



Brazil's Zero Hunger Program in the Context of Social Policy¹

**Walter Belik²
Mauro Del Grossi³**

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² Assistant Professor at the Instituto de Economia and Coordinator of Núcleo de Economia Agrícola at the State University of Campinas - Unicamp (belik@eco.unicamp.br).

³ Director of Monitory and Evaluation in the Ministry of Food Security and Hunger Prevention in Brazil (DelGrossi@planalto.gov.br)

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the possibilities of implementation of a social policy dedicated to Food Security in Brazil. It presents the main proposals taken for the Brazilian ZHP - Program Hunger Zero tracing some parallel between its design and the Mexican *PROGRESA - Oportunidades*. We utilized a hybrid profile for the ZHP, considering the selection of possible beneficiaries at that time by combining characteristics of a universal program regarding the right to adequate food guarantee with geographic targeting. Finally, the article presents some elements of analysis for the structural policies, which are being implemented, showing the effort of the ZHP in order to promote changes in the life conditions for those benefited families.

Keywords: Food Security, Social Policy, Poverty.

PRESENTATION

The goal of this work is to discuss the methodology established for the Zero Hunger Program (ZHP) of Lula's government, presenting its positions regarding the interplay between social policy and the its measures for fighting hunger. The text begins with a challenge to present a program that intends to provide attention to a citizen's universal right, which is the right to adequate food. Simultaneously, the program seeks to apply "targeting" techniques to identify the largest in-need population, in order to achieve that aim.

The work is divided into three parts, followed by a conclusion. In the first section, we discuss the characteristics of a social program for combating hunger in a country similar to Brazil, where almost one-third of the population is in a vulnerable situation concerning malnutrition. Next, we present the main characteristics of ZHP, adopted as a governmental priority beginning in 2003. In this section, we compare parts of the ZHP to the *Programa Oportunidades (ex-PROGRESA)* adopted in Mexico in 1997 to utilize as a social program model. Finally, in the text's third section, we present some justifications explaining the options adopted by the ZHP. In the last section in particular, we are working specifically with data from IBGE's Demographic Census of 2002, in order to demonstrate some characteristics of poverty in Brazil and its connection to differing regions.

1 FOCUSING OR UNIVERSALIZING SOCIAL POLICIES?

“Social Policies” are, by definition, necessary concerning society’s normal functions. They arise in order to compensate for the distortions resulting from the capitalist development process, which creates an ever-widening gap between rich and poor people. Families in a capitalist society do not begin with equal conditions, and the poorest families tend to continuously reproduce the cycle of poverty: low educational levels, poor nourishment and health, job impermanence and low income. By creating social policies, the State seeks to equalize the opportunities between poor and rich people, closing the gap between these two groups and allowing the next generations to take a step forward, breaking the poverty cycle.

On the other hand, many social policies must fit the requirement of responding to constitutionally-established universal rights. Through tax collection, the State collects funds with the intention of ensuring society’s well-being. Diverging priorities require these public funds. The government faces the always-difficult decision to decide whether to spend money working to correct the problems from the past or to accumulate reserves and invest money to assure the economic situation of future generations. For the poor countries this disjunction is fundamental. The backwardness provoked by unequal development requires an intensified effort to correct the distortions that arose long ago while simultaneously acquiring space, disputing the markets competitively.

The International Bill of Human Rights and the Constitution of several countries ensure universal rights such as education, health care and employment. More than assuring rights, however, the state’s action in these fields theoretically assures equal opportunity for individuals to act in society. In 1993, the right to adequate food was added to the list of human rights established in the International Bill of Human Rights of 1948.⁴ That essential change in the manner of facing nutritional challenges puts the State in a position of providing for basic citizens’ rights. Therefore, much more than paying attention to the individual, the State would be accomplishing a constitutional function it has already promised to fulfill, which is to assure food security to its population.

⁴ In Brazil there is a Proposal of Constitutional Rectification of 2001 that modifies the article 6 of our Constitution, including the right to adequate food among the fundamental human rights. Nowadays, the Brazilian Constitution refers to the right to life, making merely implicit the right to food.

It is interesting to point out that a large percentage of the world's population does not experience a direct lack of food, but rather society has difficulties in providing "physical and economic accessibility, continuously, of adequate food or of the means to its acquisition," pursuant to General Comment 12 of Commission on Human Rights (Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights - 1999) on the article 11 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966. It means that any State is subject to international warnings for not assuring the accessibility of food to its population; that is institutionally unjustifiable, in cases of food production surplus. This is the nature of the universal policies that were created.

Education and health care are well-known social rights and are available to all. In Brazil, all municipalities have schools for children and for elementary-level education (for children from zero to fourteen years old), ensuring education. Health care is also democratically distributed through a system of hospitals, maternity wards and clinics. However, it is obvious that citizens having higher incomes continue to have access to better education and health care. They are able to employ a private system, which is superior to the State's situation. The State must contend with a public revenue crisis, and the abandonment of education and health care systems

Regarding food welfare programs, when food is constitutionally added with the same priority as previously mentioned necessities, the situation is not the same. In Brazil, as well as in other poor countries, there is not a "public food system." That is to say, there is not a public protection network for assuring the maintenance of individuals' nutritional conditions. In the case of food, no filtering system exists for defining the limits of a private system. Because of this, the procedures are based entirely on private methods: the system is private and all individuals can be considerate as private food "consumers".

In third world countries where the needs of the poor are enormous, the State has not the means to care for every essential right of each person simultaneously. In the case of education and health care, household income appears as a selection variable, which shows that wealthier citizens choose not to seek their constitutional rights in favor of better private services. The group with highest income seeks better-quality private

services, leaving the poorer-quality public education and health care to the low-income classes.

Concerning the issue of food, this selection formula tends to recur and it remains a responsibility of the public powers to attend to the households which are most vulnerable to food insecurity, in a proprietary and compensatory manner. Poverty is spread throughout all of society in third world countries. Whenever we analyze the possibilities in ensuring access to food while having few resources, we do not usually see another possibility except to create a tiered list in order to discern which are the poorest citizens and to make sure they are taken care of.

It is important to say that in rich countries, considering the existent resources and the relatively low number of very people in need, it is much easier to find focus and to organize the “line of coverture”. However, in countries where poverty is disseminated throughout society – as in the third world – it is difficult to find one focus. In the case of food, society does not have the means to assure equal opportunities for all. A social trap is set, in which the individual strategies become decisive concerning the household’s survival.

Motivated by the proposal of universalizing all rights, liberal economists Friedrich Von Hayek and later Milton Friedman worked on the idea of creating a minimum income for all citizens would become “public services buyers”.⁵ All services would come from this income. From a procedural point of view of, this proposal would be relatively easy to implement, but in practice, it would lead to the necessity of redirecting all government resources receipts to a single and universal provider. In possession of these resources, the citizen would decide which type of education, health care or food he would utilize; he would analyze costs and make the best choice. The idea of universal income comes from the presumption that the State is inefficient at distributing resources efficiently, leading to wastefulness and deviations.

⁵ Suplicy (2002) emphasizes that there is a strong resistance to the proposal for minimum income, as the authors that proposed it became celebrities defending the capitalism. The author, on the contrary, wants to show that before those writers, other philosophers economists, most of them progressives, have presented the minimum income thesis too. Among the defenders of minimum income proposal, it is interesting to mention the contribution of J. K. Galbraith, James Tobin and Philippe Van Parijs that worked on the possibility of instituting the minimum income as an negative income tax, in which the income transfers for poor people would cover only a part of what would be missing to complete the total of a minimum wage.

However, the universal income for all citizens does not ensure universal social rights. By eliminating the State's possibility to provide benefits by the simple termination of revenue, nothing ensures that the "social benefits market" will be large enough to supply the lowest class with the social services that it requires.

Another important current opinion concerning the treatment of social policies, in opposition to the universalizing of benefits, brings the idea of focusing beneficiaries. Focusing is based on two sensible criteria, as follows: a) the financial resources for the management of social policies are restricted and (therefore); b) the policies must prioritize with maximum efficiency how to provide for the citizens in very critical situations. We must note that the strategy of focusing recognizes citizens' social rights but assumes that the resources are not large enough to address the needs of all people. According to Paes de Barros, Henriques e Mendonça (2000:20), admitting that the Brazilian State has the conditions to identify all the individuals "with perfect focusing and precise calibration for all families," it would be possible to totally eradicate poverty at a cost of R\$ 29 billion per year⁶. In other words, focusing seeks "to organize the line of coverture" if it were possible to have the most efficient system with the lowest amount of wastefulness of resources.

Nevertheless, despite appearances, focusing is also an expensive policy for the State. Transferring resources in an aleatory manner, as the minimum income programs propose, creates highly reduced planning costs for the public power. Identifying the most impoverished segments of population and controlling this kind of transfer can cost much more. In fact, in a country where the majority of the population can be considered poor, how is it possible to select the poorest among the poor? How could we assure that the "less poor" will not belong to the poorest contingent in the future? All these actions require a large quantity of financial and human resources for researches and for constantly reviewing those policies.

According to Cohn (1995), the debate regarding universalizing and focusing social policies based on the scarcity of public resources "**loses substantive continuity,**

⁶This is equivalent to US\$ 10 billion

denuding the ideological dimension, which at this time is not the central matter”

(Cohn, 1995:6). Cohn’s argument states that this is the case for making distinctions between the social policies directed at alleviating poverty and those which seek to overcome poverty. In the first case, we have immediate social welfare assistance policies directed to the highly “vulnerable to hunger” groups. In the second case, we seek a pattern of sustainable growth along with social equity. In order to overcome this strategic predicament, Cohn (1995) suggests that social policy planners must seek “*the articulation between those (actions) for short term, of more immediate character, focused on that groups identified as the poorest ones, and those for long term, of permanent character, universalizing ones, directed to the equity of citizen’s access to social rights, independently on income level or one’s work market insertion*” (Cohn, 1995:6).

Another problem that results from focusing is that poverty has several faces; therefore, a poor household could be considered “needy” in terms of health, but could have access to education or food. This is a common situation comparing the case of poor people living in rural areas to those from metropolitan urban areas (?). Another common example is the difference between families with jobless householders compared to families in **disaggregated** situation or having their members in **marginal situations**. Gender treatment can also influence the level of help that social policy can provide to the poorest people. It is difficult to make only one choice or to select only one public beneficiary. The social policies should present multiple areas of treatment and must fulfill and provide – beside an entrance door – an opportunity to change social position as well.

2 THE ZERO HUNGER PROGRAM

The Zero Hunger Program arises as a proposal formulated by the *Instituto Cidadania* of São Paulo, in 2001. The program was elaborated pursuant to a study made by almost 100 technicians, academics and policy operators, who had three main objectives: a) to evaluate the situation of hunger combat programs in Brazil, in accordance with the commitments signed by the country in the World Food Summit in 1996; b) to restart the mobilization of society concerning the theme of food security; and c) to involve federal, sub-national and municipal governments, NGOs and civil society in a feasible proposal to fight hunger.

As Counselor for *Instituto Cidadania* and inspiration for the proposal, President Lula embraced the theme in his political campaign, placing it later, after his election, as a priority for his government. The ZHP has as a guiding principle the right to adequate food, which gives the matter universal treatment.⁷

In order to make an estimate possible to measure the size of the program that would be designed, the definition of “vulnerable to food insecurity”, underwent several calculations, the bases of which included information regarding individuals’ incomes. According to the PNAD/ IBGE (Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute – National Household Sample Research) micro-data, we estimated the *per capita* income available for each household, adding family income to an estimated production income from the self-consumption by farmers, and deducted rental-home or own-home mortgage expenses from the family’s income. With that estimation of home income, we sought to define the available income for food acquisition (Takagi, Graziano da Silva e Del Grossi, 2001).

We estimated a population of 9.3 million households vulnerable to food insecurity in 2001, which amounts to a total of 46 million people. This estimate takes into account the differing regional poverty lines by estimating the cost of consumption of several food drivers. The base line was R\$ 71.53 per month based in the Northeast. These

⁷ President Lula’s phrase, presented in a speech in his election’s day, that became famous, expresses very well this universal character of the ZHP: “The first year of my mandate will have the hunger combat mark... If, at the end of my mandate, each Brazilian could eat three times a day, I will have realized my life mission”.

values corresponded to nearly US\$ 1 current/*capita*/day (Takagi, Graziano da Silva e Del Grossi, 2001:1). Compared to 1995, the annual growth rate of “vulnerable to food insecurity” households increased 3.1%. The largest growth rates were found in metropolitan areas (6.7% per year).

Brazil’s poor population is concentrated in the Northeast part of the country (47.5% of all poor people in the country). The poor rural population in the Northeast combined with the population of poor in small and medium-sized towns in that region account for 40.2% of the total population (poor and non-poor) of Brazil. These percentages illustrate that a highly concentrated population of people lives in the Northeast. The people have insufficient income – one of two inhabitants of rural and non-metropolitan urban areas in that region earn insufficient income, which is detrimental in the aims of proper nourishment.

In its initial steps in the program, the ZHP tried to take advantage of this information, initiating action by seeking to focus on the northeastern rural and non-metropolitan populations, dealing with the other rural and metropolitan areas of the country later. This movement occurred at the same time that structural changes were taking place in local development, along with efforts at self-sustainability in local economies. However, before presenting the ZHP operations to address the issue of needy households, it would be opportune to present an international spectrum of poverty combat programs that can be compared to the programs being implemented in Brazil.

2.1 THE “OPORTUNIDADES” PROGRAM OF MEXICO

The Human Development Program *Oportunidades* (Opportunities) started in Mexico in 1997, named *PROGRESA*, in concurrence with suggestions and proposals from Santiago Levy, a former professor at Boston who also worked at the World Bank. The objective of *PROGRESA* was to establish a program that could embrace education, health care and food fields, which were previously addressed by less efficient programs. *PROGRESA* is considered a second-generation poverty combat program because: 1) it transfers resources directly to the beneficiary public; 2) the transfer is made directly to the female-householder; and 3) the transfer is conditional on beneficiary actions, concerning education (keeping children in school), health care (basic care for the whole family) and nutrition (classes in the community, public health assistance). According to World Bank authorities, the traditional poverty combat programs were not effective in Mexico due to public system corruption in resource transfers, misdirected focus resulting in wasted resources, and excess control of the beneficiary public (Parker *e* Scott, 2001).

Currently, “Oportunidades” is installed in nearly all Mexico, and has quickly expanded under the President Zedillo’s government and has expanded on Fox administration. In total, Opportunities serves 4.2 million households. Six hundred thousand live in urban areas, at a cost of almost US\$ 1 billion per year. It is relevant to note that Mexico’s population numbers 103 million inhabitants, 25% of which live in rural areas. According to Gundersen *and* Kelly (2001), the implementation of *Oportunidades* in Mexico was a hallmark, because it accounted for certain limitations that existed in previous programs. The emphasis of *Opportunities* on farming households, which addresses 50% of rural households but only 0,8% of urban ones, makes it essentially a non-farm rural program, in spite of the fact that there continue to be other important income programs for Mexican farmers, such as *PROCAMPO* (Sadoulet, De Janvry *e* Davis, 2001).

In order to put the program into operation, over one year was spent in studies and simulations, which consumed nearly one-third of the planning budget. Two years were spent in planning based on sample of 24,000 households from 506 localities in seven

states (see www.ifpri.org/data/mexico01.htm) . Ernesto Zedillo's presidential mandate (1994-2000) made this extended planning period possible because there was a long time during the planning period which begun in the six months between the election of presidential candidates and the candidate-elect taking power (from July to December) and continued during the three first years.

PROGRESA – “Oportunidades” was created in 3 phases: 1) An **exclusion index** based on the demographic census was created, and considered data regarding education, health care, life quality, accessibility to public services, etc. The exclusion index would be valid for the community and therefore – at the beginning – did not take into account income levels; 2) household selection in the community based on income levels; and 3) a list of the selected households would be analyzed by assemblies and representatives (female heads of family) of the proper community (Gundersen *et al.*, 2000). In addition, some tests were made allowing benefits distribution to some households, compared to other families in the same situation and locality. Those distributions, in experimental design, were monitored and evaluated observing progress in terms of education and health.

Begun in distant communities all around the country (mainly Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán etc.), government officials disseminated *PROGRESA* to other rural areas, mainly communities with abundant *ejidos*. Presently, the program covers the whole and several communities around Mexico City, but has not yet reached the capital. Our evaluation supports the conclusion that the program would not be adaptable to benefit the urban poor.

The efforts and expenses in creating a list of the poor population were so great, that the program currently has no efficient system to update their records for society's “new” poor people. The records of the population were made only at the beginning of the program, and because of the costs and time, the indispensable update has not been realized.

The results of *PROGRESA – Oportunidades* shown by Davis (2001) are optimistic. The researchers' data highlight increasing student registration, greater incidence of children's permanence of in schools, less incidence of disease, lower rates of work

absence, and an increase in average food expenses, 13% of which is spent on meat and vegetables. With regard to costs, it is estimated that management overhead remained at 8.9% of the overall program costs. Simulations demonstrate that if the program were implemented to every household in the community without discrimination, costs would reduce by 6.2%. If we eliminated both controls and conditions for receiving aid, the costs would decrease by 6.6% of total expenditures. If the government undertook both measures (elimination of household's selection and expenditure's control), the cost could diminish to just 3.9 cents per each 100 *pesos* distributed.

In the same manner, an evaluation made by Parker and Scott (2001) demonstrates that for each *peso* transferred to the beneficiaries of the *Opportunities* program, 91 cents effectively arrive at their destination. These values are significantly higher than the 64 cents that were distributed by the *Liconsa* poverty program.⁸

PROGRESA – Oportunidades utilizes the same resources and has come to substitute the universal subsidies that used to be given to poor people in Mexico. The previous *tortibonus* (universal subsidy on the price of *tortilla*) and *tortivales* (stamps distributed by the government) had nearly-restricted accessibility. Moreover, the subsidies benefited primarily the urban masses located in Mexico City.⁹ With the reassignment of resources to the *PROGRESA* program, it became the single benefit package for populations in rural and distant localities (where 50% of the poverty in Mexico exists), but continued to provide little – or little help – to the poor populations in urban and industrialized areas.

Although *Opportunities* includes a food plan among its policies, it is not a food security program, though it does have a food consume impact¹⁰. The resource transfers made within the framework of the program are directed towards food purchase and in the health module, the program incorporates food supply assistance to children. Pursuant to Gordillo (2003), in 2002, the Mexican government and FAO signed an agreement to

⁸ *Liconsa* is based on the subsidy to the powder milk purchase for the needy households. Each family having children under 12 years old and income under ½ minimum wage is qualified for receiving the benefit (Gundersen *et al.*, 2000).

⁹ In 1997 the *Tortibono* Program has distributed 47 millions kg of *tortillas* a month to 1,9 millions of households living in 1000 towns and 400 rural localities in all over Mexico. In that year, the program had a total cost of US\$ 135 millions. None assessment about the program's economical or nutritional impacts were made.

¹⁰ Considering the diversity and the increasingly food caloric consumption.

implement a food security program for the excluded populations. Furthermore, Mexicans also rely upon an emergency attention program for food distribution to vulnerable populations.

For the purpose of our work, we note in *Opportunities* the following elements:

- The Mexican Opportunities program proved to an extreme the necessity of clearly defining its future public beneficiaries. The investments made in the program's preparations and design have consumed considerable resources, but management expenses and possible deviations were minimized.

- The program sought to "organize the line of coverture" for the rural areas' populations, but did not find yet the best method to ascertain poverty levels in large urban centers. Furthermore, *Opportunities* demonstrated that single attention programs will not work, but instead must be complemented by other specific programs for each situation.

- The program sought to creatively avoid some of the negative incentives that often arise in social programs, including: 1) movement of inhabitants from one area to the other who aimed to take advantage of benefits in other regions and 2) deliberately reducing household income or increasing the number of children and dependents in order to obtain greater benefits.

Even considering all of PROGRESA's positive aspects, the problem remains that planners have spent a lot of money to benefit few people. For instance, in 1997, *PROGRESA* spent the equivalent to 1% of Mexico's Gross Domestic Product, or R\$ 1.51 billion at 1999 rates (Camargo e Ferreira, 2001). Castañeda (1998:13) calculates that the average amount of money transferred in 1997 was 233 Mexican *pesos* (nearly US\$ 29) per household, corresponding to 34% of those families' income. Castañeda criticizes, "In Mexico as in Brazil, the program is vulnerable to deficiencies regarding services offered because the regions with larger numbers of beneficiaries have the worst educational and health care infrastructure problems" (Camargo e Ferreira, 2001:19). In addition, *PROGRESA*'s focus criteria are satisfactorily reaching the poorest districts, but

are failing in find the poorest households (Camargo e Ferreira, 2001:20; Botello, 2003: 12).

3 SOCIAL POLICIES: UNIVERSALIZED AND EFFICIENT

As illustrated, policies ensuring universal rights, including the right to adequate food foreseen in ZHP, contradict the necessity of establishing action focused a specific section of the public. Moreover, we demonstrated that focusing on food security could be slightly different from focusing on combating poverty. It is a fact that not every poor individual is vulnerable to food insecurity, and not every person vulnerable to food insecurity is necessarily poor, though there is a high probability that the mutual situations exist. Therefore, the major question that will be presented in this section is: How can find more efficiency in the selection of beneficiaries in a food program?

Public programs in Brazil and in other less-developed countries provide for social rights, including access to health care and education. However, in the case of food, either the household income is enough to provide a minimum of recommended calories and nutrients, or the individuals are automatically vulnerable to food insecurity, because households with public attention programs do not traditionally exist. Public actions in this field are still restricted to certain municipalities, or else the food-drive distribution is sporadic and has electoral aims.

The problems begin with beneficiary selection. In the case of food security, selecting “vulnerable to food insecurity” households becomes quite complicated, since the single criterion, ample and available through research on a national level, is the income.

Nevertheless, in order to counter this problem, it is possible to establish a hybrid method for social program design, in which we determine by secondary attributes how to seek the households which are most vulnerable to food insecurity.

Pursuant to recent studies made by Hoffmann (2003) based on PNAD – IBGE’s 1999 survey results, we observe the prevalence of the following characteristics among workers when the effects of other variables are left out, as follows:

- Women earn systematically less than men: a woman's expected income is 27% lower than men;
- Housekeepers (house servants) have an expected income 19% lower than other waged workers, while employers have an expected income 62% higher than waged workers;
- Non-whites (blacks and mulattoes) have an expected income 12% lower than white people;
- Northeastern workers systematically have the lowest expected income: 15% lower than the North region, 23% lower than Minas Gerais (MG) state + Rio de Janeiro (RJ) + Espírito Santo (ES), 46% lower than the State of São Paulo, 24% lower than the Southern region and 26% lower than the Center-West region;
- Rural workers have an expected income 10% lower than urban workers.

The characteristics above indicate groups of populations and regions with higher probability of being affected by poverty, but the problem is spread throughout all of Brazil at differing levels.

Food security programs that aim to ensure food on the tables of the poor have to attack with priority the problem of the poorest. Among the research in the field of food security, it is a current idea that a vulnerable situation exists in households of all income levels (Silveira *et al.*, 2002). However, it is definite that the poorest households have the biggest problems with hunger. Hunger is more evident and more readily manifest in poverty situations. For this reason, any hunger program must concentrate in regions where there is a high concentration of poor people and where poverty appears in a more profound manner.

We are attempting to define, using secondary data, which areas would have priority in the development of a program against hunger. Statistical exercises with data of IBGE's demographic census of 2000 were made. In order to simplify the calculation while also considering that the census results do not present data about self-consumption and about rental-home expenses (that could "improve" the poorest ones' income), we decided to utilize a single poverty line based in the *per capita* household income, linear for all of Brazil. This line was arbitrated on the value of $\frac{1}{2}$ minimum wage *per capita* in

September 2002¹¹ (date of census' realization), linear for the whole country, in the same way that Hoffmann has been working. Based on this information, we used the FGT rate - Foster, Greer and Thorbecke – for those households:

$$FGT^{\alpha} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^q \left(\frac{Z - Y_i}{Z} \right)^{\alpha}$$

The equation above presents the FGT's formula where:

n = population

q = population below the poverty line

Z = poverty line

Y_i = level of individual income, i

α = level of aversion to poverty

The FGT rate presents three well-known pieces of information, as follows:

a) An estimation of the proportion of poor people in each region analyzed. This number can be obtained when $\alpha = 0$ and therefore P (proportion)= q/n . . In the case of Brazil, Table 1 presents the proportion of poor people according to the characteristics of municipality's population:

Table 1
Brazil: Proportion of poor people per type of municipality.

	# Poor households	
	(1.000)	Proportion Pop(%)
Municipalities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	6.069	49,6
Municipalities with over 50,000 inhabitants	2.765	29,8
Metropolitan areas	3.153	20,1
Total	11.988	32,6

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

In Table 1, we observe that a total of nearly 12 million families live under the “ $\frac{1}{2}$ minimum wage *per capita*” poverty line; in the municipalities of up to 50,000 inhabitants, which could be considerate rural, slightly more than 50% of the population

¹¹ Equal to US\$ 60, according to the exchange rate of the period.

is poor people. Also in the smaller municipalities, the proportion of poor people is larger. We observe that in the first category of municipalities a proportion of 49,6% of households live below the poverty line in the municipalities with less than 50,000 inhabitants. This proportion is much larger than that observed in the larger municipalities (29,8%), and also higher than that found in large cities (20,1%).

b) Another known property of the FGT is that when $\alpha = 1$, simultaneously the proportion of poor people and the poverty intensity are known, by calculating income insufficiency.¹² The income insufficiency is high in the three groups, but is most acute in the group of individuals living in municipalities with less than 50,000 inhabitants (Table 2). In these small municipalities, the poor people's medium income is 53% under the poverty line. This means that these individuals' incomes must at least double in order to reach the poverty line. In the other groups, while the percent below the poverty line is relatively less, it is still high.

The FGT's calculations compares these differences, in which we observe that when $\alpha = 1$, municipalities have a high level of what? – 0.26, which is half the number of individuals living in bigger municipalities (0,14), and half again for those populations in metropolises. Table 2 illustrates this.

The FGT's comparison when $\alpha = 1$ allows us to distinguish the “poor” group from the “very poor.” The higher the rate, the graver the situation is for these individuals. In this particular instance, it is interesting to notice inside of each of the two groups mentioned, the states where the situation is most critical, before measuring a third level of analysis.

c) We attribute to α the value 2; this illustrates the critical situation. This rate attributes proportionally more weight to poor people. For this reason it considers also unequal income distribution.

¹² Also known as income gap.

Table 2
Brazil: Depth of Poverty according to the FGT index.

	Insufficiency of income (%)	FGT rate $\alpha=1$	FGT rate $\alpha=2$
Municipalities - less than 50,000 inhabitants	52,8	0,26	0.185
Municipalities with over 50,000 inhabitants	46,6	0,14	0,092
Metropolitan areas	45,9	0,09	0,065

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

The FGT rate shows that, with $\alpha = 2$, we give weigh the poor populations more heavily; the smallest municipalities have inhabitants in the worst situation. That means that the largest contingent with insufficient income is located in the Brazilian municipalities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. The depth of income insufficiency is the largest and also has more income inequality. The next step, based on these elements, is to define the geographic areas where the income situation is worst. The question is: Where should we start?

Based on the FGT's rate calculation when $\alpha = 2$, we note in Table 3 that the North and Northeast regions present the most acute situation. The highest level is in the Northeast, where the people live in municipalities less than 50,000 inhabitants; second, are the households in small northern municipalities, followed by the northeastern municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. In fourth place among the municipalities having the biggest inequality are the northeastern metropolitan areas. These data direct us to reason that it is important to act in the most problematic regions with directed social policies. We emphasize that the small municipalities of São Paulo state and the southern regions in Brazil were where we verified the smallest income insufficiencies among poor populations. Even the metropolitan areas of São Paulo city present much less acute differences between the situation of the poor and the poor found in the Northeast.

Table 3
Brazil: FGT rate –specific regions (parameter $\alpha= 2$).

Regions of the country	Inhabitants of municipalities with		Metropolitan areas
	up to 50,000	over 50,000	
North	0,252	0,142	0,090
Northeast	0,294	0,168	0,114
RJ+ES+MG	0,113	0,056	0,059
São Paulo	0,051	0,035	0,053
South	0,078	0,049	0,038
Centre-West	0,097	0,057	0,054

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

In Table 4, the states with the largest proportion of poor population in small municipalities are presented. We observe that in this list of ten states, eight of them are part of the Northeast region, and the state with largest number of poor households among the small municipalities is Bahia (908,400 households), followed by seven other states in the northeastern region. Among the ten selected states, only Amazonas and Acre have high poverty levels. However both are among the states with the smallest populations.

We also observe in Table 4 that all the levels of income insufficiency in those states are over 54.7% and the parameter $\alpha= 2$ is always greater than 0.259, which is five times higher than that found in São Paulo state.

Table 4

Brazil: Situation of 10 States with the greatest proportion of poor people among the municipalities with less than 50,000 inhabitants.

Federal States ¹³	Proportion of poor people (%)	Insufficiency of income (%)	FGT rate $\alpha = 1$	FGT rate $\alpha = 2$	Number of poor households (1.000)
MA	76,7	60,0	0,46	0,339	490,5
AL	76,4	60,5	0,46	0,346	216,4
AM	74,1	64,5	0,48	0,375	122,8
PI	72,1	58,3	0,42	0,306	269,6
CE	71,9	59,5	0,43	0,319	442,8
PE	68,7	56,9	0,39	0,286	401,1
BA	67,9	55,8	0,38	0,272	908,4
SE	67,0	55,0	0,37	0,259	126,7
PB	66,7	54,7	0,36	0,259	287,0
AC	64,5	57,4	0,37	0,275	29,0

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

In Table 5, we present the same information as Table 4, but now we concentrate on the households in municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Once again we verify the prevalence of northeastern States in the list (8 out of 10). We also note that the Maranhão state contains households with the worst income insufficiency situation, and Bahia state contains the largest number of poor households (363,1 households). Some particularities should be noted, such as the fact that at rates $\alpha = 1$ and $\alpha = 2$, observed in the municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, there is an enormous variability between the first and the tenth states on the list, contrary to what has been observed in the previous case. Finally, Table 6 presents the same information as Tables 4 and 5, this time considering metropolitan areas.

¹³ Federal States: Maranhão (MA), Alagoas (AL), Amazonas (AM), Piauí (PI), Ceará (CE), Pernambuco (PE), Bahia (BA), Sergipe (SE), Paraíba (PB), Acre (AC).

Table 5

Brazil: Situation of 10 States with the largest proportion of poor populations – municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants.

Federal States ¹⁴	Proportion of poor people (%)	Insufficiency of income (%)	FGT rate $\alpha = 1$	FGT rate $\alpha = 2$	# of poor households (1.000)
MA	62,4	52,4	0,33	0,226	164,4
CE	60,7	53,1	0,32	0,226	181,3
AL	58,4	51,4	0,30	0,204	45,4
PA	54,8	50,3	0,28	0,186	176,2
BA	50,1	49,9	0,25	0,171	363,1
PE	50,0	49,9	0,25	0,172	190,1
PI	42,8	44,8	0,19	0,121	93,1
AM	40,7	50,9	0,21	0,146	136,3
SE	39,7	46,9	0,19	0,123	75,4
RN	38,8	44,5	0,17	0,113	23,4

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

Once more, we verify in Table 6 that the metropolitan areas of the Northeast placed in the first five positions among the largest proportion of poor people. The state with the most poor households in the metropolitan areas is Pernambuco, although the differences between poor people are smaller than those observed in small and medium-sized municipalities. It is interesting to note that, different from other the cases, the income insufficiency that measures the difference between the average of poor households' incomes and the poverty line is drastically reduced between the first and tenth cases. This demonstrates a marked difference regarding the poverty situation in the various capitals of Brazil; however, it could also be a consequence of a bias resultant from the adoption of a single unified poverty line for the whole country.¹⁵

¹⁴ Federal States: Maranhão (MA), Ceará (CE), Alagoas (AL), Pará (PA), Bahia (BA), Pernambuco (PE), Piauí (PI), Amazonas (AM), Sergipe (SE), Rio Grande do Norte (RN).

¹⁵ Studies developed by Rocha (2002) demonstrate that the food-drive's price presents big variability, taking for basis the consumption of the population with lowest income in several capitals of Brazil. In this work, we have chosen a single poverty line, for lack of updated informations about food consumption, which will be available in the end of 2003, by the new IBGE's POF (*Pesquisa de Orçamento Familiar - Household's Budget Research*).

Table 6

Brazil: Situation of 10 States with the largest proportion of poor population – urban area municipalities.

Federal States ¹⁶	Proportion of poor people (%)	Insufficiency of income (%)	FGT rate $\alpha = 1$	FGT rate $\alpha = 2$	Poor households (per 1.000)
AL	42,7	49,1	0,21	0,144	91,0
MA	41,7	45,3	0,19	0,122	91,6
CE	38,8	45,4	0,18	0,115	245,1
PE	36,4	46,2	0,17	0,113	273,7
RN	34,1	44,6	0,15	0,099	74,5
BA	32,8	47,0	0,15	0,106	222,8
PA	31,7	43,5	0,14	0,090	117,7
GO	22,3	42,2	0,09	0,063	128,6
ES	21,3	42,9	0,09	0,061	70,6
MG	21,2	41,6	0,09	0,058	263,0

Source of gross data: IBGE's Demographic Census 2000.

These numbers demonstrate that choosing areas within the northeastern *semi-árido* region (the driest region) as a starting point for initiating the ZHP programs of benefit distribution covers perfectly the demand for focusing social policies. Actually, studies demonstrate that economic growth policies without correct regional focusing have reduced impacts.

To close the section showing the critical situation of poverty in the Northeast region of Brazil, it would be relevant to reinforce some information about rural areas. Therefore, we will take the data obtained through the Farming Census 1995/1996 regarding farming establishments.

According to the research *O novo retrato da agricultura familiar no Brasil* (The new portrait of household agriculture in Brazil), based on the Farming Census of 1995/1996, 52,2% of northeastern farmers belonged to the type “D” (the poorest people, whose “Total Property Income” rate is lower than half of their “Opportunity Cost Value” rate, measured by the state daily pay, which is the daily value plus 20% increase). Given that information shows that there are 1,215,064 type D establishments in the Northeast, which represents 29.3% of household establishments of Brazil and 63.4% of all type D establishments. These are the most undercapitalized producers, with an annual total

¹⁶ Federal States: Alagoas (AL), Maranhão (MA), Ceará (CE), Pernambuco (PE), Rio Grande do Norte (RN), Bahia (BA), Pará (PA), Goiás (GO), Espírito Santo (ES), Minas Gerais (MG).

income average of R\$ 226.00 and a monetary income of R\$ 54.00, which certainly put those households under any poverty line that we could construct.

In accordance with Lustig, Arias e Rigolini (2002), “while in some countries and in certain periods, poverty decreases significantly because of the economic growth, in other countries the response is much less pleasant... The speed at which growth reduces poverty depends on the distribution of initial benefits and also on its evolution over time. In unequal societies, the same growth rate produces a much smaller poverty reduction” (2002:2). This is the case in Brazil, which has a Gini coefficient at about 0,6, which causes the economic growth to reduce poverty at a rate equivalent to half the speed observed in countries with a Gini coefficient at 0,2.

The authors also warn of another point: growth can be little successful concerning poverty reduction, if it does not include certain geographic areas and poor sectors, or if it does not utilize technology of intensive manpower (Lustig, Arias e Rigolini, 2002:5). They demonstrate that the improvements of human capital must join with intervention programs in health, nutrition, basic sanitation and infrastructure, because children suffering malnutrition have a much lower learning levels (2002:10).

Contrary to the Mexican “Oportunidades” program, in which has the comfortable situation of spending many months in detailed planning and used one-third of the annual budget to identify its beneficiary public in the first year, the ZHP decided to search for a program’s hybrid shape, in which there is more direct focus while simultaneously working to ensure universal social rights guarantees. For these reasons, the initial choice of geographic areas where the program should start fell directly to the northeast states, due the generalized poverty situation of their population and the high levels of inequality¹⁷.

In the second phase of the selection process, it was necessary to analyze the income situation of poor households in the municipalities of northeastern *semi-árido* region, in order to define which would be the beneficiary households for the resources transfers.

¹⁷ Contrary to Mexico that has begun its program focusing the poorest families covering the whole territory

As was done in Mexico, we intended to utilize databases tool to select the poorest families among the poor.

Due to the need to work rapidly and for the lack of ample research on the nutritional situations of northeastern households, we have chosen a single registry (*Cadastro Único – Cadúnico*) of households, initiated in 2001, by the federal government¹⁸.

The *Cadúnico – Cadastro Único* of federal government was created by decree in 2001 orientated the beneficiary household selection of *Bolsa Renda* (income-help), *Bolsa Escola* (scholarships), *PETI – Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil* (Child Labor Eradication Program), *Agente Jovem* (young agent) and *Bolsa Alimentação* (food-help). The database became an obligatory reference for the program managers upon which to base grants to the households.

The task of compiling a single registry fell to the *Caixa Econômica Federal* (Federal Savings Bank), which the organization improved jointly with municipality offices, local governments, religious entities and other groups, in order to establish households and create a registry. According to information from MPAS (Public Ministry of Social Assistance – 2002), up to November 2002, the single registry had covered 5,112 municipalities of Brazil (92% of total), registering 22,3 million people in 5,3 million poor households (57% of the estimated total). Each family was given an NIS – Social Identification Number – and a benefit card.

Prior survey results based on the Single Registry show that the actions involved in the preparing the list were extremely expensive¹⁹ and inefficient. Due to the complexity of the registry and to its tendency to quickly become obsolete, the information quickly went out of date. According to sources in the recently-created Special Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger,²⁰ responsible for benefit distribution (food stamps), in some Northeast localities nearly 90% of the sampled households did not live at the address declared on the single registry list; in another municipality, only one-third of

¹⁸ Which is known for its poor quality of information.

¹⁹ *Caixa Econômica Federal* received R\$ 6,00 per digitalized form, R\$ 0,70 per attributed NIS or R\$ 0,20 per localized and modified NIS. Besides, the beneficiary was obliged to pay taxes to the institution, as R\$ per identification and password registered, R\$ 1,20 per received benefit and R\$ 1,20 per issued card. These values compare roughly with the US dollar at a rate of US\$ 1 for R\$ 3 as of 2003 July.

²⁰ Based on results taken from TCU – *Tribunal de Contas da União* (Federal Budget Accounts Court).

listed households had municipality functionaries among their integrants. Those elements demonstrate that the inefficiency of that instrument was allowing a big quantity of frauds to happen.

Keeping in mind those difficulties, we again looked for a model for household selection that could skip certain steps with respect to the Mexican model previously described. For this reason, the ZHP has chosen an efficient and cheap method to attract local participation, instead of a database superstructure for the local identification of “vulnerable to food insecurity” households. This turns to be a great advantage of Zero Hunger.

In the present legislation, all households must be listed on the single registry in order to receive any type of benefit transfer from federal government. Therefore, we determined that the members of local committees should select the households that will receive food-stamp benefits to begin the ZHP program in municipalities. The Local Committees are also responsible for including needy households that are not yet listed in the single registry.

The Local Committees consist of between seven and nine members, preferably female householders, with a majority of civil society representatives. It falls to the Committee to select the households and to arrange the follow-up process of resource transfers with the beneficiaries’ counterparts. These counterparts encompass several types: maintenance of children in the school, attendance at literacy courses, participation at capacity building courses, community services, proof of being under public health assistance (children’s vaccination), and proof of spending the stamps on food purchases.

The resources transfer involved in the food stamp program is the main policy of ZHP, since it is linked to the specific necessity of ensuring food consumption. However, it is not the only policy: it complements the other structural programs that have been developed since the ZHP was launched.

The next section describes these programs, showing how the program’s strategy of acting sought to embrace several possibilities, and ensuring the focusing aims without losing their universal character.

3.1 STRUCTURAL ACTIONS OF THE ZERO HUNGER PROGRAM

The ZHP is part of a collection of actions in the structural field, created to ensure that populations vulnerable to food insecurity can enter into a self-sustainable process of development (Graziano da Silva, Belik e Takagi, 2002). The Brazilian government launched a series of programs seeking to support these transformations in poorer areas, while keeping in mind that the resources transfer to the poor households through the food stamp presupposes a set of counterparts involving education, health care and infrastructure. Simultaneously, another group of programs was arranged, directed towards areas where poverty is growing at a rapid pace, as is the case in Brazilian metropolitan regions.

General actions were arranged in the education field, such as adult literacy programs, professional capacity building courses and digital inclusion. In the field of health care, the government intensified work towards basic health attention by initiating a monthly follow-up program to the beneficiary households. Simultaneously they worked on sanitation programs and endemic disease control. Finally, in respect to income and employment creation policies, we started to work in a synergic framework on food production and infrastructure in those communities.

In the rural areas and small communities, the object of priority government action is to address the neediest areas, two initiatives should be mentioned: the incentive for household farming and the construction of cisterns to supply drinking water.

As a way to improve household income, examining not only the specific actions but also the structural actions, is possible to articulate programs which can directly convey the wanted effects without resource deviations, as follows:

- **Household farming** requires support. It was once a major part of life in these rural households, who practice subsistence agriculture without looking towards future development. Indicators taken from PNAD 2001 show that 38.9% of poor rural households have some capacity for producing foods for self-consumption. In addition, the research shows that 41,7% of autonomous families whose primary income is from

farming can be considered poor. Also taking into account the households with other financial activities, 38,1% of families involved in farming can be taken as poor.

Because of those characteristics, the ZHP set up a policy of ample credits towards household farming, which includes the government's guarantee to purchase some of the food produced. They will purchase at differential minimum prices which should strengthen official technical assistance in the producers' municipalities.²¹ This policy is connected to an increase in food consumption along with the resources transfers in the food stamp program. For this reason, in the municipalities where the food stamp program is being implemented, we plan to increase household farming production, providing for sustainable development.

- Micro-credit policies directed towards the improvement of housing conditions and to the development of small business. As was expected, the PNAD's data show that 33,9% of poor households contained at least one member searching for a job during the reference week. This is without considering that the "effective search for a job during the reference week" is very restrictive, and also excluding the knowledge that a discouraging situation results from underemployment, a situation that directly affects rural families. The policies connected to the micro-finance work directly on income and employment creation for the poorest communities.

- Adult's literacy, educational level improvement and professional capacity building are also priority policies linked to the ZHP. Considering that 44,5% of poor households have one illiterate member (as opposed to 19,6% of non-poor households, according to PNAD 2001), several policies were implemented with the support of UNESCO, universities and local institutions, to give households the means to receive support along with the food stamp resource transfers.

Sanitation infrastructure, water supply, and public works are also being examined to add to ZHP policies. These actions are particularly important in the Northeast, where it is necessary to break links between needy communities and corrupt politicians, who

²¹ There will be an increase of 28,7% in credits for household farming totalizing R\$ 5,4 billions in the harvest of 2003/2004. Besides, the credit line Pronaf-food was created, restricted to the cultivation of rice, beans and manioc, having interests much more reduced.

control the water supply with water trucks. This break represents great social and political progress. It ensures better health conditions and increased income to these populations. In the urban and rural areas, PNAD data show that the homes of 11,7% of poor families did not have piped water (compared to only 2,7% of non-poor families). In this sense, the hunger combat is also linked to the actions in the health care field and to rural housing. Therefore, it is interesting to mention the “one million cisterns” program (P1MC) that is being implemented in the Northeast, in conjunction with NGOs and rural workers’ syndicates.

Other structuring actions for the rural areas of Brazil’s Northeast that should be noted are: the strengthening of legal dispossessions for the Land Reform (*Reforma Agrária*) process and the constitution of property owners’ rights, aiming to redistribute assets (Paes de Barros, Henriques e Mendonça, 2000:28; De Janvry e Sadoulet, 2001:476), maintaining children in school through the *Bolsa Escola* (scholarship) program, creating and supporting the maintenance of local open air markets as a manner for ensuring the farming production’s commercialization, or preferential storage in the public system of governmental storehouses.

CONCLUSION

In this work, we analyzed the characteristics of ZHP and its capacity to articulate sustainable growth models in the municipalities selected as priority in the Northeast region of Brazil. We also made a brief comparison between the ZHP and the *PROGRESA – Opportunities*, which is being implemented in Mexico and shares similar goals with the ZHP.

We observed that ZHP, shares similarities with *PROGRESA – Opportunities*. Both incorporate in the planning and implementing system some concerns related to the efficient utilization of public resources. They also show the possibilities and the results that could be obtained from a group of structural actions and specific actions regarding food, nutrition and health care policies. However, contrary to the Mexican program, the ZHP seeks to cut back some of the planning stages of the program concerning the definition of its priority beneficiary public and also the follow-up of resource transfers. Previously, we observed that the rural and non-metropolitan areas in the Northeast region contain the country's largest concentration of poor people and it is there that the poverty gap is greatest. The urgency that causes us to skip some of the steps is justified by the necessity of providing a rapid response to the expectations created by President Lula after he was elected. We find further urgency due to aggravation caused by drought in the Northeast region, affecting 975 municipalities in the *semi-árido* region and resulting in an emergency situation.

Furthermore, the ZHP establishes a hybrid design assuring the universal right to adequate food and simultaneously directs efforts to answer the demands established by priority geographic areas. The policies involved with focusing usually ignore the causes of poverty. The ZHP seeks not to fall victim to this mistake, promoted by academicism and by the lack of sense of urgency. Nevertheless, the price paid by bypassing phases in the process of selecting beneficiary households has increasingly been the responsibility of Local Management Committees, charged with household selection and follow-up.

In effect, considering that the household selection in the municipalities chosen as priority is based on the utilization of the Single Registry, *Cadastro Único - Cadúnico*,

created in 2001 and having several problems, the Committees' actions have enormous importance.

Although empowerment and the strengthening of communities are some of the social policy's aims, the Local Management Committee is currently responsible for selecting the poorest families among the poor, based on inefficient and incomplete information. This can, in short or long term, affect the reputation of that Committee's control. Therefore, we must promote, as quickly as possible, the verification and the update of this database. At the same time we must combine the utilization of this policy with other informational sources such as the official civil register, information given by social welfare and health care public local entities, the list of public services users, and others.

The integration of social government programs can also help; the ministries' technical teams are currently discussing it. Integration is based on the need to integrate tools for transferring resources, unified mechanisms to follow-up, and also databases and committees for following-up. Integration of programs does not mean the unification of structures nor the hierarchy of social priorities, but only the rationalization of tools, the synergy and the unity of objectives.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the assessments and the follow-up of the research play a crucial role in correcting the direction and implementation of ZHP in new areas. As in the previous phases, the evaluation phase can be successful only if reliable monitoring systems support it. Once more, the ZHP must apply creativity mixing quantitative and qualitative assessments related to food issues that are already employed in Mexican and North American social programs, which provide information that can evaluate the conditions for economic and social inclusion of those populations.

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