

Food and nutrition security in the global context: the Brazilian case

The Brazilian strategy of food and nutrition sovereignty and security must be seen in a global context. While the country's agribusiness sector is a huge world food exporter based on large-scale monocultures, there are public programmes supporting family farmers whose significant social and environmental repercussions are a central component of the eradication of hunger and extreme poverty in the country.

In order to evaluate the repercussions of global initiatives set in place since the food crises of 2006–2008 over the Brazilian strategy of food and nutrition security, it is mandatory to start by approaching peculiar features of the country's international insertion before presenting recent trends in this field. For better clarity, it is worth anticipating the argument that the international repercussions of Brazilian positioning and policies used to be more important than the other way round, through the internalisation of such global initiatives. This has to do both with the condition of huge food exporters

and the participation of Brazilian government and civil society organisations in various international forums.

■ The world faces not one but four crises

First of all, it is worth highlighting the challenges to food and nutrition sovereignty and security posed by the global context. One can say that the world is passing through a period of confluence of crises with a sort of overlapping of the food, economic, environmental (climate) and energetic crises. They are all systemic and inter-linked despite their having different timings and amplex. Being systemic, those four crises also require systemic responses encompassing both the multiple dimensions involved in each and the connections among them. No long-term strategies for food and nutrition security could be envisaged without considering their connections, for example, with

the economic constraints on accessing food, the search for renewable sources of energy or the environmental impacts of (or the climate repercussions on) food production.

As for the food crisis, it is assumed here that, underlying the food prices uprising, some components of the world food system came up as evidences of the systemic nature of the crisis. Food system puzzles underlying the climbing up of food prices lead to assessing present patterns of multilateralism, global governance and national regulation of food markets. By the way, international initiatives such as those assessed in this issue of Rural 21 have been facing criticisms in relation to governance mechanisms, resource availability and efficiency in accomplishing their proposed targets. It is widely recognised that there is an absence of multilateral bodies capable of dealing with the complex challenges posed by the present context. Questions related to the role of family farmers and peasants, the power of transnational corporations, biodiversity and consumption patterns and human health come out as well.

■ Brazil – a poverty alleviator that is a global player on the world markets

In order to place Brazil in the global context of food sovereignty and security as briefly described, one has to consider that the country actively takes part in the making of this global scenario in at least two ways. First, being a huge food exporter – condition valued for its contribution to global food security – means that Brazil is an active component of the global food system which is under the above-mentioned criticisms. More important to the subject of this paper, it explains repeated calls by the Brazilian government and export companies for agricultural trade liberalisation, while supporting domestically the expansion of agricultural

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models with significant social and environmental impacts. This I call a more-of-the-same response to the present global context.

Secondly, and perhaps more stimulating, Brazil has gained international attention thanks to recent achievements in the reduction of hunger and poverty to which the perspective of promoting food and nutrition security made an important contribution. Having become a political priority since the beginning of the Lula Government, in 2003, the ongoing process of building up the National System and Policy for Food and Nutrition Security has been profiting from a long-standing nationwide mobilisation gathering social organisations, networks and movements, governmental officials and researchers.

Considerable improvements in social indicators have resulted from active anti-cyclic measures for the recovery of employment and the creation of job opportunities together

with broad-reach social policies such as: the gradual valuing of the official minimum wage; the unification of instruments and quick expansion of conditional cash transfers; strong support to family farmers; strengthening the school meals programme including local food purchases from family farmers; specific actions for most vulnerable social groups and communities. As one can see, a central role has been played by public policies oriented on giving active responses to the food and economic crises. However, distinct socio-economic dynamics still exist that, on the one hand, improve poor people's living conditions while, on the other hand, old economic dynamics continue to promote social inequalities.

The above-mentioned process of setting in place a system and a policy to promote food and nutrition security takes the latter as a public policy strategic goal oriented by the principles of the human right to adequate food and food sovereignty. Intersectorality, active social participation and

decentralisation are core elements and challenges in these processes. The National System has two co-ordinating spaces where sectoral goals are dealt with in trying to reach integrated programmes. The National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) – an advisory body to the Presidency of the Republic – put together 19 governmental and 38 civil society representatives. The Inter-ministerial Chamber (CAISAN) is an intra-governmental body gathering these 19 ministries in order to reach intersectoral programmes based on Consea and others' propositions.

By the middle of 2011, a national plan of food and nutrition security should be launched to final discussion and official approval as established in a Presidential decree signed in August 2010. The plan should encompass the following seven priority areas:

Small farming households in Brazil receive support from public programmes.



1. Access to food;
2. systems of food production, collecting, processing and distribution;
3. education and capacity building;
4. indigenous people and traditional communities;
5. food and nutrition actions in health care;
6. access to water;
7. food sovereignty and security at international level.

The new Federal Government lead by President Dilma Rousseff that took power in January 2011 established the eradication of extreme poverty as its main social priority, allowing for the expectancy that programmes and actions to promote food and nutrition security should continue to play a role.

In spite of counting on strong endogenous dynamics, obviously, the Brazilian experience in this field briefly referred to above shares knowledge and procedures with other countries and international organisations. There has been increasing technical co-operation aimed at extending Brazilian experience in many areas of public policy and also among civil society organisations while the country profits from the experience of others in these same areas. Furthermore, there is a growing perception that regional strategies must be put forward in the Mercosul region, and closer links are



Photo: J. Boethling

Access to water is one of the seven priority areas of the Brazilian national plan for food and nutrition security.

being established with African and Asian countries.

■ How to face present and future food crises?

However, coming back to the argument presented in the first paragraph, the global initiatives in response to the food crises have only limited, if

any, meaning for countries such as Brazil. More important, one could take the risk of affirming that they have been having limited effects for most vulnerable countries as well. So far, the world lacks a multilateral body able to deal with global challenges in ways quite different from what we are used to. The Committee on World Food Security, hosted by FAO, could play this role if member countries support its moving forward the recent reform in their functioning which

now includes civil society participation. International co-operation must change traditional paradigms and instruments, while trying to achieve more coherence among international organisations' plans of action. Actually, more than conventional aid, vulnerable countries need support to create political and institutional capacities to make and implement their own policies and strategies.

Zusammenfassung

Die brasilianische Strategie zur Nahrungsmittel- und Ernährungssicherung muss in einem globalen Kontext betrachtet werden. Während der Agribusiness-Sektor des Landes riesige Mengen an Lebensmitteln für die Weltmärkte exportiert, unterstützt die brasilianische Regierung die Ausweitung bäuerlicher Familienbetriebe, was erhebliche Wirkungen auf sozialer und ökologischer Ebene hat. Diese Strategien sind auch eine Antwort auf die Herausforderungen der vier großen Krisen der Welt: Neben der Nahrungskrise sind dies die Wirtschafts-, Umwelt- und Energiekrisen. International hat Brasilien mit seinem erfolgreichen Programm zur Armut- und Hungerbekämpfung,

das 2003 unter der Lula-Regierung eingeführt wurde, viel Aufmerksamkeit erregt. Die neue Regierung unter Präsidentin Dilma Rousseff hat die Beseitigung extremen Hungers zur sozialpolitischen Priorität erklärt. Ein nationaler Plan für Nahrungsmittel- und Ernährungssicherung soll Mitte 2011 verabschiedet werden.

Resumen

La estrategia brasileña de seguridad alimentaria y nutricional debe analizarse en un contexto global. Por un lado, el sector de agro-negocios del país es un enorme exportador de alimentos a los mercados mundiales, y por otro el gobierno brasileño viene apoyando la expansión de la agricul-

tura familiar, con significativos impactos sociales y ambientales. Estas estrategias constituyen también una respuesta a los desafíos de las cuatro crisis que el mundo debe afrontar: aparte de la crisis alimentaria, están la crisis económica, la ambiental y la energética. Internacionalmente, el Brasil ha atraído un alto grado de atención debido a su modelo exitoso de reducción de la pobreza y del hambre, puesto en práctica por el gobierno de Lula desde 2003. El nuevo gobierno, liderado por la Presidenta Dilma Rousseff, ha declarado la erradicación del hambre extrema como su principal prioridad social. A mediados de 2011 se lanzará un plan nacional de seguridad alimentaria y nutricional.