Max Wang Northfield Mount Hermon Gill, MA Brazil, Policy & Governance

Addressing Food Insecurity in Brazil Through Policy & Governance Measures

Food insecurity, hunger, and poverty are constant challenges, especially given the world's booming population. One in every nine people in the world does not have enough safe and nutritious food, and with the amount of food that goes to waste, these numbers are bound to go up. The need to solve this problem in Brazil is as dire as ever. Improving human health, increasing access to education and opportunity, promoting economic growth, and protecting the environment are all elements that could help end hunger and poverty. Considering Brazil's size and population demographics makes it apparent that the implementation of policy and governance can positively impact food security.

Brazil is the fifth-largest country in the world, and its rural population is decreasing in line with increasing urbanization trends worldwide. As of 2022, about 12 percent of its 214 million citizens comprise the rural population, with the rest living in urban areas (World Bank). The country's constitution is democratic and has a federal and presidential system of government. However, it was at risk of becoming an autocracy under President Bolsonaro and faced rampant political corruption (Sabatini and Wallace). According to the World Bank's development indicators, 28.64 percent of Brazil's land area is agricultural, which forms a significant part of the country's economy. However, other indicators show that the total land area occupied by agriculture is above 40 percent (Trading Economics). Major crops include soybeans, sugarcane, corn, coffee, and oranges, and Brazil is a major exporter of these agricultural products, topping soybean exports worldwide (Valdes). Urbanization and modernization have affected the country's agrarian trajectory.

Brazil has become a world agricultural leader through modern technologies, and farm sizes range from small family-owned plots to large agribusiness operations. In 2011, 70 percent of Brazilian farms were larger than 500 acres, and about 15 percent of farmland by area was under 99 acres (Stratfor). In the United States, 55 percent of farmland was under 99 acres at the time, despite the country's reputation for factory farming (Stratfor). Because of its large size, Brazil has several distinct climatic regions, including rainforests, savannas, and semi-arid areas. The geography varies from the Amazon Basin to the Atlantic coastline, with mountains, plains, and plateaus scattered throughout the country, housing citizens in various geographical contexts.

The typical family size in Brazil varies. Families tend to be relatively large compared to some developed countries, and it is not uncommon for families to have three or more children, though family size has decreased in the years leading up to 2011 (Marteleto and De Souza 1453). By 2021, the average household size was 2.77 people, and their dwellings varied depending on the region and socioeconomic status of the family (Global Data). Many families live in apartments or tiny houses in urban areas, while houses in rural areas may be larger and more spread out. Brazil faces a shortage of about 6 million homes, with an estimated 25 million citizens living in inadequate conditions (Habitat). Housing conditions can range from modern and well-equipped to more basic and informal.

Struggling citizens typically live in informal settlements known as favelas. A typical family diet in Brazil often includes rice, beans, meat like beef, chicken, or pork, and fruits and vegetables (Andrade et al. 218). Traditional Brazilian dishes vary by region but may include a stew of beans with beef and pork, rice and beans, and various types of seafood along the coast (Andrade et al. 218). Families in Brazil obtain food from various sources, including supermarkets, local markets, and smaller neighborhood stores. Cooking

techniques differ but usually encompass stovetop cuisine, barbecuing, and baking. Likewise, the job opportunities in the nation are diverse.

Jobs in Brazil encompass a wide variety of industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, and the service sector. The average salary across all professions is \$1,738; however, 25 percent of employees make less than \$1,092 per month (Remoti). Education and healthcare standards vary by region, with certain families having limited access to these amenities, resulting in increased costs for private options. According to the World Bank, access to clean water, electricity, telephones, roads, and toilets also differs depending on the region (World Bank). Urban areas may have better infrastructure than rural areas, but local markets are common in both urban and rural areas. However, the quality and variety of the products are unpredictable. Brazilian families face multiple barriers that may include economic inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to stable employment. Ultimately, they could also face lacking quality healthcare and education, contributing to the challenge of earning a living and accessing nutritious food. Policy and government play a vital role in determining the good and the bad in these situations.

The assurance of food security in Brazil relies significantly on policies, processes, and structures governing power distribution. Policies affecting land allocation, water management, and agricultural incentives have a significant impact on access to resources for food production (OECD). The equitable sharing of resources plays a vital role in effective governance by enabling rural farmers to sustain their livelihoods while ensuring adequate nutrition. Brazilian trade policies also influence the availability and costs associated with sustenance in domestic markets. Export-oriented agriculture programs focused on cash crops like soybeans and sugarcane may lead to shortages or domestic price inflation (Valdes). Other social safety net initiatives like Bolsa Família can similarly affect accessibility among populations that are particularly vulnerable when facing hunger challenges (Martins and Monteiro 827). Effective governance in implementing and expanding social assistance programs can alleviate food insecurity among marginalized groups. Land tenure, indigenous land rights, and environmental policies impact food production, especially for rural and indigenous communities.

Brazil faces significant challenges regarding deforestation, land degradation, and water pollution. Effective governance in enforcing environmental regulations is essential for mitigating the risks. As it is an extensive and geographically varied country, the present status of food security also varies. While Brazil is one of the world's largest agricultural producers and exporters, food insecurity persists, particularly among low-income rural and urban communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened food insecurity, leading to increased demand for social assistance programs and highlighting systemic inequalities in access to food (World Bank). Trends in food security have been greatly influenced by factors like economic conditions, climate variability, and government policies (Flexor et al. 1). Economic downturns reduce funding for social assistance programs, worsening food insecurity. Climate change-related impacts also affect agricultural productivity and food availability.

Policy and governance decisions affect rural and urban populations differently in Brazil. Rural communities often face challenges related to land tenure, access to infrastructure, and market access. At the same time, urban populations may encounter issues like "food deserts," limited access to nutritious food, and informal employment (Honório et al. 1). Everyone experiences food insecurity differently, as social, economic, and cultural factors determine their experience of inequality. Brazilian women also deal with gender-based discrimination, which limits their access to resources and opportunities, despite being the primary breadwinners. The effects of undernutrition in the long term are seen among vulnerable populations such as children and older people. The former experience stunted growth, whereas the latter suffer poor health. This is due to limited education opportunities or healthcare provision in marginalized areas that worsen poverty, prejudice, and other structural inequalities. Future food security will be

threatened by unregulated agricultural practices, together with extensive deforestation. There is a need for quick interventions to reduce these side effects so that upcoming generations can have adequate food.

A country like Brazil has many food production alternatives. For example, primary support for smallholder farming through land access, credit availability, and agricultural extension services can enhance their productivity and food security. Small-scale agriculture has great potential to contribute to local food production, generating employment opportunities and reducing poverty (Fuchigami et al. 321). This approach will empower rural communities and enhance local food systems by promoting sustainable farming practices, making it a possible long-term solution. However, it will be challenging to ensure that all smallholder farmers enjoy equitable access to resources. They also face specific market barriers that will have to be breached, especially as they will pose an increasing threat to larger agribusinesses in the country (Fuchigami et al. 321). This solution segues into the next, which pertains to expanding social assistance programs and policies.

The already-implemented assistance program, Bolsa Família, provides a fine example of the positive effects of these programs. Scaling them up will imply providing targeted cash transfers or food vouchers to vulnerable populations, helping alleviate systematic stress symptoms. Food access and nutritional outcomes will improve. Programs like these also aid in alleviating poverty, supporting food security on a household level, and supporting overall food security. Its key benefit will be that it immediately alleviates poverty and improves access to food while also stimulating local economies. Weaknesses may present themselves through issues with sustainability and an overreliance on government support, as these programs will be subject to budget constraints. It provides symptomatic relief but does not address the issues that cause these problems. The possibility of this solution highlights the involvement of policy and government, but it is by no means the only solution to the problem.

Thus, to address food insecurity in Brazil effectively, a multi-faceted approach involving governments, local and international organizations, and ordinary citizens is essential. Governments, both local and federal, need to play a part in supporting smallholder farmers, and ordinary citizens need to take the initiative to create community-based cooperatives, such as urban gardening and collective farming. By taking a grass-roots approach towards this cooperation, the systemic causes can be addressed directly, improving overall resiliency at all levels of the state. International organizations can support these efforts by offering financial aid and expertise and by facilitating knowledge exchange between countries facing similar challenges (Pingali 125).

In addition, Agroecology and sustainable food systems provide long-term solutions to the problems Brazil is facing regarding its food security. In the face of climate change and threats to the country's biodiversity, agroecological practices and sustainable food systems can introduce an element of resilience and improve the country's food sovereignty (Altieri et al. 1). In general, technologies that are appropriate for communities in Brazil are those that are accessible, cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable. These technologies should thus enhance local capacities and benefit smallholder farmers by promoting water conservation, renewable energy, and organic farming are particularly suitable for Brazil's varied climate and geographical conditions (Pingali 585). As such, ordinary people play a crucial role in developing and spreading these new technologies to ensure that technologies are tailored to local needs and conditions and to further contribute toward the adaptation and dissemination of sustainable practices (Pingali 589). Of course, the resistance from traditional agricultural institutions is a significant obstacle to this objective, and agroecological products face challenges in being accepted into the market. In combination with this pushback is the issue of "one-size-fits-all" technologies by those who wish to cut corners and not work with respect for Brazil's mega-diverse climates.

What would work best right now is if there were a well-rounded strategy incorporating smallholder agriculture, social protection measures, agroecology, and sustainable food systems. This four-pronged

approach would give priority to protecting the environment while enabling local communities to increase their farming output. Implementing such an elaborate plan would require the involvement of various actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the World Bank, and other international organizations for resource coordination as well as tapping on their diverse skills. Moreover, these goals may also be financed through development budgets set aside by governments or grants contributed by private sources focused on domestic development priorities. Foreign aid could also offer some funding support for this scheme. This plan requires the heavy involvement of respective community members to alleviate economic disparities practically and effectively.

To guarantee socially inclusive and culturally sensitive interventions, reformation of policies is essential, considering the diversity and specific needs of the country. It is crucial to address current marginalization in addition to food safety standards and land tenure regulations before advocating for sustainable agriculture through incentives. At the same time, social protection mechanisms that would have broader impacts on smaller scales while creating partnerships within communities for innovation alongside environmental conservation measures are needed. This will result in long-term sustainability solutions in addressing food insecurity, which will have lasting positive effects throughout the nation.

Brazil needs an intricate strategy to deal with persistent cases of food insecurity, hunger, and poverty. It is necessary to invest in education, local-level infrastructure development, and training that will enable individuals to acquire skills in resource management. This will create sustainable solutions for all stakeholders regarding this multifaceted problem in Brazil. Addressing the nation's population against its policy framework and governance structure reveals several workable solutions. Long-lasting policies need to be implemented by Brazilian authorities through a comprehensive plan aimed at improving future generations.

Works Cited

- Altieri, Miguel A., et al. "Agroecologically efficient agricultural systems for Smallholder Farmers: Contributions to Food Sovereignty." *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, vol. 32, no. 1, 14 Dec. 2011, pp. 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-011-0065-6
- Andrade, Giovanna, et al. "Out-of-home food consumers in Brazil: What do they eat?" *Nutrients*, vol. 10, no. 2, 16 Feb. 2018, p. 218, https://doi.org/10.3390/nu10020218
- Flexor, Georges, et al. "Agri-Food Globalization and food security in Brazil: Recent trends and contradictions." *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 9 Oct. 2023, pp. 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2023.2259807
- Fuchigami, Helio Yochihiro, et al. "Supporting Brazilian Smallholder Farmers Decision making in supplying institutional markets." *European Journal of Operational Research*, vol. 295, no. 1, Nov. 2021, pp. 321–335, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2021.02.047
- GlobalData. "Average Size of Households in Brazil (2010 2021)." *GlobalData*, 2021, www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macroeconomic/average-household-size-in-brazil-2096120/
- Habitat for Humanity. "Brazil." *Habitat for Humanity*, 2024, www.habitat.org/where-we-build/brazil
- Honório, Olivia Souza, et al. "Social inequalities in the surrounding areas of food deserts and food swamps in a Brazilian metropolis." *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol. 20, no. 1, 21 July 2021, pp. 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01501-7
- Marteleto, Letícia J., and Laetícia R. De Souza. "The changing impact of family size on adolescents' schooling: Assessing the exogenous variation in fertility using twins in Brazil." *Demography*, vol. 49, no. 4, 19 July 2012, pp. 1453–1477, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-012-0118-8
- Martins, Ana Paula, and Carlos Augusto Monteiro. "Impact of the Bolsa Família program on food availability of low-income Brazilian families: A quasi-experimental study." BMC Public Health, vol. 16, no. 1, 19 Aug. 2016, p. 827, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3486-y
- OECD. "Brazil." Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2021 : Addressing the Challenges Facing Food Systems, 2024, <u>www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c09def7e-</u> <u>en/index.html</u>
- Pingali, Prabhu L. "Agricultural Policy and Nutrition Outcomes Getting Beyond the Preoccupation with Staple Grains." Food Security, vol. 7, no. 3, 2015, pp. 583–591. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-015-0461-x.

- Remoti. "Need Brazilian Talent? Start with This Salary Study (2024)." Average Salary in Brazil (2024): Learn Costs, Then Hire, www.remoti.io/blog/average-salary-in-brazil
- Sabatini, Christopher, and Jon Wallace. "Democracy in Brazil ." *Chatham House*, 19 Dec. 2022, www.chathamhouse.org/2022/08/democracy-brazil.
- Stratfor. "U.S.-Brazil Farm Size Comparison." *Stratfor*, 12 July 2011, worldview.stratfor.com/article/us-brazil-farm-size-comparison.
- Trading Economics. "Brazil Agricultural Land (% of Land Area)." *Trading Economics*, 2023, tradingeconomics.com/brazil/agricultural-land-percent-of-land-area-wb-data.html.
- Valdes, Constanta. "Brazil." USDA ERS Brazil, 1 Aug. 2023, www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-u-s-trade/countries-regions/brazil/.
- World Bank. "Children and Youth Brazil's Invisible Victims of Inequitable Access to Water and Sanitation." *World Bank*, World Bank Group, 21 Sept. 2020, www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/08/25/brasil-ninos-jovenes-desigualdadesacceso-saneamiento-covid-19.
- ---. "Rural Population Brazil." *World Bank Open Data*, 2022, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL?locations=BR.