

# ZERO HUNGER

## The Brazilian experience

“We are going to create conditions in which all people in our country can eat decently three times a day, every day, without needing gifts from anyone. Brazil cannot continue living with such inequality. We must defeat hunger, poverty and social exclusion. Our war is not to kill anyone – it is to save lives.”

*President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva,  
Inaugural Address,  
1st January 2003*



### **An approach to development centred on hunger eradication**

In the 1930s, Josué de Castro reached the conclusion that hunger in Brazil was the consequence of distortions created by an economic development model that exploited the poor, effectively excluding them from enjoying its benefits. By the end of the 20th century, Brazil's economy was growing fast, but the gap between rich and poor was widening and 44 million of the country's 170 million people were caught in a hunger trap. They were too poor to buy the food they needed for a healthy life and so were denied the opportunity of participating in Brazil's growing prosperity.

Zero Hunger was launched by President Lula in 2003 to help improve the situation by introducing a new development model centred on hunger eradication and social inclusion, linking macro-economic, social and productive policies. He sought to make this a truly national effort by engaging the widest possible participation of Brazilians.

Brazil is now looked to by other countries for lessons on how to tackle hunger, food insecurity and poverty reduction. The success of Zero Hunger is due to five main factors:

- **Political commitment at the highest level:** From his first day in office, President Lula placed hunger eradication and poverty reduction at the very centre of Brazil's development. He engaged all sectoral ministries and levels of government as well as Brazilian society in general in a massive, concerted effort to work on this agenda.
- **Zero hunger** goals were reflected in Brazil's macro-economic policies.
- **An integrated national food and nutrition security policy** was created, which was later underpinned by a new legal and institutional framework. This was based on the concept that it was the Government's duty to ensure that all Brazilians could enjoy their right to adequate food.
- **Twin-track approach:** policies for raising production were linked to those promoting social inclusion so as to enhance their effectiveness. In this way, the new buying power created by social protection was harnessed to stimulate increased food production by small-scale farmers who were poor themselves, thereby strengthening the local economies of their communities.
- **The Zero Hunger initiative learned from other experiences:** Zero Hunger built upon existing local and national policies in Brazil and also looked for inspiration elsewhere. The cash transfer programme is inspired by the United States Food Stamps

programme, created in the aftermath of the Great Depression, while the virtuous circle between local production and consumption is based on experiences from California.

In the ten years since it was launched, Zero Hunger has shown that it is possible to combine rapid economic growth with improved income distribution. It demonstrates that social protection is not 'welfare'; rather it is a sound investment in human capital that not only puts an end to hardship, suffering and the worst of injustices, but also stimulates growth by enabling people to fulfil their creative and productive potential. In so doing, the people who benefit become a new source of demand for goods and services, including food.

This approach to development has inspired a new generation of policies in Brazil and its success has led the country to set itself a still more ambitious goal in its 'Brazil Without Extreme Poverty Plan'.

## **The main components**

Zero Hunger sought to bring about immediate improvements in nutrition while also addressing the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition, including income inequality, inequitable access to land, and low quality infrastructure and services in rural areas.

The programme involved over 30 mutually reinforcing sets of action, implemented at national, sectoral and local levels:

- At the national level, policy reforms focused on employment and income generation, social protection, support for small-scale farming and accelerated land reform.
- Sectoral food and nutrition related actions included: food stamps; emergency feeding, backed by publicly held food stocks; food safety; mother and child nutrition; school meals, and nutrition education.
- At the local level, policies were tailored to respond to the different needs of urban and rural settings, focusing as needed on better services for small-scale farmers; food banks; improvements to food storage infrastructure; engagement of supermarkets in better food management; urban agriculture, and so on.

The relative weight given to these different actions evolved over time, resulting in the dominance of four major components:

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### **Cash transfers**

The food stamps programme was merged with other programmes to create *Bolsa Familia*, a nationwide conditional cash transfer programme. It was managed centrally through a locally updated unified register of beneficiary families, monitored with the participation of civil society. Grants, averaging about US\$30 per family (adjusted to food price inflation), were paid each month by a cash withdrawal card, which was held in the name of a female family member wherever possible. It now serves over 13 million families with an average monthly payment of US\$75 per family.

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### **Public sector food procurement**

The government implemented a direct food procurement programme (PAA) so as to source most of the food requirements of state institutions and emergency programmes from small-scale farmers, often through forward contracts.

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### **School meals**

The existing school lunch programme (PNAE) was expanded to cover all pre-school and school children (47 million children). Schools are required to acquire 30% of the value of purchased food from local small-scale farmer sources through the PAA food procurement programme.

## 4 Support for small-scale farming

Farm credit and technical services to small-scale farmers (PRONAF) were greatly expanded to enable farmers to raise output and thereby satisfy the extra demand created by Bolsa Familia, school meals and other procurement programmes.

### Management

Zero Hunger was set up and initially managed by a Special Ministry for Food Security (MESA), created to implement the programme and coordinate the actions during its first year of existence. After that period, its leadership was then transferred to the Ministry for Social Development.

An Executive Secretariat, reporting to the President, assures coordination of government inputs. A National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA), two-thirds of which is composed of civil society representatives and one-third of government representatives, advises the President on strategies and monitors progress. CONSEAs also exist at state and city levels.

The legal setting for the programme has been progressively strengthened, assuring the sustainability of the actions initiated by Zero Hunger. Measures include the approval of a National Food and Nutritional Security Law (LOSAN) in 2006 and the incorporation of the Right to Food in Brazil's Constitution in 2010.

### Results

As a result of Zero Hunger and related measures (e.g. minimum wage legislation), Brazil met the Millennium Development Goals of halving hunger and poverty by 2010. The trend of rising inequality between rich and poor was reversed; for example the Gini index fell from 58.7 in 2003 to 51.9 in 2012. The mortality rate of under five year olds was reduced by 45% over 11 years, and the proportion of people suffering from moderate and severe malnutrition fell from 16.9% in 2004 to 11.5% in 2009.

### Suggestions

Although the situation and possibilities in each country differ, it is possible to draw some lessons from Brazil on how to approach the design of effective food security strategies.

- › Take as a starting point the concept of enabling all citizens to enjoy the human right to food.
- › Recognize that the goals of ending deep poverty and of eradicating hunger and malnutrition are distinct and may call for different actions.
- › Recall that many aspects of food security affect the whole population and not just the poor.
- › Define realistic boundaries as to what can be done, recognizing skills and institutional constraints and taking steps to overcome these.
- › Whenever possible, adopt bold goals and implement actions at a national scale from the outset.

### The Zero Hunger experience suggests that:

- › A nationwide targeted *income transfer programme* to raise the food purchasing power of the poorest members of the population will have the most immediate impact on reducing chronic hunger. Its effectiveness will be enhanced by making family grants available wherever possible through women and engaging civil society in beneficiary selection and monitoring.
- › The nutritional impact of income transfers can be enhanced by media-based *food and nutrition education programmes* and by *health and nutrition interventions targeted at specific groups* (e.g. mothers and infants, children attending school, indigenous people, slave descendent populations and poor people living beyond the normal reach of established

institutions, such as the homeless, street children and people without birth certificates). A special focus should also be given to correcting vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

- The *multiplier effect* of the income transfers can be enhanced by support programmes (technical services, credit, public sector purchases, and rural infrastructure, including access to clean water and safe waste disposal) for small-scale farmers to enable them to respond to the extra demand for food and to enjoy an acceptable standard of living. This could include special support for improving the nutritional benefits of subsistence farming.
- The durability of the impact of these interventions will be increased by complementary adjustments in macro-economic policies, especially by sustained measures to reduce inequality in incomes (e.g. minimum wages, reduced restrictions in labour markets) and to broaden access to natural resources (e.g. land reform). These should eventually assure that all people can eat well without the need for special interventions.

### Three useful formulation steps:

1. National experts, with international support as needed, formulate a preliminary proposal (diagnosis, targets, resource needs, strategies).
2. The promotion of participative consultation mechanisms to review, refine and continuously update and improve the programme.
3. The creation of management and coordination arrangements, endowed with the necessary powers and resources.

### Reducing risks

The main risks are that the high political attractiveness of a programme to end hunger raises expectations that might not be met because of institutional weaknesses, lack of funding and corruption.

To counter these risks it is important to keep initial programme design simple, build institutional capacities, including at local levels, minimize use of intermediaries in transferring funds (e.g. electronic or phone transfers), coordinate government engagement at all levels and actively mobilize social participation. A willingness to adjust the programme in response to performance monitoring is essential.

The risk of non-sustainability can be reduced by creating a legal framework based on the right to food.

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