

**UN HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL
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**Roundtable 4:
Enhancing engagement of Civil Society and Private Sector**

Statement by Cecilia Rocha, Director, Centre for Studies in Food Security (Canada):

I would like to follow-up on the presentation by the Brazilian Minister of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, Patrus Ananias. My statement may overlap with what has been previously said, but hopefully it will complement earlier statements and further provide arguments for more careful consideration of what is happening in Brazil as a reference for policies and programs elsewhere. In particular, I believe that what is happening in Brazil is of great relevance to our topic in this Roundtable: "proposing ways to enhance the role of civil society in governance for food security".

Why Brazil?

- 1) Brazil is one of the countries on track to achieve many of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), particularly in reducing extreme poverty and malnutrition.
- 2) Much of this achievement is credited to bold and innovative government policies.
- 3) It seems to be achieving much of its success through diverse channels for popular participation and local democracy, from participatory budgeting to social councils, thus exemplifying new forms of governance for food security.

Participation of civil society through social councils:

Social councils are now common institutions in the governance for food security in Brazil. At a minimum, social councils are responsible for the monitoring and control of how federal resources are spent in local programs. Hence, by law, municipal governments must have (for example) an operating School Meals Council in place before federal funds are transferred for the School Meals program. But, in many instances, the role of the councils goes beyond monitoring the use of federal resources. School Meals Council members also participate in the elaboration of menus to comply with nutrition guidelines and to maintain and support regional food habits and local production. The composition of social councils overseeing different programmes also varies, but they must take at least half of their members from civil society.

While, through the requirement for the establishment of social councils, the government has created potential institutional spaces for civil-society participation in governance, the mere existence of such spaces does not guarantee effective participation. Effective participation in governance often demands skills and resources not readily available to civil-society representatives. Civil-society groups have identified a significant gap in the human resources needed to face this undertaking, pointing out the desirability for the formation of personnel in key areas that can design, implement, monitor and evaluate a range of relevant food-security policies, programs and projects. While new spaces for participation were opened through the formation of local councils, there is a recognised need for training and education so that those spaces can be filled in an effective manner.

Problems and challenges:

It is estimated that over 30 million Brazilians are still below the poverty line, suffering the daily threat of hunger and malnutrition. The current world food crisis created by the sharp increase in grain prices is certainly putting greater stress on that population. Clearly, *Fome Zero* (Hunger Zero) programs have not yet been able to alleviate food insecurity among all the vulnerable groups in the country, especially those living in remote, isolated communities. In trying to improve the effectiveness of its food and nutrition policies, challenges faced by the Brazilian government include the following:

- Lack of information and knowledge among small-scale farmers has prevented them from taking full advantage of recent government agricultural programs. Policies to support small-scale family farmers have the double objective of providing short-term support in conjunction with long-term structural changes. These, however, cannot be realised without further resources geared to farmers' capacity-building in gathering information, market-functioning education, and forming associations and co-operatives.
- The effectiveness of social councils in governance for food and nutrition security has also been undermined by the lack of appropriate training and education among potential representatives from civil society. Local patronage and corruption are also obstacles to effective participatory governance in many municipalities.
- Notwithstanding recent significant reduction in income inequality, Brazil continues to be plagued by inequalities represented particularly in the socio-economic and regional disparities in access to resources (land, credit, jobs) and public goods and services (sanitation, housing, health care, transportation, and education). These inequalities are reflected, for example, in the fact that the infant mortality rate among the Indigenous population is 138% higher, and that among the black population 37% higher, than the rate among whites in the country.

Sustainability and hope:

There are indications that the essence of the *Fome Zero* strategy will outlive the present government.

First, the institutionalisation of food and nutrition security as the responsibility of the state, rather than of governments, has been advanced with the National Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN). LOSAN brings with it a firm understanding of food and nutrition security as a comprehensive, systemic issue, to be dealt with from a multidimensional approach, involving diverse sectors of the economy, society and government. This understanding is to be followed by community groups, civil-society organisations, and government departments working in this area.

Second, the development of a participatory model of governance through the work of social councils is well advanced, and has made possible the institutionalisation of collaboration between government and civil society to an extent rarely seen in other parts of the world. This model of governance is advancing 'food citizenship' far beyond its individual realm of appropriate ethical choices (such as 'buying local') to the collective, public realm of policy. New spaces for potentially effective participation by civil society in governance have been created, and through their institutionalisation the danger of a reversal in the trend towards further progress has been minimised.

For more information:

Rocha, C. (2009), "Developments in National Policies for Food and Nutrition Security in Brazil", *Development Policy Review* 27 (1): 51-66.