

Human Right to Adequate Food: Brazil's Rights-Based Development Approach

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Abstract

Between 1990 and 2012, Brazil reduced from 25.5% to 3.5 % the percentage of the population in extreme hunger, thus achieving the Millennium Development Goal before the 2015 deadline. In addition, the country reduced the percentage of people living in extreme poverty from 24.3% to 8.4% between 2001 and 2012. With these results, the Brazilian experience became referenced worldwide as a successful case. In this article, some aspects of the Brazilian National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security's institutional building will be approached in order to highlight its conceptual structure and how a rights-based approach guided its developments.

Keywords: *Human rights, Adequate food, Brazil, Development approach.*

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Background to the Study

Food Security

The term food security appeared in international debates in the early 1970s, during a severe food crisis. At that time, the concept of food security presented at the World Food Conference (1974) focused on ensuring stable production to meet growing world demand (FAO, 1974). At the time, the Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and food security were not yet dealt with in an articulated manner in international diplomatic discourse and action. However, after the end of the Cold War, when the ideological divisions between civil and political rights and social, economic, and cultural rights were softened, these concepts gradually developed from the aggregation of new reflections on the causes of hunger that did not only approach the productive deficit, but also income access, nutritional quality and cultural matters related to consumption and production, which characterizes the debates about food sovereignty as well.

In 1999, the Human Right to Adequate Food was the subject of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment n°. 12. The Committee established essential guidelines for the State's ability to formulate and implement national strategies that comply with the principles of accountability, transparency, popular participation, decentralization, legislative capacity and judiciary independence.

Institutional Building: Combining Intersectorality and Social Participation

Brazil vigorously resumed the process of building food and nutritional security policies from the year of 2003. In this scenario, the Zero Hunger Program creation represents the culmination of a historic movement to fight hunger in Brazil, reinforced with the re-democratization and strengthening of social rights in the 1988 Constitution. The Project, and the subsequent Zero Hunger Program, laid the foundations for the National Plan for Food and Nutrition Security, which over the years was developed using legal regulatory instruments. At the heart of Brazil's food and nutritional security policies are the concepts of Human Right to Adequate Food, and food sovereignty. In line with this perspective, the Food and Nutritional Security Policy developed in Brazil was built on a rights-based approach to development and, therefore, on the State's responsibility to design and maintain public policies in close collaboration with civil society.

Supported by the previous conceptual elaborations developed in the international sphere, the Brazilian definition of food security presents some peculiarities. The addition of the adjective "nutritional" to the expression most commonly used as "food security" aims to make clear the connection between the socioeconomic, health and nutrition spheres, in order to highlight the intersectorality (intersectoral work) that this concept encompasses.

Throughout the decade of 2000, food and nutritional security policies were gradually institutionalized. In this context, the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA in Portuguese) was reinstated in 2003 and reproduced at the State and municipal levels. In 2006, the National Food and Nutritional Security System (SISAN in Portuguese) was created and the Interministerial Chamber of Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN in Portuguese), in 2007. Recognising food security as a national priority, the Human Right to

Adequate Food was introduced into the Brazilian Constitution in 2010. In the same year, a Decree was published to regulate SiSAN and instituted the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security.

In this scenario, the role of CONSEA stands out. This Advisory Council, which brings together civil society and governmental representatives, had a working group to elaborate the Organic Law on Food and Nutritional Security proposal. Consequently, this Law considered all the concepts, principles and the Human Rights perspective for years defended by civil society. CONSEA's other important actions can be highlighted, such as bringing to the presidential agenda the recovery of the school feeding program's per capita budget, as well as proposing a new legislation for this program and also for the improvement of the Brazilian conditioned cash transference program, Bolsa Família. Another relevant proposal articulated in this Council was the Program for Food Acquisition from Family Farming (PAA in Portuguese). However, in spite of the success in the national level, not always food and nutritional security councils have the same efficiency in the lower levels of public administration. Thus, this capitalization is still a challenge for fully implementing the National Policy (Leitão and Maluf, 2012).

The National Food and Nutritional Security System aims to ensure the HRAF through policy elaboration, implementation and monitoring in a coordinated space that values State and civil society exchanges. In this System the Interministerial Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security, created in 2007, has the purpose of promoting the articulation and integration of federal public administration's organs and entities. This intersectorial structure and strong dialogue with civil society are remarkable features of the Brazilian policy and are pointed as fundamental for the success achieved.

Challenges and Perspectives

Although developing a complex institutional framework, it is important to consider that Brazil is a diverse country and that local implementation of these policies can suffer from deficiency of structures or lack of political will. It is significant to remark that even with clear advances in the last decade, according to official data from 2013, 7.2 million people still suffer from food insecurity in Brazil.

Conclusion

As can be observed in the topics presented, civil society mobilization was an important feature for building food security policies in Brazil. However, it is also relevant to remark the government's openness to deal with social movement's demands and contributions required to achieve successful outcomes. In the current political and economic crisis in Brazil, uncertainty has been a major challenge for social policy. Dilma's impeachment was followed by the Plenary approval of a Proposed Constitutional Amendment which limits public spending for 20 years, including health and education expenses. In this bitter political landscape some questions remain: what is the future for social policy in Brazil? Will social pressure have effects on policy change? What will be the impacts of latest legal reforms on social achievements?

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