 million people – faced some degree of daily food insecurity (Government of Brazil 2010). Of these, more than 12 million people experience severe food insecurity, or hunger (FAO 2011).

Access to food, not production, is the primary problem. Millions of people simply have too little income to buy adequate food. This is exacerbated by geographical variance in food production. Around 90 per cent of Brazil's total food production is concentrated in the south, south-east and the southern part of the central western region. However, 60 per cent of food-insecure people live in northern and north-eastern Brazil (FAO 2010).

Despite the increasing concentration of agriculture in the hands of large-scale agribusinesses, Brazilian family farming occupies 24 per cent of agricultural land, is responsible for 38 per cent of national food production, 74 per cent of rural employment, and most of Brazil's domestic food supply. Small-scale and family-based agriculture accordingly has a major role to play in meeting Brazil's food security needs.

# **FOME ZERO: HOW BRAZIL IS TACKLING HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY**

## **About Fome Zero**

Hunger is a multi-sectoral problem requiring an integrated, cross-government response. The *Fome Zero* programme recognises that poverty reduction, food security, and support for small-scale agriculture are intimately connected. Its 50 interlinked initiatives are intended both to increase access to food for the poorest people (through cash transfers, livelihoods support, and targeted free meals), and to support food production from small-scale and family farmers.

*Fome Zero* has three main policy pillars:

1. The *Bolsa Família* is the world's largest conditional cash transfer programme. It provides direct income, under certain conditions, to 12.7 million families (nearly 50 million people) facing poverty and deprivation (World Bank 2010). Through linking and integration with other social programmes, access to financial benefits is based on access to basic rights such as health, education, and food in order to support poverty reduction more effectively.
2. The *Alimentação Escolar* (school meal) programme provides 47 million free school meals every day (CONSEA, 2009).
3. The *Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar* (strengthening family agriculture) pillar is intended to strengthen and stimulate small-scale and family-based agriculture in order to increase the quality and quantity of the food supply, and to support increased incomes for rural households. This programme includes subsidized credit, training and technical assistance, and insurance for small-scale and family farmers. The *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos da Agricultura Familiar (PAA)* (Family Agriculture Food Procurement Programme) aims to ensure a stable market price for products from small-scale farmers, for example by buying local food products for government feeding programmes or for local food banks.

## **Fome Zero: Reasons for success**

In 2010, by the end of Lula's second term in office, food and nutrition security programmes had reached millions of households in Brazil. Between 2003 and 2009 they had helped raise 20 million people out of poverty (World Bank 2010). What were the reasons behind the apparent success of *Fome Zero*?

### **1. High-level political commitment**

Former President Lula made a high-profile personal commitment to the *Fome Zero* programme by determining food security and poverty reduction to be national priorities. This became part of his political identity, and was a major factor in his re-election in 2006 (Washington Post 2006).

Lula's high-level support was a key driver in cross-government coordination to address the complex social and economic factors involved in fighting hunger. In 2007, Lula created an inter-ministerial body for Food and Nutrition Security, in order to co-ordinate and align the action of 19 ministries with the national priorities for food and nutrition security. The Federal Government was also significant in implementing the policies.

## **2. Economic growth and labour reform**

Economic growth and labour reform were also crucial to the policy's success. Lula's administration managed to reinvigorate economic growth alongside a degree of progressive labour reform. More formal jobs; increased real value of the minimum wage; and expansion of access to pensions, health insurance, social assistance, and education also helped fight hunger. This combination of economic growth, hunger reduction, and political popularity has helped to institutionalize and embed the *Fome Zero* programme.

## **3. Managing powerful oppositional interests**

Feeding hungry people is a widely appealing political agenda which is difficult to oppose. Although large-scale agribusinesses are a major player in Brazilian agricultural production, the family agriculture food procurement programme (PAA) was structured so that it did not pose a direct challenge or threat to powerful corporate interests.

## **4. External support**

External actors have played a significant role in expanding and consolidating *Fome Zero*. The World Bank and other international financial institutions have given financial support. For example, in September 2010 the World Bank approved a US\$200m loan to support the *Bolsa Família* (World Bank 2010). The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has provided financial and technical support. Brazil's success in reducing poverty and hunger has been much praised by external commentators and analysts.

## **5. Active civil society**

The adoption of Brazil's progressive food and nutritional policies reflects 20 years of activism by Brazilian civil society and social movements. Civil society and social movements have kept hunger on the political agenda; mass mobilizations (called *mutirão*) were particularly successful in promoting collective action against hunger. Through their campaigning and activism, civil society organizations have contributed to the election of politicians with the vision to make a difference (ActionAid 2009).

Through the presidential advisory body CONSEA, civil society actors have been integrated into the design and implementation of the *Fome Zero* programme. CONSEA is a cross-government, cross-sector, participatory instrument for designing or suggesting, implementing and evaluating food and nutritional security policy. This has allowed civil society interests to influence policy directions more directly. For example, the PAA was started by CONSEA to bridge the gap between family farmers and food-insecure households. Recently, CONSEA supported Congress to pass a bill obliging local governments to buy at least 30 per cent of the food destined for school meals from small-scale farmers (CONSEA 2009).

## LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT NEXT FOR FOOD JUSTICE IN BRAZIL?

The move by the government to target economically and socially excluded citizens via the *Fome Zero* programmes has increased the government's popularity with the poorest citizens. The recently-elected President Dilma Rousseff was handpicked by Lula as his successor, and elected on a platform of economic and social continuity. Accordingly, it seems likely that political commitment to rolling out *Fome Zero* will continue.

In its 2009 report, CONSEA identifies ten key challenges for the future of hunger eradication and food security in Brazil. These include the further embedding of the right to food within international, national, and federal policy frameworks; ensuring better inclusion of marginalized groups, such as Brazilians of African descent, indigenous people, family farmers, and the urban poor; and combating and mitigating the effects of climate change, which threatens millions of poor farmers in Brazil (CONSEA 2009). In particular, the Federal Government's capacity to implement these policies at a local level varies greatly geographically. Co-ordination is patchy in the poor regions of north and northeast Brazil, where the majority of food-insecure people live. This needs to be improved for greater impact.

Meanwhile, there has been huge international interest in Brazil's achievements in relation to food security and poverty reduction, with the *Fome Zero* approach being internationalized as a tool for hunger reduction in other countries in Latin America and Africa. As such, Brazilian successes are providing a model for achieving food security globally.

### At a glance: food insecurity in Brazil

Food insecure population: **66 million**

Population experiencing extreme food insecurity: **12 million**

Brazilians living in extreme poverty: **16 million**

Proportion of food-insecure Brazilians living in northern and north-eastern Brazil: **60 per cent**

Brazilians moving out of extreme poverty since 2003: **20 million**

Brazilians benefiting from the *Bolsa Família* cash transfer programme: **50 million**

Free school meals provided daily: **47 million**

## REFERENCES AND USEFUL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**ActionAid** (2009) 'Who's Really Fighting Hunger?' London: ActionAid, [www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)

**Beghin, N.** (2008) 'Brazil: The Positive Impact of Public Rural Development, Food and Nutritional Security (FNS), and Social Security Policies in Curbing Food Inflation', Oxford: Oxfam International.

**CONSEA** (2009) 'Building up the National Policy and System for Food and Nutrition Security: The Brazilian Experience', Brasilia: CONSEA.

<http://www4.planalto.gov.br/consea/publicacoes/publiucacoes-arquivos/construcao-do-sistema-e-da-politica-nacional-de-seguranca-alimentar-e-nutricional-a-experiencia-brasileira-ingles>

**The Economist** (2009) 'The gloves go on: lessons from Brazil, China, and India', *The Economist*, 26 November.

**FAO** (2003) 'Brazil receives US\$1 million for Zero Hunger Project from FAO', FAO, <https://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2003/13420-en.html> (last accessed 16 May 2011)

**FAO** (2003) 'Brazil: The hunger of the missed meal – Interview with Andre MacMillan', FAO, 14 February 2003, <http://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2003/13320-en.html> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**FAO** (2010) 'Special programme for food security – Brazil', Rome: FAO, <http://www.fao.org/spfs/national-programmes-spfs/success-npfs/brazil/en/> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**FAO** (2011) 'Hunger', Rome: FAO, <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**Fome Zero Website:** <http://www.fomezero.gov.br/>

**Government of Brazil** (2011) 'Brazil Programme to Eradicate Extreme Poverty to Benefit 16.2 Million Citizens', 4 May 2011, [http://www.brasil.gov.br/news/history/2011/05/04/brazil-program-to-eradicate-extreme-poverty-to-benefit-16.2-million-citizens/newsitem\\_view?set\\_language=en](http://www.brasil.gov.br/news/history/2011/05/04/brazil-program-to-eradicate-extreme-poverty-to-benefit-16.2-million-citizens/newsitem_view?set_language=en) (last accessed 16 May 2011)

**Government of Brazil** (2010), National Council on Food Security and Nutrition (CONSEA), 'Food Security and Nutrition and the Human Right to Sufficient Food in Brazil', November 2010.

**IBGE** (2006) 'Censo Agropecuário 2006: Resultados Preliminares', <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/economia/agropecuaria/censoagro/2006/default.shtm> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**IBGE** (2010) 'Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Segurança Alimentar 2004/2009' [http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/seguranca\\_alimentar\\_2004\\_2009/default.shtm](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/seguranca_alimentar_2004_2009/default.shtm) (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**Neves do Amaral, W.S and Peduto, A.** (2010) 'Food Security The Brazilian Case', London: International Institute for Sustainable Development.

**Ravallion, M.** (2009) '[A Comparative Perspective on Poverty Reduction in Brazil, China and India](#)', *Policy Research Working Paper* 5080. Washington DC: World Bank.

**The Washington Post** (2006) '[Cash aid program bolsters Lula's reelection prospects](#)', *The Washington Post*, 29 October.

**United Nations High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis** (2010), 'Brazil's landmark *bolsa família* program receives US\$200 million loan', press release no. 2011/093LAC, 17 September 2010.

<http://un-foodsecurity.org/node/799> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

**World Bank** (2010) 'Brazil's Landmark *Bolsa Família* Program Receives US\$200 Million Loan',

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/BRAZILEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20754490~menuPK:2024799~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:322341,00.html> (last accessed 16 May 2011).

© Oxfam International June 2010

This paper was written by Kate Kilpatrick from research by Nathalie Beghin. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Carlos Wilson de Andrade Filho and Antonio Hill in its production.

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail [publish@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:publish@oxfam.org.uk).

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org).

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-84814-892-5 in June 2011. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

Oxfam is an international confederation of fifteen organizations working together in 98 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice:

Oxfam America ([www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)),  
Oxfam Australia ([www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au)),  
Oxfam-in-Belgium ([www.oxfamsol.be](http://www.oxfamsol.be)),  
Oxfam Canada ([www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca)),  
Oxfam France - Agir ici ([www.oxfamfrance.org](http://www.oxfamfrance.org)),  
Oxfam Germany ([www.oxfam.de](http://www.oxfam.de)),  
Oxfam GB ([www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)),  
Oxfam Hong Kong ([www.oxfam.org.hk](http://www.oxfam.org.hk)),  
Intermon Oxfam ([www.intermonoxfam.org](http://www.intermonoxfam.org)),  
Oxfam Ireland ([www.oxfamireland.org](http://www.oxfamireland.org)),  
Oxfam Mexico ([www.oxfamMexico.org](http://www.oxfamMexico.org)),  
Oxfam New Zealand ([www.oxfam.org.nz](http://www.oxfam.org.nz)),  
Oxfam Novib ([www.oxfamnovib.nl](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl)),  
Oxfam Quebec ([www.oxfam.qc.ca](http://www.oxfam.qc.ca)),  
Oxfam India ([www.oxfamindia.org](http://www.oxfamindia.org))

The following organizations are currently observer members of Oxfam International, working towards full affiliation:

Oxfam Japan ([www.oxfam.jp](http://www.oxfam.jp))  
Oxfam Italy ([www.oxfamitalia.org](http://www.oxfamitalia.org))

Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org).  
Email: [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org)

[www.oxfam.org/grow](http://www.oxfam.org/grow)

**GRÖW**  
FOOD. LIFE. PLANET.

 **Oxfam**