

# Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People

关注贫困，行动起来

Beijing, China • October 17–19, 2007

## SPEAKER SUMMARY NOTE

- Session:** Latin America: New Strategies, Actions, and Ways Forward to End Extreme Poverty and Hunger in Main Developing Regions
- Speaker:** Renato Maluf, Professor, Coord. Centro de Referência em Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Title:** Connecting Social Policies, Poverty, Hunger, and Food and Nutrition Security

This presentation stresses social policies possibilities and main challenges for facing poverty, hunger, and food and nutrition security. It is based on three main arguments of a previous essay:<sup>1</sup>

1. The recent reduction in poverty and hunger by combining 'economic discipline' with massive social policies (e.g., income transfer programmes) leads to considering the economic and social processes (*quality dimension*) underlying improvements measured by conventional indicators (*quantitative dimension*);
2. Institutional framework allowing for intersectorial policy making and effective social participation is crucial for facing poverty and hunger through more equitable ways; this implies an integrated approach to social policies build up in intersectorial public spaces at various levels;
3. Promoting food and nutrition security as a strategic goal to be pursued with intersectorial policies could contribute in having such equitable and sustainable processes.

### Brazil: A Large, Rich, and Unequal Country

Our empirical reference is the Brazilian recent experience in this field, but one will find similarities in many aspects with other Latin American countries. Brazil could be classified as a large middle-income country. Defined in terms of both population size and geographic extension, being large in this case means (i) relevance of internal economic dynamism combined with significant share in the international trade, (ii) geopolitical standing at regional and international levels, (iii) possessing of institutional capacities in policy making, and (v) important environmental challenges. Furthermore, Brazil is also known for the production of richness while generating inequalities and poverty.

In recent years, Brazil is showing – as well as other Latin American countries – a decrease in its historical high levels of inequality and poverty, in a context of (i) monetary stability under orthodox economic policies, (ii) extension of social protection (especially for rural families), (iii) gradual employment and minimum-wage recovering, and (iv) strengthening of income transfer programmes. When it comes to health and nutrition, there have also had improvements in most indicators (infant mortality, chronic infant malnutrition, adolescents, adults and seniors), although with regional, gender and ethnic inequalities. Obesity has become a public health problem, even among low-income classes. Measured for the first time in 2004, 34,8% of households (18 million households with 72.2 million people) were considered as having some degree of food insecurity (mild, moderate or serious)<sup>2</sup>.

### Poverty, Equity, and Income Transfer Programmes

<sup>1</sup> Burlandy, L. & Maluf, R. S. *Poverty, Inequality and Social Policies in Brazil*. R. Janeiro, ActionAid/CERESAN, 2007. (Working paper N. 1). Available at: <http://www.ufrrj.br/cpda/ceresan>.

<sup>2</sup> The Brazilian Scale of Food Insecurity has been developed by Brazilian researchers on the basis of the methodology created at Cornell University and adopted by the USDA.

Social and setorial policies regained relevance in their role of re-balancing social and territorial unevenness and inequalities, in line with the fragmentation and differentiation of public policies promoted by the so-called structural adjustment and the reform of the State. The prevalence of "economic discipline" (orthodoxy) in most Latin American countries lead to a variety of ways of combining it with the extension of social policies to a large part of poorest people. It is worth noting the uncommon occurrence of poverty reduction under low rates of economic growth. Notwithstanding, Brazil has already started moving strategies and policies towards a sort of 'fasten-growth focus', which allows discussing their social and environmental implications due to pre-existing inequalities which are still in place.

Income transfer programmes related to social protection became the main modality of social policy. In Brazil, this took the form of conditional income transfer to poorest families (Family Grant Programme reaching 11 million families), besides more focused instruments (e.g., elder and disabled people). Nonetheless, important contributions for poverty reduction come from the extension of retirement pensions to rural families, the gradual recovering of the minimum-wage real value and a slight increase of the employment level. Increasing poor people income has immediate economic impacts in the access to market goods, especially, the access to food (President Lula's target *three meals a day to everyone*). In terms of social effects, a light reduction of poverty and the bettering of life conditions of those extremely poor are being possible even without significant changes in the unequal income distribution so far.

These programmes brought social policies back to public debates all over Latin America after a long prevalence of neo-liberalism. Efforts have been made for trespassing conventional dichotomies such as universal *versus* focalised social programmes. Focalisation turns out to be positive discrimination (types of selectivity) without losing sight of the central role of the State. That is, combining a view of assuring universal rights based on strong State commitment, with the recognition of people and social sectors' different needs and requirements in terms of public policies. Here, the main challenges have to do with being community-based, involving local actors, and capturing poorest people's demands. There are also human rights' issues in relation to both sides: equality in the access to social programmes and the request of return contributions from beneficiaries.

### **Institutional Framework and Social Participation**

Adequate institutional framework is required for stimulating integrated and participative approach in policy making, in order to promoting people's autonomy from governmental transfers (e.g., accessing job-income opportunities), as well as for facing other forms of poverty (e.g., increasing poor rural families income). This approach leads to the designing and implementation of intersectorially integrated programmes with a view of equitable access to them. Intersectoriality means joining distinct governmental sectors and social organisations around integrated programmes with shared goals, instruments and resources. This perspective questions (i) the integration and coordination among programmes, (ii) the degree of decentralization of public policies, and (iii) the effectiveness of social participation in the decision-making process.

The latter is all the more important giving the narrow links between social participation and social equity. In Brazil, since the 1980's, an increasing number of councils for social participation in public policies has been created; massive conferences become also an exercise of social participation. The National Council on Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) is a particular case, due to its intersectorial composition gathering a wide range of Ministries of State and civil society representatives coming from very different fields.

Adequate feeding—a human right—is central to any anti-poverty strategy, notwithstanding its concerning the population as a whole. CONSEA takes food and nutrition security as a strategic goal to be promoted with intersectorial public policies. In doing so, reciprocal links are established between food-related policies initiatives and socioeconomic strategic options. Connections could be made between

supporting family farmers (let alone the agrarian reform), improving of urban poor access to food, promoting decentralized provisioning systems, valuing bioiversity, etc.

### **Concluding Remarks**

To conclude, it is worth highlighting the following proposals:

- Harmonizing economic dynamism with increasing social equity is a development issue, which will be better faced with social participation in the decision-making processes and the integration of economic and social public arenas;
- Developing an integrated approach to social policies means creating intersectorial public spaces/arenas joining governmental sectors and social organizations, especially from most vulnerable sectors, as well as integrating and coordinating public policies;
- Giving visibility to human rights in institutional spaces is a condition for social equity
- Promoting equitable ways of producing and accessing adequate food is strongly connected with joining economic dynamism with increasing social equity, as well as the other way round.