

# Capacity-Building for Food and Nutritional Security: A Case Study on Governance in São Paulo State, Brazil

## Executive summary of masters thesis

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**Introduction:** This thesis examines food security governance in São Paulo state, Brazil. It seeks to examine how certain governance interventions—particularly partnerships between different levels of government, between different government agencies operating at the same level, and between governments and civil society, contribute to social inclusion and food security over the long-term. To address this problem, the thesis explores a number of empirical questions relating to the structure and general functioning of food security institutions in Brazil, the way these institutions conceptualize food security, the extent to which their structure and activities reflect this conceptualization, as well as issues of leadership.

**Methodology:** To answer these questions, the thesis looks at food security programs, food supply centres, and food security councils operating at the municipal level. It also looks at the state food and nutritional security council, which was restructured into a regionally representative institution, linked to 30 separate sustainable regional food and nutritional security commissions, in 2005. Research was carried out using an open-ended qualitative methodology based on analysis of interviews, policy documents, participant observation.

**Theory:** For its theoretical basis, the thesis examines the literature on food security and its links to democratic governance and citizenship, as well as the discourse on Brazil's own process of democratization and the move to decentralized, participatory approaches to governance. Key concepts and approaches reviewed include *food security*, which is rights-based and includes issues of entitlement and access; *social policy* or *anti-hunger* approaches, where food insecurity is contextualized within socio-economic inequalities; *food policy*, which includes broader concerns about the food system such as the environment, food related health problems, and the industrialization, globalization and urbanization of the food system; and *community food security*, which likewise incorporates broader concerns about the food system but focuses on building local and community capacity and the use of urban institutions, such as food policy councils. Welsh and MacRae's (1998) concept of *food citizenship*, which links food security and food policy concerns to public participation and democracy is also discussed, and is argued to resonate with the widespread use of the language of *citizenship* by Brazil's social movements in their quest for a more just, inclusive society. The thesis suggests that while local institutions such as Brazil's food and nutritional security councils and municipal food security programs have not received much attention in the literature, they might also be seen as being conducive to "food citizenship."

**Context:** Chapter Three of the thesis provides background on the problem of food insecurity in Brazil, and the various institutions of governance that have been used to address this problem over time. This historical overview is contextualized within Brazil's evolving economic, political, and social structures. The movement from top-down, centralized military rule from the 1960's to 1980's, to increasingly decentralized, participatory governance (albeit within a neoliberal macroeconomic framework) is a key focus. The Zero Hunger Program launched by the Workers' Party (PT) government in 2003 is seen in mixed light. On the one hand, the *Bolsa Família* income-transfer program has expanded significantly since introduced, while municipal food security programs and food security councils have emerged throughout the country, funded and/or encouraged by the federal government. On the other hand, the placement of this national food security initiative within a single government ministry (namely the Ministry of Social Development which is primarily concerned with social welfare programs such as the *Bolsa Família*), may pose challenges for implementing a more holistic and integrated approach to food security in Brazil. The types of mechanisms for addressing food insecurity currently in existence in Brazil at the subnational level are also described.

**Findings:** In Chapter Four, I present my research findings on food security governance at the municipal level, based primarily on research carried out in Campinas, Santo André, and São Paulo, cities which had each developed food security initiatives before the PT came into power in 2003. I describe what I see to be some of the key factors for success in food security governance in Brazil. The role of strong leadership and technical know-how in public

administration, supportive political environments, and intersectoral approaches to administration and policy-making were seen by local food security advocates as essential components of governance. The latter were observed as occurring via interdepartmental cooperation in program implementation (such as in Santo André's Urban Agriculture Pilot Project), as well as through municipal food and nutritional security councils, policy-making and management bodies which consist of government and civil society representatives from diverse sectors.

Challenges to effective governance discussed include political turnover, low participation on the councils, tensions between the councils and more executive bodies such as municipal secretariats of food supply, poor coordination of actions between different levels of government, and lack of resources. Subtle differences were observed in the ideological biases of those involved in food security governance in the various municipalities examined, with a relatively high emphasis placed on the education and *economic empowerment* of the poor though targeted (rather than universal) policy initiatives in the municipality of Santo André. It is noted that ideological and political differences between a given municipal administration and senior governmental funding sources may pose challenges for acquiring resources for local food security programs in Brazil.

It is argued that a vibrant civil society plays an important role in advancing food security through its participation on the government-civil society food security councils, as well as through more grassroots action. Not only can organized civil society provide information and make demands for public policies and much needed resources, it can help to implement projects that are in the public interest (such as the NGO *Instituto Pólis'* food security reference centre in Butantã). While food security councils in Brazil are mandated to include civil society participation, participation of the poor is not required. Thus while civil society participation on the councils may promote the *economic empowerment* of the poor through the policies and programs produced, such bodies do not necessarily promote the *political empowerment* of poor and food insecure in any direct sense.

Given the many factors needed to advance food security at the local level, Chapter Five examines how Brazil's food security movement is being extended beyond the municipal level through the restructuring in 2005 of the São Paulo state's *Sustainable Food and Nutritional Security Council* (CONSEA-SP) into a regionally representative governance institution, linked to 30 separate regional food security commissions. In response to leadership by CONSEA-SP, the commissions were created in open, democratic plenaries, with each commission composed (like the CONSEA-SP itself) of one third-government and two-thirds civil society representatives. While recent political events have reversed the restructuring process, the commissions appeared for a time to provide a solution to the near impossible demand that every municipality in the state create its own food security council. CONSEA-SP and the regional commissions aimed to coordinate state-wide and regional actions devoted to food security as well as resources coming from federal, state, and municipal levels. Mechanisms for achieving this objective included the implementation of a state-wide food security plan through a systematic, democratic, regionally representative process and the creation of a series of community kitchens and sustainable regional food and nutritional security reference centres throughout the state. While CONSEA-SP may have been subject to some of the problems associated with municipal food security councils (such as low participation, and conflicts of interest among councilors) under its now-extinct incarnation, it did show significant promise to expand citizenship by institutionalizing a holistic, empowering approach to food security, throughout the state of São Paulo during its short-lived existence.

**Conclusion:** The thesis concludes that governance institutions in São Paulo state support food security in diverse ways. Through partnerships between government agencies and councils operating at different levels (*vertical cooperation*) they facilitate the flow of resources to municipal and regional food security planners, including those working in resource-poor areas, as well as the two-way flow of ideas, best practices, and information. Through partnerships between local government agencies in a city or region functioning via food security programs, councils, or commissions (*horizontal cooperation*) they encourage the implementation of an integrated (or "intersectoral") approach to food security policy coordination, and the acquisition of resources. Through state/civil society collaboration on councils, commissions, programs, or less formalized means, such institutions can help to put and keep food security on the policy agenda, as well as developing and implementing policies and programs at the municipal, regional, and state levels. It is argued that food security governance in Brazil can be seen as part of a move to expand citizenship, even *food citizenship*, through participatory governance at the subnational level, and through "social policy" and "food policy" approaches to addressing the structural causes of food insecurity operating at multiple levels of governance.