

# What can we learn from the “Zero Hunger” Program in Brazil?

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## Abstract

Hunger remains a pressing global issue, exacerbated by climate change, globalization, and resource limitations. Understanding the historical context and lessons from past policies is crucial for developing effective strategies. The research delves into the long-term policies implemented by the Brazilian government to address hunger and analyzes why they were unable to prevent the country's regression. It also examines the political context of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidential win over Jair Bolsonaro, emphasizing Lula's commitment to fighting hunger. The paper explores key policies implemented during Lula's government and their role in his political agenda centered around combating hunger and poverty. The paper focuses on one of Lula's prominent programs, Zero Hunger (Fome Zero), analyzing its impact and significance within the broader journey toward food security and development in Brazil. By examining Brazil's experience, this research provides insights into the complexities of addressing hunger and the interplay of historical, political, and social factors. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and the potential lessons learned, aiming to inform future policies and strategies in the fight against hunger.

Keywords: Hunger, Brazil, Food Security

## I. Introduction

Hunger is an issue that is anything but new; however, as climate change raises new environmental concerns, globalization makes dynamics more intricate and the limitedness of resources increases tensions worldwide one must consider the historical background against which the current situation has been established and what lessons can be found for future policies. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are some of the world's key food suppliers, particularly in terms of commodities. While natural configurations, such as land quality and climate, have been determinant factors for this, historical

foundations must not be forgotten since the structures of exploitative colonialism, as well as the Cold War, have shaped the social, political, and economic realities of the region. Brazil and its recent return to the hunger map serve as an interesting case study to understand the development of hunger-addressing policies in the region against its historical backdrop.

## 2. Hunger in Brazil: Its Return to the Hunger Map

In 2022, Brazil officially returned to the World Food Programme (United Nations) Hunger Map after leaving it in 2014<sup>1</sup>. The map consists of a study report that considers a country to be lacking food if more than 2.5 percent of the population deals with a chronic lack of food<sup>2</sup>. In the 2019-2021 period, chronic hunger in Brazil reached 4.1 percent<sup>3</sup>. The issue of hunger is a complex and intricate problem that relates to many different internal, external, past and present factors. In Latin America, some of these factors include, in particular, poverty, inequality and land distribution. To consider the current state of hunger, it is important to understand the distinction made by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Hunger, or **undernourishment** consists of the physical response/sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy. An individual is considered **food insecure** when they are consistently unable to have access to enough nutritious and safe food. It is measured by the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES); whereby, **severe** food insecurity consists of not having food for one or more days; **moderate**, where there is a compromise on the quality, and a reduction on the quantity of good consumed; and, food security to **mild** insecurity, where there is some uncertainty regarding the ability to obtain food<sup>4</sup>. In 2022, out of over 200 million Brazilians, 116.8 million suffered from food

insecurity, 19 million of which faced hunger, and with only 4 out of 10 families being able to guarantee food on the table<sup>5</sup>. Between 2019 and 2021, the prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population was 7.3 percent, a considerable increase from the 2014-2016 period, when it was 1.9 percent, and moderate food insecurity went from 18.3 percent to 28.9 percent in the country<sup>6</sup>. The data shows the worrying situation of hunger in the country. While a plethora of factors have led to the current scenario, including political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic, assessing the **long-term policies implemented by the Brazilian government** may provide answers as to what went wrong and why such policies were not able to prevent the country's regression.

The current discussion gains even higher relevance, not only for its highly alarming nature in itself, but also given the political context of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidential win over Jair Bolsonaro. While the focus of this essay is not the political differences and merits of such between the two candidates, it is valuable to highlight that hunger is a priority for Lula. In his inaugural address in 2022, he affirmed "if, at the end of my mandate, each Brazilian is able to feed itself three times a day, I will have

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<sup>1</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO Hunger Map Prevalence of Undernourishment 2019-2021 SDG Indicator 2.1.1, [FAO Hunger Map](#)

<sup>2</sup> Jornal Nacional, Brasil volta ao Mapa da Fome das Nações Unidas, G1, 2022, [Brasil volta ao Mapa da Fome das Nações Unidas | Jornal Nacional | G1](#)

<sup>3</sup> FAO; IFAD; UNICEF; WFP; WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022, Rome, Italy,

2022, 144, [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Hunger | FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#)

<sup>5</sup> [VIGISAN Inquérito Nacional sobre Insegurança Alimentar no Contexto da Pandemia da Covid-19 no Brasil](#) (9-10)

<sup>6</sup> [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#) (144)

accomplished my life mission”<sup>7</sup>. Now, 20 years later a similar moment took place on November 10, 2022, as he reiterated his commitment to fighting against hunger in the country amidst tears while delivering a speech in Brasilia. Key policies geared towards the vulnerable and poor, and combating hunger and poverty were implemented during his government and are at the center of his political agenda.

The development of public policies to combat hunger in Brazil has come a long way, forming a complex web of organs and programs that have changed throughout the years. Addressing hunger through public policy began has its roots in the 1980s and 1990s when there was the emergence of a greater focus on behalf of the State in terms of market regulation<sup>8</sup>. The basis for this can be drawn back to the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, whereby the universal healthcare system of the country (SUS) was established (Law 8.080), together with the guarantee of access to food and nutrition. Five years later, two fundamental organs were created to oversee and coordinate federal policies toward food security, the Food Security and Nutrition Council (CONSEA) and the National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNAN). From this moment onwards, many different programs were created to combat hunger in the country, including those implemented by president Lula. Understanding the historical journey, including gains and drawbacks towards food security and development in

Brazil includes a multitude of nuanced factors. For the purpose of this essay, an analysis of one of Lula’s key programs, Zero Hunger (Fome Zero) will be provided.

### 3. The Global Context

Food insecurity and malnutrition remain challenging global issues and current affairs have dimmed the prospect of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger. Following a decade of globally consecutive declining trends, the prevalence of undernourishment worldwide began to rise starting in 2019<sup>9</sup>. Recent developments like the COVID-19 pandemic and international conflicts, such as the War in Ukraine, in addition to long-term problems like climate change, poverty and weak governance have contributed to this. According to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2022 report, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”, in 2021, 20.2 percent of the population faced hunger in Africa, 9.1 percent in Asia, 8.6 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.8 percent in Asia, and less than 2.5 percent in Northern America and Europe<sup>10</sup>. This regional disparity is particularly relevant because poorer and more vulnerable societies, internally and externally, are not only the ones that will be affected most by climate change, and are the least ones prepared to respond to it<sup>11</sup>, but also the ones most likely to experience conflict resulting from such environmental changes<sup>12</sup>. In a vicious cycle, this would

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<sup>7</sup> Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 28/10/2002

<sup>8</sup> [Políticas de combate à fome no Brasil](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#) (14)

<sup>10</sup> [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#) (xvi)

<sup>11</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (35)

<sup>12</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (70)

perpetuate and augment inequalities within and between countries. It is thus important to understand and position the issue of hunger bearing in mind the different realities and varying conditions that have led to the current state of affairs in the world.

Current aggravators, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine have emphasized and exacerbated already existing problems in the global food system, bringing preceding issues and structural deficiencies to the forefront. It reinforces the intricate web of factors entailed in the issue. The Brazilian researcher Renata Motta points out that the two crises have highlighted the vulnerability of the global food system, which accentuates the free market and the **comparative advantages of each region**, leading their diets to impoverished and based on a small number of commodities like wheat, corn, and soy<sup>13</sup>. This further demonstrates the unfair distribution that perpetuates the internal and global status quo and makes it difficult for these countries to prosper. Furthermore, bearing in mind climate change and current environmental concerns, the discrepancy amongst countries also sheds light on the debate regarding sustainability, considering the highly contentious argument that to “deny to third world societies the kind of technological and economic modernization that the West has to thank for its own locational advantages, high standard of living and relative security for the future”<sup>14</sup>, which highlights the historical backdrop of these

differences. In terms of international relations and foreign policy, more ought to be done to foster an international environment where countries stand upon more equal grounds in which to develop and grow.

Moreover, the hunger question is relevant not only in itself as millions continue to die<sup>15</sup>, but also as an aspect of the greater concern over climate change and its concomitant challenges. In his book, *Climate Wars*, Harald Welzer argues that in the 21st-century wars will no longer be fought because of ideological conflicts, but rather they will be environmentally driven, marked by food scarcity and penurious conditions threatening individuals’ very survival<sup>16</sup>. The all-encompassing impact that climate change entails indicates the level of urgency with which we need to consider policies to address hunger, particularly in the most vulnerable areas of the world. Welzer also calls upon the need for effective political structures to handle these matters, pointing out that “political structures that do not curb violence, resting neither on the rule of law nor on the promotion of social welfare, serve to sharpen and perpetuate the problems rather than to mitigate them”<sup>17</sup>. As such, he points out the underlying structures that ought to be in place to deal effectively with climate change, lack of resources, and therefore the issue of hunger as well, indicating that effective governance and public policy are required to address them.

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<sup>13</sup> [Clara Balbi, “Fome não é problema populacional, mas de desigualdade social, dizem especialistas”](#)

<sup>14</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (84-85)

<sup>15</sup> [Famines - Our World in Data](#)

<sup>16</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (12)

<sup>17</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (68)

#### 4. Latin America

Despite being the third-most struggling region in terms of hunger in the world, Latin America and the Caribbean have long been referred to as the "breadbasket" of the world. According to the World Bank 2020 report on agriculture in LAC, the region is the world's leading supplier to the world market across several commodity products, including coffee from Colombia, soybeans from Brazil, and wheat from Argentina<sup>18</sup>. Considered a super-exporter with over 90 percent of the value of its total export shares consisting of agriculture<sup>19</sup>, Brazil is a great example of how significant LAC countries are in providing food worldwide and the significance of agriculture for their economy. However, this **significance is often not translated into development in the country**. The region is a diverse, culturally and environmentally rich region, with ample potential for development and growth, but that is often overlooked and reduced to its striking poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment, which are all factors that further push the most vulnerable into the helplessness of hunger.

In 2021, 20.2 percent of the population faced hunger in Africa, 9.1 percent in Asia, 8.6 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.8 percent in Asia, and less than 2.5 percent in Northern America and Europe<sup>20</sup>. This regional disparity is particularly relevant because poorer and more

vulnerable societies, internally and externally, are not only the ones that will be affected most by climate change, and are the least ones prepared to respond to it<sup>21</sup>, but also the ones most likely to engage in conflict resulting from such environmental changes<sup>22</sup>. In a vicious cycle, this would perpetuate and augment inequalities within and between countries.

Current aggravators, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine have emphasized and exacerbated already existing problems in the global food system, bringing to the forefront preceding issues and structural deficiencies. It reinforces the intricate web of factors entailed in the issue. The Brazilian researcher Renata Motta points out that the two crises have highlighted the vulnerability of the global food system, which accentuates the free market and the **comparative advantages of each region**, leading their diets to impoverished and bases on a small number of commodities like wheat, corn and soy<sup>23</sup>. This further demonstrates the unfair distribution that perpetuates the internal and global status quo and makes it difficult for these countries to prosper. Furthermore, bearing in mind climate change and current environmental concerns, the discrepancy amongst countries also sheds light on the debate regarding sustainability since it would be considered highly contentious to argue to "deny to third

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<sup>18</sup> [Future Foodscapes : Re-imagining Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (28)

<sup>19</sup> [Future Foodscapes : Re-imagining Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (4)

<sup>20</sup> [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#) (xvi)

<sup>21</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (35)

<sup>22</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (70)

<sup>23</sup> [Clara Balbi, "Fome não é problema populacional, mas de desigualdade social, dizem especialistas"](#)

world societies the kind of technological and economic modernization that the West has to thank for its own locational advantages, high standard of living and relative security for the future”<sup>24</sup>, which highlights the historical backdrop of these differences. This persistent contradiction is disturbing. In light of these export-based economies and dependency cycles, the international community has relegated these countries to a position similar to the one they occupied in colonial times. In terms of international relations and foreign policy, more ought to be done to foster an international environment where countries stand upon more equal ground in which to develop and grow.

While resources are limited, the persistence of hunger as a global issue goes much beyond that. It is not merely a quantitative matter, but rather one of poverty, inequality, management, and accessibility. Many factors such as the distribution of land, agricultural practices, and inflation play a role in the levels of food security. Ensuring food security entails a complex solution encompassing a multitude of factors of different spheres ranging from agriculture and food production to economic policies to consumer behavior and beyond. Addressing the matter is thus not simply a question of producing more food, but of thinking about the distribution and accessibility of resources.

## 5. Public Policy: “Fome Zero”

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<sup>24</sup> Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars* (84-85)

<sup>25</sup> Aranha, [Fome Zero: Uma História Brasileira](#) (93)

### 5.1 Context

*Fome Zero*, meaning Zero Hunger in Portuguese, is a program created in 2003, during the beginning of Lula’s presidency, under the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Combating Hunger. It encompasses over 30 complementary programs that had the objective of tackling the immediate and underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity. Its axis, programs, and actions can be divided into 4: (1) access to food; (2) the strengthening of family agriculture; (3) income generation, and (4) coordination, mobilization, and social control<sup>25</sup>. In addition and complementary to this, in 2003, there was the creation of the “Programa Bolsa Família”, which unified the Zero Hunger program with other programs from the previous government. As such, from the start of Lula’s government, a strong foundation was laid to implement strategies to fight hunger in a comprehensive and encompassing manner. Additionally, the Zero Hunger Program identified 3 key dimensions relating to hunger in Brazil as of the 21st Century, which include: (1) the insufficiency in regards to demand as a function of the inequality in purchasing power, high levels of unemployment and underemployment and of the lower purchasing power given the salary of workers; (2) the incompatibility of food prices in relation to the population’s purchasing power; and (3), the hunger of the portion of the population that is poor and excluded from the market<sup>26</sup>. By analyzing the impact of one of the most renowned public policy

<sup>26</sup> Mattei, [Políticas públicas de combate à fome na américa latina: evidências a partir de países selecionados](#) (91)

programs in the country, it is possible to acquire a greater understanding of how administrative tools have been used to address these challenges.

### 5.2 General effect

The two programs, Fome Zero and Bolsa Familia, had a significant impact in the country, gaining traction worldwide and across the political spectrum. The United Nations and World Bank have both expressed sympathy and a favorable look upon the Brazilian experience of Bolsa Familia. The State of Food Insecurity in the World Report of 2014, concluded that “Brazil has made great strides in food security and nutrition governance over the last ten years, with laws and institutions that are the legacy of the Zero Hunger programme”<sup>27</sup>, finding that “between 2000–02 and 2004–06, the undernourishment rate in Brazil fell by half from 10.7 percent to below 5 percent”<sup>28</sup>. It also detailed the importance of inter-ministerial and sectoral collaboration as well as the significance of the institutionalization of food security and nutrition governance. Nevertheless, such public policies are not without their share of criticism. One example is the view posed by the economist and FAO member, Hartwig de Haen, who expressed disappointment with the program and called out its “assistentialist” character as well as the lack of other government policies that are of a more structural and fundamental nature, such as an agrarian reform<sup>29</sup>. As such, it is possible to acknowledge that the establishment

and institutionalization of these two programs consisted of a very important development in the country; however, not overlooking their limitations.

### 5.3. Social perspective: access to food (Bolsa Familia)

#### 5.3.1. Positive impact

While Bolsa Familia is a separate government program, it is one of the key components of the “access to food” pillar of Fome Zero given its ability to provide access to means. The program consists of a conditional cash transfer geared towards helping poor families with conditionalities tied to health and children’s education. One of its main goals was alleviating hunger. In regards to poverty, in 2017, Bolsa Familia transfers helped to remove 3.4 million individuals from extreme poverty and another 3.2 million from poverty<sup>30</sup>. In relation to inequality, data indicates that the program reduces the Gini coefficient between 1 percent and 1.5 percent and was responsible for nearly 10 percent of the decrease in the Gini between 2001 and 2005<sup>31</sup>. It is important to acknowledge the significance that the increase in purchasing power has and how it is tied to conditionalities and the data related to its effects, particularly given that these developments are tied to structural problems of large impact (e.g. the impact of education on subsequent earnings). Particularly, in its direct effect on food security, it was found that a family that is part of the program decreased the risk that a child will face

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<sup>27</sup> [The State of Food Insecurity in the World \(SOFI\) 2014](#) (26)

<sup>28</sup> [The State of Food Insecurity in the World \(SOFI\) 2014](#) (23)

<sup>29</sup> [FAO critica resultado do Fome Zero | Acervo | ISA](#)

<sup>30</sup> [IPEA. Os Efeitos Do Programa Bolsa Família Sobre A Pobreza E A Desigualdade: Um Balanço Dos Primeiros Quinze Anos](#) (5)

<sup>31</sup> [IPEA. Os Efeitos Do Programa Bolsa Família Sobre A Pobreza E A Desigualdade: Um Balanço Dos Primeiros Quinze Anos](#) (23)

chronic malnutrition by 31 percent, and for young children between 6-11 months, this protection increased to 62 percent<sup>32</sup>. This indicates just how important this welfare tool is to help provide means to cover the basic needs of low-income families. Overall, by addressing poverty, equality, and education, the Bolsa Familia program encompasses key aspects leading to positive change in society and namely, it is a key contributor in allowing families to have access to income and thus food.

### *5.3.2. Limitations*

The program is fundamental in the history of Brazilian public policy; however, in light of Brazil's recent return to the Hunger Map, one must consider its limitations and perhaps its long-term shortcomings. A key criticism towards Bolsa Familia and conditional cash transfer programs generally is that they may act as a disincentive for individuals to work and limit the meritocratic ideal, thus leading to lower productivity and an increased sense of "laziness". Furthermore, another important criticism is its short-term character and the lack of medium to long-term deadlines for the program's policies. There are not enough means through which the program allows families to autonomously reach food security through work<sup>33</sup>. This lack of autonomy and self-support may perhaps indicate a key limitation of the program. As such, it may also provide an answer as to why it was not enough as a public policy to ensure the stability and safety of the millions of Brazilians

impacted by the events of the last couple of years. KP: Thus, the challenge of not only guaranteeing access to income but also providing a system to encourage and propel autonomy can be considered largely untended.

### *5.4. Economic perspective: family agriculture*

#### *5.4.1. What is family agriculture and why does it matter?*

Strengthening family agriculture is one of the key axes of the Zero Hunger strategy, as it proposes the stimulation of food production by family farmers, both for their own consumption as well as for sale and profit-making. This is a fundamental aspect of promoting food sovereignty, which consists of establishing a system whereby the ones who produce food have power over the methods of policies and mechanisms related to it. The idea behind this is to provide public support for producers that need it most based on pressure exercised by the rural population in the country. There is a distinction that must be made between family agriculture, which takes over a small plot of land, usually between 1-2 acres and administered within the same family and with food production destined for their own consumption and sale of surplus, and agribusinesses, which consist of large plots of land often destined for monoculture and exportation, a common feature in Latin American countries. An essential step towards family agriculture was the Family Agriculture Law (Law 11.326) passed in 2006, which consolidated the idea of family agriculture and

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<sup>32</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (102)

<sup>33</sup> Maria Fernanda Bocafoli. "[Políticas Públicas De Combate À Fome Nos Governos Lula \(2002-2010\) E Bachelet \(2006-2010\)](#)" (10)



promoted the establishment of public policies focused on it.

The approach of strengthening family agriculture is particularly important in Brazil, as in many Latin American countries, because it provides approximately 77 percent of the food that reaches the population, especially staple products, while only occupying around 80 million acres, that is, 23 percent of the total agricultural land<sup>34,35,36</sup>. This not only highlights the extreme maldistribution of land in the country, in light of its colonial past and the absence of measures to address it but also how significant family agriculture is to guarantee the supply of the internal market. This also means that Brazil's status as one of the world's largest food producers is not always reflected within the country – since the producers for export and internal supply are not the same. Furthermore, while small landowners are the main producers of internal consumption, the rural area it is the one that struggles the most with food insecurity, having around 45 percent of food insecurity (7.1 percent extreme), against 35 percent (4.1 percent extreme) in urban areas<sup>37</sup>. In addition to this disparity, there are also major differences among the different regions within the country, with the North and Northeast suffering the most. Overall, all these inequalities stress some of the difficulties in ensuring that there is a proper and functional link between producers and

consumers. Lastly, in portraying the relevance of this approach, it is valuable to grasp how strengthening family agriculture through multiple public policies (namely Pronaf, PAA, and Programa Mais Alimentos), diminished the impact of the recent food and economic world crisis<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the strategy of acknowledging and supporting the production and distribution of small landowners and family farmers in the country is fundamental in order to guarantee food security, without compromising Brazil's economy and status as a key world producer.

## 6. Public Policy: PRONAF

### 6.1 *What is PRONAF and why is it significant?*

The National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF) is a program destined to support food production, promoting a more diversified production and bearing in mind regional particularities. It finances individual and collective projects of family farmers and agrarian reforms settlers upon request, offering subsidized credit at a lower-level fixed interest, according to different categories of farmers based on profit, as well as technical services. It is managed by the Ministry of Agrarian Development and operated by public banks. By providing a specific focus to small landowners, PRONAF, was, in 1995, a turning point in regard to agricultural policies in Brazil since until then, family farmers were largely excluded from such – despite composing 80 percent of agricultural

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<sup>34</sup> [IBGE | Censo Agro 2017 | Em 11 anos, agricultura familiar perde 9,5 percent dos estabelecimentos e 2.2 milhões de postos de trabalho](#)

<sup>35</sup> Abrandh and Oxfam, 2012, *Effective Public Policies and Active Citizenship: Brazil's experience of building a Food and Nutrition Security System* (56)

<sup>36</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (191)

<sup>37</sup> [IBGE | Censo Agro 2017 | 10,3 milhões de pessoas moram em domicílios com insegurança alimentar grave](#)

<sup>38</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (102)

establishments in the country<sup>39</sup>. This was the case particularly because the main mechanisms of policies at the time were rural credit and minimum price guarantees, meaning that there was not a distinction and consideration for the different needs of different producers, and that medium to large landowners had a much greater capacity to benefit from these policies than small landowners. The program was also strengthened in 2003, as Lula became president and made it an important aspect of his government, under the Zero Hunger strategy. Resources destined for the program were R\$ 2.4 billion in the 2003-2004 harvest year, and R\$ 9 billion in the following year<sup>40</sup>. While the credit policy in itself may be a subject of scrutiny and indicate potential fundamental failures in the overall effort to end hunger in the country, it was a key request of small landowners at the time, and differentiating and delegating specific focus to family farming was a great development.

### *6.2 PRONAF positive effects*

PRONAF has had ample positive effects. It has been able to grow and develop through social interaction with its target audience and their organizations, which has allowed it to adapt to the specificity and particularity of the needs of family farming<sup>41</sup>. One of its key outcomes was allowing family farmers to invest in their production and increase the

land used for it<sup>42</sup>. Its advancements and particularities in regard to other programs in the region include: (1) The distinction and classification of farmers according to their economic situation; (2) Subsidies to interest rates of financing arrangements; (3) The stimulation of organic and agroecological production; (4) Support to activities that add more value to production, and thus income; (5) Incentive to the establishment of small agro-industries; (6) Support to the education of young farmers; (7) Support to the development of forestry; (8) Simplification of credit guarantees; (9) Democratization of resources of training through selection processes and support to projects developed by the organizations themselves and farmers; (10) Stimulation and support to the establishment of cooperative credit systems; (11) Security of price and production; (12) Technical assistance<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, its continuation throughout time and respect for its incurring obligations are connected to the financial support given and to the existence of insurance mechanisms related to both climate and price, tied to credit<sup>44</sup>. Overall, it has contributed to the increase in production, the inclusion of rural families and of their income, as well as the dynamicity of local economies<sup>45</sup>. This showcases just how encompassing and thorough the program is.

### *6.3 PRONAF limitations*

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<sup>39</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (191)

<sup>40</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (178)

<sup>41</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (196)

<sup>42</sup> Carlos E. Guanzioli, [PRONAF dez anos depois: resultados e perspectivas para o desenvolvimento rural](#) (324)

<sup>43</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (196)

<sup>44</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (221)

<sup>45</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (148)

Assessments and studies on PRONAF have also shed light on shortcomings and many suggestions for its improvements, which indicate gaps and deficiencies that may have led to an initial positive response that in later years were somewhat reversed, leading to Brazil's return to the hunger map. To begin with, the high amount of bureaucracy and cost of the program, as well as simultaneously the need for more resources were key problems pointed out in a comprehensive study by FAO published in 2010<sup>46</sup>. The study also considered the need to ensure the inclusion of poorer families through new operators in the financial system and facilitate its accessibility, which could be done by promoting the involvement of regional and local government and complementary funding. Given Brazil's size and particular complexities arising from such, it is not a surprise that administrative matters pose an obstacle to effective policy-making.

Another limitation of the program is related to its long-term potential. 10 years after its establishment, evaluations of the program's impact on income and lifestyle improvement of the rural population benefitting from it were still inconclusive<sup>47</sup>. Relatedly, the need to improve the training and education of rural producers and access to knowledge and information regarding public policies was considered a significant need<sup>48</sup>. As such, similarly to one of the key

challenges of Bolsa Família, the program seems to have been effective in allowing individuals and families to make valuable investments, but not necessarily in a way that allows them to reach more all-encompassing and significant lifestyle improvements that would lead to greater stability and thus a well-founded food security scheme. Additionally, it showed that a significant limitation is related to the capacity of farmers to pay back the credit. It identified four factors that have negatively impacted income generation, and thus the payment of loans on behalf of the farmers; namely: (i) absence of technical assistance or its low quality; (ii) difficulty in the management of credit; (iii) absence of a systemic approach in part of technicians; (iv) absence of the integration of markets, commercialization structure and addition of value<sup>49</sup>. It thus suggests that the institutionality and mechanisms of PRONAF ought to be reviewed with the objective of reinforcing financial discipline, encouraging the maximization of the efficiency of resources, and improving complementary policies to help consolidate family farming<sup>50</sup>. As such, ensuring that the program is geared towards a more holistic and realistic understanding of families' needs and capabilities is essential.

A more recent analysis, published in 2014 pointed out three main obstacles for the program: (i) its financial mechanism remains tied to the financial agents' interests; (ii) there is a

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<sup>46</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (123)

<sup>47</sup> Carlos E. Guanziroli, [PRONAF dez anos depois: resultados e perspectivas para o desenvolvimento rural](#) (324)

<sup>48</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (220-221)

<sup>49</sup> Carlos E. Guanziroli, [PRONAF dez anos depois: resultados e perspectivas para o desenvolvimento rural](#) (320-21)

<sup>50</sup> Carlos E. Guanziroli, [PRONAF dez anos depois: resultados e perspectivas para o desenvolvimento rural](#) (325)

significant concentration of resources in the South; (iii) the financial resources are mostly destined to a specific segment of family farmers<sup>51</sup>. The author points out that rural development has been anchored in values of the dominating model of agricultural and livestock production in the country – as opposed to a more qualified government intervention based on economic, social, and environmental sustainability, which could help to overcome such limitations<sup>52</sup>. He thus concludes that while progress has been made since in previous times there was the general exclusion of family farmers; nowadays, PRONAF continues to exclude segments of this group, particularly those that have benefited from agrarian policies<sup>53</sup>. Therefore, while the program was groundbreaking at the time it seems it has not done enough to acquire its goals and actually help provide more autonomy to family farmers at a large scale.

## 7. Public Policy: PAA

### 7.1. *What is PAA?*

The Food Acquisition Program (Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos, or PAA) is a federal-level public policy instrument created in 2003 from a recommendation of CONSEA. It is managed by the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), in partnership with the National Supply Company (CONAB), states and municipalities. It

is essentially a tool for the commercialization of food products, complementary to PRONAF, in the joint effort of inserting family agriculture in the market. Generally, it has 5 objectives: (1) encourage food production by family farmers, thus contributing to their own food security; (2) generate income amongst the poorest family farmers through the sale of surplus to the federal government; (3) encourage the commercial link to family agriculture; (4) increase the food stock related to food programs geared towards the most vulnerable; (5) promote social inclusion with the rural area<sup>54</sup>. Its two main purposes are: (i) promoting access to food for those facing food insecurity, and (ii) supporting and incentivizing family agriculture and livestock. As such, this dual character allows it to both stimulate food production and facilitate access to it by those in need. It does this by directly (without the need for public bidding) purchasing foods produced by family farms, land reform settlers, and traditional peoples and communities, and distributing it to individuals suffering from food insecurity supported by the network of social assistance, and other public tools geared towards food security<sup>55</sup>. It also contributes to the creation of strategic public stocks of foods and its organization produced by family agriculture, which encourages production from small landowners and the recuperation/elevation of food prices – which allows family farmers to sell their products in the market for a higher price<sup>56</sup>. It is a key component of the Zero Hunger

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<sup>51</sup> Mattei, [Políticas públicas de combate à fome na américa latina: evidências a partir de países selecionados](#) (67-8)

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (197-198)

<sup>55</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (104)

<sup>56</sup> Delgado et al. [Avaliação Do Programa De Aquisição De Alimentos Da Agricultura Familiar \(Paa\)](#) (19)

strategy as well as part of the government initiative for the Productive Rural Inclusion of poorer families. The PAA thus consists of a substantial measure to close the gap between the food supply from family agriculture and the demand for food for programs and public instruments for those in need.

### *7.2. PAA positive effects*

Considering that the program simultaneously tackles two major issues regarding food production and accessibility by promoting interconnectivity between producers and consumers that are largely left out of the global market, it is a promising policy. In 2008, five years after its implementation, nearly 119,000 farmers sold their products to the PAA, which were donated to around nearly 17 million people<sup>57</sup>. A key aspect of this was the development of the National School Meals Programme (Pnae), which provides food to students in public schools. The large values showcase how great the extent of the unmet need on both the production and consumption sides was. Within the 7 years of its creation, over R\$3 billion were invested, benefitting around 140,000 farming families each year, as suppliers, allowing them to cover their production cost, and around 15 million people, through food donations –

increasing the variety and quality of foods consumed<sup>58</sup>. Thus, empirical data indicates that the program was able to address its two main goals.

Another positive impact of the program consists of its support of farmers and incentive towards diversification. While not representing a statistically significant overview, research conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), published in 2021, points out that the most observed benefits, in over half of the studies, were the commercialization of products and guarantee of sale as well as an improvement in terms of profits<sup>59</sup>. On the production side, this ensures a level of safety and predictability for small landowners. The diversification of products was also one of the main benefits, and other studies have highlighted the significance of this in regard to sustainability, since diversification allows for greater production efficiency, reduces pests, diseases, and negative environmental impact, and increases production resilience<sup>60</sup>. Promoting variety in agricultural production is particularly relevant considering not only the historical makeup of production in Brazil – as it consists of a challenge to the long-established system of monoculture –, but also the fact that family farmers produce on the basis of self-sufficiency. Thus, greater variety allows small producers to get closer to food sovereignty, and additionally, provides the

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<sup>57</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (104)

<sup>58</sup> [FAO. Fome Zero - A experiência brasileira](#) (218-219, 221)

<sup>59</sup> [IPEA. A Evolução Do Programa De Aquisição De Alimentos \(Paa\): Uma Análise Da Sua Trajetória De Implementação, Benefícios E Desafios](#) (60)

<sup>60</sup> [Sustainability of Diversified Organic Cropping Systems—Challenges Identified by Farmer Interviews and Multi-Criteria Assessments](#)

possibility of better accessible nutrition for consumers that benefit from the program.

### *7.3 PAA limitations*

In spite of its widespread benefits, one must also consider the remaining challenges and shortcomings of the program, particularly to consider any issues that might have led to Brazil's regression in terms of food security. The research led by IPEA also pointed out that key problems are related to access and functioning of the program, including bureaucracy and lack of information<sup>61</sup>. Another important problem was the insufficient support to family farmers, including limited infrastructure for stock and transport and the absence of technical assistance services<sup>62</sup>. The purchase limit and delays in payment were also cited as major problems<sup>63</sup>. While most difficulties showcased improvement in following years, lack of support to local public power did not<sup>64</sup>. This is particularly relevant in regard to food sovereignty since the ability to transfer power to the hands of these small landowners and family farmers is essential in strengthening their capacity to supply and fulfill the demands of the internal market. This inability to establish self-sufficiency and independence from direct government aid also indicates that the positive developments of the program were not capable of "standing on their own feet", thus being easily subjected to political and economic instability as well as general international market fluctuations.

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<sup>61</sup> [IPEA. A Evolução Do Programa De Aquisição De Alimentos \(Paa\): Uma Análise Da Sua Trajetória De Implementação, Benefícios E Desafios \(64\)](#)

## **8. Conclusion**

Overall, key lessons that can be taken from Fome Zero consist primarily of its short-term focus tied to political gains entrenched in Brazil's democratic immaturity and limited development. This has hindered it from having a more robust and long-term effect in a manner that would allow members of its numerous projects and programs within it to develop their autonomy to a greater degree. Furthermore, failure to address structural and more historical problems, such as the question of land distribution, import-export set-ups, inequality, poverty and so on, has also jeopardized the creation of a more well-founded support system for hunger to not return to the country. Despite the focus on family agriculture and Lula's initial rhetoric and attempt at an agrarian reform, such did not occur to the extent that would have led to a greater and longer-lasting impact.

As to takeaways and insights for the future, developing a more sustainable and self-reliant system is essential. One of the key aspects of this would be investing in professional qualifications geared towards promoting autonomy in rural areas and family farming. The State needs to take action in a more efficient manner, not in terms of imposition and positive action, but through strategic measures and better regulation, particularly in regards to the distribution of land, and the internal-external market dynamic. As written

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

in the report *Effective Public Policies and Active Citizenship: Brazil's experience of building a Food and Nutrition Security System* “the proposals point to the recovery of the **regulatory capacity of the State** and the implementation of **sovereign national supply policies** that increase access to quality food based on decentralized sustainable systems, coordinate different actions from production to consumption, and tackle health problems arising from a poor diet”<sup>65</sup>. As such, **national supply policies centered on food sovereignty** are key.

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<sup>65</sup> Abrandh and Oxfam, 2012, *Effective Public Policies and Active Citizenship: Brazil's experience of building a Food and Nutrition Security System* (64)