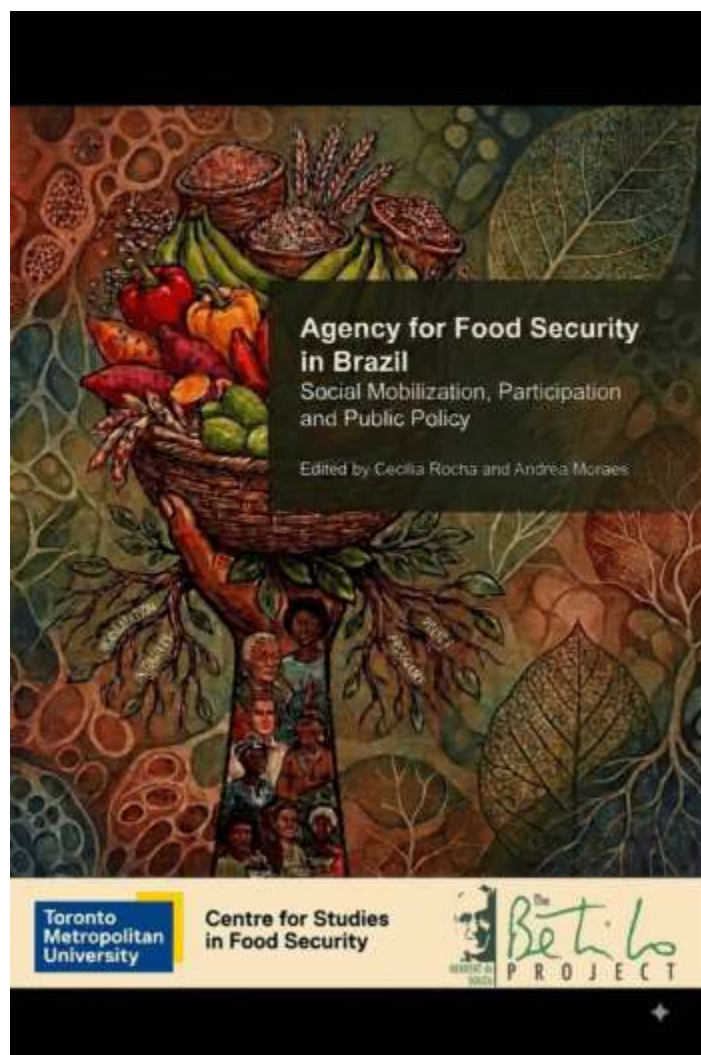




Agency for Food Security in Brazil: Social Mobilization, Participation and Public Policy





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Honoring the Betinho Legacy: The Power of Agency

ANDREA MORAES AND CECILIA ROCHA

Introduction

The right to food extends far beyond being free from hunger. The Rome Declaration on World Food Security established a global commitment to provide all people with safe, nutritious, and adequate food (FAO, 1996). Building upon this declaration, the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Toronto Metropolitan University outlined that complete food security relies on five essential components (CSFS, n/d; Koc, 2026). For true food security to exist, all five dimensions must be present:

- Availability: Having a reliable, sufficient supply of food at all times.
- Accessibility: Ensuring all people have the physical and economic means to obtain food.
- Adequacy: Accessing food that is safe, nutritious, and produced through environmentally sustainable methods.
- Acceptability: Accessing food that is culturally appropriate, produced, and obtained in ways that fully respect human dignity, self-worth, and human rights.
- Agency: Implementing the policies and governance processes that empower people and enable the achievement of food security.

Agency refers to all mobilization, initiatives, programs, and policies needed for food security. It is about democratic governance needed to guarantee the availability, accessibility, adequacy, and acceptability of the food we have. Is what we do individually and collectively to have food security (Rocha, 2019).

Agency matters because it gives individuals and communities the rights, capabilities, and power to actively shape their own food systems with dignity rather than remaining passive consumers (HLPE-FSN 2020). By elevating people to active “food citizens” (Welsh & MacRae, 1998), agency empowers people to make and execute critical decisions about how food is produced, distributed, and eaten. Ultimately, this enables effective participation in governance and decision-making processes at the local to global levels, driving improvements in overall well-being (HLPE-FSN 2020).

Agency is the central theme of the present book. Its chapters address broad, macro-level frameworks (national policies, systemic guidelines, and democratic participation) down to specific institutional settings, and finally, ground-level struggles, cultural resistance, and lived experiences in the fight for food security and sovereignty in Brazil. The book, thus, describes a trajectory of how agency is operationalized, restricted, and reclaimed across different scales.

The book has been conceived as part of the *Betinho Project*, which inspired this volume.

The Betinho Project

Herbert “Betinho” de Souza (1935–1997) was a humanitarian forced into exile by the military dictatorship in Brazil in the 1970s. During this time of exile, Betinho lived for five years in Toronto, Canada. Among the many causes Betinho embraced and led was the Campaign Against Hunger and for Life, which triggered the new movement for food and nutrition security in Brazil. Betinho was one of the most important civil society leaders in the country, an undeniable example of the power of a person’s agency.

In 1973 Betinho, his wife Maria Nakano, and a few Brazilian friends were received in Canada as political refugees after fleeing the military coup that had toppled the government of Salvador Allende in Chile. With the guidance and support of Professor Liisa North, Betinho was accepted as a graduate student in political science at York University and was a major

force in the creation of that university's Brazilian Studies group, later the Latin American Research Unit (LARU), which became the seed for CERLAC (Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean). In Toronto he also contributed to other non-governmental organizations such as the Development Education Centre (DEC) and Gatt-Fly. As a student at York University, Cecilia Rocha (co-editor of this volume) had the privilege to work alongside Betinho during this time.

Returning to Brazil in 1979, Betinho and friends Carlos Afonso and Marcos Arruda founded the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (Ibase), a pioneering non-governmental organization (NGO) for citizenship mobilization in support of public policies and democracy. As a social activist, Betinho was a leading figure in several national campaigns including the National Campaign for Agrarian Reform, the Movement for Land and Democracy, the Movement for Ethics in Politics, and the Citizenship Action Against Hunger, Poverty and for Life. He also founded the Inter-Disciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA), and worked with street children (receiving UNICEF's Child and Peace trophy in 1993), the women's movement, and for the democratization of communications and information using the (then, very new) internet as a tool.

For everything he did, Betinho became one of Brazil's modern heroes. Although living with a debilitating health condition (he was a hemophiliac and lived with HIV/AIDS for the last 10 years of his life), Betinho was one of the country's strongest fighters for social inclusion, citizenship and democracy.

In March 2004, Cecilia Rocha (Director, Centre for Studies in Food Security, Ryerson University), Debbie Field (Executive Director, FoodShare Toronto), Wayne Roberts (Coordinator, Toronto Food Policy Council), and Nick Saul (Executive Director, The Stop Community Food Centre) were invited to attend the Second National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security in Olinda, Brazil. This was an opportunity to witness the culmination of a democratic process in which civil society organizations from throughout the country participated in the development of key recommendations to be forwarded to the federal government through the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA). For the Canadian observers, it was also an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities in developing a movement to improve food security in Canada and elsewhere based on principles of social justice and participatory democracy.

The 2004 Conference was strongly grounded on the works of two key figures in the Brazilian movement against hunger and for food security: Josué de Castro and Herbert (Betinho) de Souza. The impact of the work of these two Brazilians reached far beyond their country's borders (see Rocha et al, 2026, in this volume), and their legacy can still be felt today.

Upon their return to Toronto, the four Canadian observers of the Brazilian Conference felt the need to rekindle the Toronto connection with Betinho. Thus emerged the *Betinho Project*, coordinated by Cecilia Rocha. The project aimed to celebrate Betinho's life and work, and to make a contribution to the continuation of his campaign against hunger and for life everywhere in the world.

The Betinho Project had two phases – an earlier period from 2004 to 2010, and a second period from 2019 to 2024. Key activities in the first phase of the project included invited seminars by Brazilian scholars (Renato Maluf, Luciene Burlandy, and Gislene Aparecida dos Santos); a presentation and visit by then Brazilian Minister of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, Patrus Ananias; an encounter of Indigenous representatives from Brazil and from Canada (see Barbosa & Rocha, 2026, in this volume); and fundraising for the Community Bake Oven built at Wychwood Park in Toronto. The project counted with the work of a number of research assistants and volunteers, including Andrea Moraes, Marcelo Paolinelli, Rita Simone Liberato, Tania Tzupanic, Marcos Abreu, Vania Freire, Bernadete Nobrega, and Alison Clegg.

The second phase of the project emerged out of a need felt by Brazilian scholars at the Toronto Metropolitan University to debate the political situation brought about by the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil in 2018. With a reactionary and anti-democratic agenda, one of the first acts of the new president in 2019 was to abolish the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security. The [Betinho Project Seminar Series](#) (2019–2024) was created as a space for academic conversations in support of democracy and the food security movement in Brazil. Coordinated by Cecilia Rocha and Andrea Moraes, this seminar series brought together diverse scholars, practitioners, students, and researchers at the Centre for Studies in Food Security, to discuss Brazilian democracy, social change, and agency in food

security. Isabella Trindade, Tatiana Terry, Hudson Moura, and Andhressa Fagundes also participated in the creation of the Seminar Series.

The current book, part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Centre for Studies in Food Security, presents a selection of contributions from Brazilian scholars and activists associated with the Betinho legacy. Many of the authors were Visiting Scholars at the Centre and participants of the Betinho Project Seminar Series.

Part I: Public Policies and Participation: Institutionalizing Agency for Food Security

A number of initiatives, policies and programs implemented in Brazil in the past 20 years have received international attention for their originality, comprehensiveness, and effective results. Among those, *Bolsa Familia* (conditional cash transfers to families in poverty), the National School Food Program (serving all students in public schools), direct food procurement from family farms, and the bold revision of the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population are prominent examples.

The first five chapters in this volume address the question of how democratic participation in the construction of public policies for food security is being institutionalized in Brazil. This process of institutionalizing agency happens at a macro level (as described in the first two chapters), but it has also been essential in the development and implementation of policies in specific settings (chapters 3 and 4). Active participation of individuals and organized civil society is also important in facing the many challenges and in finding solutions for problems emerging at local levels (chapter 5).

Chapter 1 – Moving Forward in Guaranteeing the Right to Food: Timeline on Food Security Policy in Brazil, by Rocha et al., sets the baseline by looking at the historical trajectory of the fight against hunger and food insecurity in Brazil, highlighting some of the main policies and programs that have elevated the country as an example and source of inspiration for effective food and nutrition security (FNS) policy worldwide. The chapter emphasizes the centrality of understanding hunger as a political and social problem, a human-made and not a natural phenomenon.

Looking at the recent history of policy-making in Brazil, the chapter argues that progress does not follow a smooth, linear trajectory. Instead, it is characterized by fluctuations. Meaningful progress is realized only when advancements outweigh setbacks. The consolidation of FNS policy—achieved by institutionalizing its most successful programs and securing civil society participation—has been essential to ensuring that these advancements consistently outpace the setbacks.

The institutionalization of civil society participation is the focus of **Chapter 2 – Exercise in Democracy: Social Participation in Public Policies for Food Security in Brazil**, by Fagundes et al. This chapter explains how civil society engages with the state to shape the policies mentioned in Chapter 1, highlighting the democratic mechanisms unique to Brazil's food security framework – the National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN) – under construction in the country. By merging the principles of participatory and representative democracy, this framework guarantees citizens a direct role in drafting, implementing, and monitoring public policies across municipal, state, and federal levels.

The text concludes that the democratic vision of the 1988 Constitution demands constant defence and renewal. While civil society mobilization is vital when formal channels are open, it becomes absolutely critical when institutional spaces are threatened or destroyed. Frameworks like SISAN are essential because they empower citizens to participate in governance, which strengthens civil society. In turn, a robust, mobilized civil society serves as the ultimate shield required to continuously defend and reclaim these democratic gains.

Chapter 3 – Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population: A Tool for Addressing Syndemic Problems, by Lima et al., positions the 2014 *Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population* (BDG) as an important instrument in combating the simultaneous problems of obesity, malnutrition, and climate change. Earning international acclaim, the BDG moved away from tracking isolated nutrients to spotlighting whole foods and their level of industrial processing. The authors argue that this processing-based framework helps regulate food environments by shaping policies, such as on clear food labelling, the taxation of sugary drinks, and institutional school menu mandates.

Ultimately, this chapter shows that the BDG's importance extends far beyond education and guidance for individual

dietary choices. By connecting consumption to how food is produced and distributed, the Guide is framed as a critical strategic tool for cultivating a healthy, just, and sustainable food system.

Chapter 4 – Food Services as Strategic Settings for Food Security: The Central Role of Menu Planning, by Rolim & Bezerra, defends that food services can drive systemic, transformative actions that integrate sustainability, public health, and food security. Drawing on a “One Health” approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental well-being, the authors explore how nutritionists can expand their roles from routine menu planning to broad policy implementation. To demonstrate this potential, the authors examine Brazilian public policies and offer practical applications based on institutional experiences and research at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. These include strategies for sustainable public procurement, healthy menu design, worker health, and food waste reduction.

The chapter notes that the field of food services has traditionally been viewed through a technical lens, primarily focusing on operational efficiency, sanitary control, and cost management. However, rising global concerns regarding food insecurity, environmental degradation, and diet-related chronic diseases demand a broader perspective. Looking ahead, the future of food services relies on connecting menus directly to resilient food systems. By embedding sustainable procurement and waste reduction into management mechanisms, every institutional meal served can actively contribute to community health and planetary sustainability.

While Brazil’s National School Feeding Program (PNAE) is one of the largest and most celebrated food programs in the world, **Chapter 5 – Challenges Implementing the School Food Program in Rio Grande do Norte: Local Micronutrient Supplementation and Full-Time Schooling Expansion**, by Medeiros et al., provides a crucial reality check, evaluating how national policy standards manifest as distinct, localized challenges. The chapter reports on two studies examining local attempts to complement basic services under PNAE in the northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte. The first study identifies implementation barriers for NutriSUS—a micronutrient supplementation strategy—in a small town. The second study addresses the challenge of maintaining national PNAE standards amidst an expansion of full-time schooling.

The studies illustrate how subnational entities are vital to funding and operationalizing PNAE at local levels. Ultimately, both studies reveal the challenges of top-down decision-making in a federative context. The authors argue that previous consultation with local managers could have prevented the breakdown of the NutriSUS project, while noting that these same local actors were central in lobbying for the supplemental resources required for the success of PNAE under full-time schooling.

Part II: Agency and Social Mobilization: Anti-Racism and Food Sovereignty

The exercise of agency is deeply intertwined with social structures. Systemic inequities and power imbalances rooted in gender, age, race, and other characteristics often act as barriers to participation, which can directly undermine food security. Overcoming these barriers requires enhancing agency at both the individual level—by boosting autonomy, safeguarding labour rights, and ensuring culturally acceptable food—and the community level, where collective governance has been proven to drive better food security and nutritional outcomes (HLPE-FSN 2020).

The final four chapters in this volume address a major challenge to achieving food security in Brazil: the systemic racism and discrimination embedded in the country’s social structures. Despite an anti-racism legislation in place since 1989 (Felix, 2024), the country still struggles with a social reality deeply marked by a history of slavery and colonization, reflected in the daily lives of non-white workers, as reported in chapter 6.

The other three chapters in this section highlight the fight for food sovereignty, and how marginalized and traditional communities across Brazil reclaim their collective agency and use cultural, ancestral, and activist frameworks to resist systemic inequities and secure self-determination within their food systems. This final section centres on the voices, worldviews, and historical resistance of Brazil’s Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous communities.

Chapter 6 – Precarization of Precariousness: Work Process, Hunger and Food Insecurity of Non-White Food Delivery

Drivers in Curitiba, Brazil, by Daufenback et al., provides a stark, modern counterpoint to successful state programs. It exposes a cruel paradox in the modern food system: the very gig-economy workers delivering food in urban centres are themselves facing severe food insecurity and racialized precarity. It shifts the book's tone into the urgent realities of structural inequality.

The chapter reveals how structural racism combines with algorithmic governance to exacerbate the precarious situations of non-white workers, severely impacting their health and income. Structural discrimination actively undermines customer ratings and fosters algorithmic distrust, which directly results in fewer assigned deliveries, extended waiting hours, and deflated monthly earnings. The authors conceptualize this phenomenon as the “precarization of precariousness”—a compounding cycle where a volatile employment structure intersects with racialized systemic inequality to reinforce pre-existing socio-economic disadvantages.

Chapter 7, Food Systems and Food Sovereignty of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix in Brazil: Critical Reflections, by Nogueira et al, examines how ancestral foodways serve as vital frameworks to combat systemic racism and protect cultural identity. The chapter summarizes findings from the research project “*Public Health and Traditional Peoples of African Matrix for the Promotion of Food and Nutrition Security*”. Exploring ancestral wisdom, it emphasizes the integration of food, nature, and culture, offering sustainable solutions to contemporary challenges as a vital counterpoint to the hegemonic food system.

The chapter uncovers narratives that reveal the profound depth of ancestral food systems. The authors argue that recognizing and protecting the food knowledge of traditional peoples of the African matrix is a fundamental step. It secures cultural and religious rights while sustaining alternative, equitable possibilities for living in, and relating to the planet.

Chapter 8 – Food as Communication in the Formation of the Buen Vivir in an Indigenous Village in Brazil, by Barbosa & Rocha, examines how food serves a central communicative role in developing the Indigenous village of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba (CVJ) in Brazil. The authors discuss how the fight for food security communicates the community's core values across generations and to the outside world. The villagers' agricultural choices, food practices, and views on territory have directly guided them toward *Buen Vivir* (Good Living), an Indigenous philosophical framework. The chapter reflects on key values embraced by the CVJ, including commensality, reciprocity, solidarity, and permaculture, showing how the village reconstructs ancestral knowledge to articulate survival strategies and dialogue with national society.

The authors argue that these practices are not merely economic activities, but communicative acts that materialize memory, reciprocity, and territorial belonging. Exploring food as a living system of communication in an Indigenous village highlights how marginalized groups utilize their land and heritage to speak back to dominant societal structures. Through this relational labour, the community successfully organizes, educates, and defends its territory against the ongoing pressures of historical erasure.

Chapter 9 – Lifewritings on Food Security and Sovereignty: Trajectories of Anti-Racist Activism and Resistance, by Moraes et al. presents six personal trajectories of anti-racist activism, resistance, and commitment to food sovereignty in Brazil. These narratives blend personal and collective experiences with localized and global events to illustrate a profound discomfort with systemic inequality.

A central thread connects the contributors to the *Caruru da Gratidão*, a celebratory gathering focused on a sacred Afro-Brazilian dish. Many authors include their *Orunkó* (sacred Candomblé names), reflecting their spiritual identities as Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (POTMA). Historically born out of enslaved resistance, these traditional communities occupy territories and use institutional mobilization to combat hunger and environmental degradation. In 2011, they founded FONSANPOTMA, a national forum dedicated to preserving ancestral food systems and defending food sovereignty.

By embedding education, nourishment, and ancestral preservation into their daily practices, these activists challenge exclusionary state structures, planting seeds of transformation that bring global sustainable development goals to life.

Final Words

Agency through social participation in policy making and implementation is a core pillar of Brazilian democracy. Still, while robust democratic frameworks and public participation are essential for defending the right to food, effective food security also requires clear, systemic blueprints to guide what a healthy nation actually eats.

Moving from the political scaffolding of citizen-led governance to concrete policy implementation at specific settings, the chapters in this book explore how state guidelines can transcend basic nutrition to target deep-seated, intersecting health, social, and environmental crises. Establishing national frameworks, democratic oversight mechanisms, and progressive dietary guidelines provides the essential legal and philosophical foundation for securing the right to food. However, for these national ideals to impact lives, they must be successfully translated into daily institutional routines in physical, practical settings—such as public kitchens, schools, and workplaces.

A profound synergy between personal experiences, ancestral territory, and food sovereignty culminates in the volume's final section. Weaving together the book's overarching themes around agency and food security, the last chapters of the book also reveal that the democratic ideals of the country must still be extended to much of its racialized populations. They show how Indigenous and traditional communities of the African matrix are exercising and building agency through reclaiming ancestral knowledge that serves as a critical shield against environmental racism and cultural erasure. The deep connection between territorial sovereignty and systemic survival is vital to these populations and exemplifies how food transcends material nourishment to become an essential form of communication, community building, and philosophical resistance.

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Dedication and Acknowledgment

Cecilia would like to thank José, for his continuing support for over 50 years. She would like to dedicate this work to the Rochas, her foundation, and to Elisa, Miguel, Paulo, Mariana and Lucas, with the hope for a kinder world in times to come.

Andrea would like to thank Burkard, Clarinha, Claudia and Renata for their love and support. She would like to dedicate this book to the memory of her friend Azoilda Loretto da Trindade, a pioneer in the fight against racism in education in Brazil.

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PART I - PUBLIC POLICIES AND PARTICIPATION: INSTITUTIONALIZING AGENCY FOR FOOD SECURITY

Chapter 1 - Moving Forward in Guaranteeing the Right to Food: Timeline of Food Security Policy in Brazil

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1. Introduction

A definition of Food Security first emerged after World War I, when Europe began to show concerns about food production capacity and possible threats to food sovereignty. Over the years, the concept of Food Security has gained different connotations, incorporating economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Koc, 2026). In Brazil, the term has included nutritional aspects, becoming Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), established in legislation as:

“... the right of everyone to regular, permanent and quality access to food in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting food practices that respect cultural diversity and are environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable” (Brasil, 2006, translation by the authors).

This definition has guided the broad set of bold and innovative government policies to combat food insecurity in the country (Burlandy et al., 2013; Rocha, 2009 and 2016), leading to Brazil's success in leaving the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Hunger Map in 2014 (and again in 2024, after some setbacks during the years in between).

In this chapter, we look at the historical trajectory of the fight against hunger and food insecurity, highlighting some of the main policies and programs, which have elevated Brazil as an example or inspiration for positive FNS policy in the world. In the Conclusion, we reflect on the most important elements and lessons learned in this trajectory.

2. Timeline for Food and Nutrition Security Policy in Brazil

2.1 Background: Josué de Castro

Records on discussions about hunger in Brazil can be traced back to at least the first decades of the twentieth century, a period marked by intense economic and social transformations (Maluf, 2007). With the advance of industrialization and urbanization, regional inequalities and the precariousness of the population's living conditions became more evident. In this context, hunger began to be understood not so much as resulting from food shortages, but as a consequence of the country's structural inequalities.

The culmination of these discussions was the work of the physician and geographer Josué de Castro (1908-1973). In his seminal book on hunger in Brazil, *The Geography of Hunger*, first published in 1946 (Castro, 1984), and a follow-up volume, *Geopolitics of Hunger*, originally published in 1951 (Castro, 1959), Castro argued that hunger is a political and social problem, and not a natural or inevitable phenomenon. He fought the Malthusian view of overpopulation leading to malnutrition, denouncing instead the concentration of land, the poor distribution of income, and the absence of public policies as fundamental causes of hunger in Brazil and elsewhere in the world.

Josué de Castro became President of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 1951, and greatly influenced the global debate on the issue of food security (FAO, 2023). His ideas on hunger as a human-made issue inspired social and governmental movements aimed at guaranteeing the human right to adequate food.

In 1966, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* was adopted during the 21st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations, 1966), establishing that governments must recognize the right of every individual to an adequate standard of living, including access to adequate food (Article 11). To fulfill these commitments, states agreed to promote the principles of nutrition education and to ensure the equitable distribution of food resources in accordance with the specific needs of different groups and conditions in each country.

2.2 1980s and 1990s: Mobilization of Civil Society

The Brazilian government only adhered to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* in 1992. The years leading to that, however, witnessed the emergence of strong participation of civil society in social and political causes, including food security.

In the mid-1980s, a series of social movements emerged in Brazil demanding the expansion of rights and better living conditions, with an emphasis on the reduction in social inequality. This period was marked by the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, and the demands of social movements were fundamental in the formulation of the new Brazilian federal constitution (in 1988), strengthening the new democracy, and in the creation of a publicly funded healthcare system.

“Food Security” had emerged as a main topic during the 1st National Conference on Food and Nutrition in 1986. That same year, the 8th National Health Conference, driven by the healthcare reform movement, selected the theme of “food as a universal right” as one of its priorities (Amaral & Basso, 2016). The addition of the term “nutrition” in the traditional “food security” in establishing the term “Food and Nutrition Security” (FNS) in the 1990s has distinguished Brazil from other countries in the application of the concept, interlinking socioeconomic and health approaches (Maluf, 2007). A broad citizen-based movement emerged, raising awareness in Brazilian society of the health impacts of hunger and poverty, which affected approximately 32 million Brazilians in the early 1990s (Peliano, 1993; Rocha, 2007).

In 1993, the sociologist and activist Herbert (Betinho) de Souza created the Citizenship Action against Hunger, Poverty and for Life (Citizenship Action – *Ação da Cidadania*) movement. The initiative sought to mobilize civil society in support of solidarity actions, income-generating activities, and the promotion and strengthening of social policies for food security (Peliano, 1993). This mobilization led to the establishment of numerous solidarity committees dedicated to combating hunger across the country (Rebouças & Redig, 2018).

That same year, during President Itamar Franco’s government, the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) was established as an advisory body to the presidency, placing issues of food and hunger as priorities in the national agenda (Maluf et al., 1996). Inspired by the Citizenship Action movement, the Council functioned as an institutional space for social oversight and for the participation of civil society in the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies for food and nutrition security. Its central objective was to promote the progressive realization of the Human Right to Adequate Food through collaboration between government and social actors. The first composition of CONSEA had 7 government representatives (from federal ministries) and 21 representatives from civil society (Burlandy, 2011). Unfortunately, CONSEA was abolished in 1995, under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s term. That first experience, however, left the seed of what civil society could envision as a formal structure for its participation in policymaking.

Other major contributions by civil society towards greater awareness of FNS issues included the formulation of the National Food and Nutrition Policy (as a component of the National Health Policy), proposed at the 1st National Food Security Conference in 1995, and adopted in 1999 by the National Board of Health (Rocha, 2003). The National Food and Nutrition Policy was innovative in promoting the right to adequate food as a foundation of its actions and highlighting the need for a comprehensive FNS policy (Vasconcelos, 2005). At the end of 1999, about 50 civil society entities formed

the Brazilian Forum for Food and Nutrition Security, which supported the creation of FNS councils all over the country (Burlandy, 2011).

2.3 2003–2015: Policy Development and Implementation — the “Golden Years”

At the turn of the 21st century, national mobilization to combat hunger and poverty intensified in Brazil, accompanied by growing demands for more effective food and nutrition security policies. This movement culminated in the inclusion of the Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) initiative in the election platform of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who assumed the presidency in 2003 (Maluf 2007; Silva et al., 2011). The Zero Hunger strategy became the central social policy of Lula’s newly elected government, and it has influenced the FNS policies in the country since then. Its primary objective was to guarantee the human right to adequate food for populations experiencing limited access to food. Through the implementation of the Zero Hunger strategy, food security became a central priority of Brazil’s social policy agenda for the first time (Rocha, 2009).

The Zero Hunger strategy led to the creation and strengthening of several social programs, significantly expanding the number of beneficiaries, the level of public funding, and the geographical reach of social protection policies. In support of the strategy, in 2003 the government reinstated CONSEA, with the participation of one-third of its members from the government and two-thirds as representatives from various sectors of civil society. In the following years, CONSEA proposed and supported a number of FNS initiatives, such as a specific law (LOSAN) to create a National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN) in 2006, and an amendment to add the Right to Adequate Food to the country’s constitution in 2010 (Rocha, 2016). Here we briefly describe a few of the most important programs developed between 2003 and 2015.

Conditional Cash Transfers: Among the many initiatives under the Zero Hunger strategy, the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) conditional cash transfer program deserves special mention. Launched in 2003 to benefit families living in poverty, it became the largest program of its kind in the world, reaching approximately 11 million families in 2007 (Rocha, 2009). In 2025, *Bolsa Família* benefited over 19 million Brazilian families (Agência Gov, 2025a). Despite some initial criticisms, many studies have since shown the positive results from the program (Amaral & Basso, 2016; Costa et al., 2023; Segall-Corrêa et al., 2008; Silva et al., 2011). *Bolsa Família* is credited for 28% of the decline in extreme poverty in the country between 2003 and 2012 (IPEA, 2013; Rocha, 2016).

School Food: Proposals by CONSEA have been fundamental in updating norms for the implementation of the National School Food program (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar – PNAE*). One of the largest programs of its kind in the world, PNAE covers over 40 million students’ in the public school system (FNDE, 2025). The federal government transfers funds to municipalities, which must follow the most recent legislation (since 2009) in implementing the program. School menus must meet student’s nutritional needs, and respect local eating habits and food cultures. Consistent with the Brazilian Food Guide of 2014, PNAE limits the presence of ultra-processed foods in school meals to 10 per cent, and guarantees differentiated care for students with special dietary needs (Rocha et al., 2026). Since 2009, PNAE’s legislation also requires that at least 30% of federal funding goes to the purchase of food produced by family farmers. In 2026, the percentage of federal funding to purchase products from family farms has grown to 45% (FNDE, 2026).

Food Procurement: As exemplified in the 2009 School Food legislation, direct food procurement by the government has also been a strategy in support of poor and small-scale family farmers in Brazil. Direct food procurement by the government also includes the Food Acquisition program (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos – PAA*). Through the PAA, the government buys food from family farmers to be distributed to public and charitable entities (food banks and community kitchens, for example). PAA facilitates access to markets by small-scale producers, simultaneously promoting local economies and the consumption of fresh produce (Assis et al., 2017; Becker & Anjos, 2010; Casagrande et al., 2024; Moraes & Rocha, 2016).

Subsidized Meals: Another program within the network of actions developed by the Zero Hunger strategy is the subsidized sales of ready-to-eat meals through Popular Restaurants. Popular Restaurants are government-run,

cafeteria-style spaces, offering daily meals at affordable prices to relatively large (over one thousand) numbers of people (MDS, 2023; Murça, nd; Rocha, 2001). They offer healthy and affordable (subsidized) meals, prioritizing regional ingredients and dignified ambiance. Through their locations, they specifically cater to socially vulnerable populations, but are open to all, under a universal access framework. Popular Restaurants also host nutritional education activities, such as lectures on the nutritional value of food, and workshops on food utilization and combating food waste. These restaurants are located in regions with considerable daily movement of low-income workers or in peripheral regions of large cities, which have a greater concentration of individuals in situations of social vulnerability.

Public Groceries: In some cities in Brazil (most notably, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, and São Paulo), municipal governments have developed partnerships with private grocery stores to implement programs making available fruits and vegetables at lower prices (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte, 2022; Prefeitura de Curitiba, 2026; Rocha, 2001; Weber, 2024). Usually, the city owns the land where these grocery stores (*sacolões*) are installed. While these stores are privately run, store owners, selected through a bidding process, agree to let the price per kilo of a number of items (between 15 to 25 items) be set by the city below the market value. Anyone can purchase fruits and vegetables in those stores (universal access). Items not on the government list can be sold at any price. The intent of this initiative is to have fruits and vegetables available at lower prices to the population.

Other important programs to promote food and nutrition security in the country include public food banks (Fagundes et al, 2022; Rocha, 2014); cisterns for capturing rainwater in semi-arid regions (Silva et al., 2021); and specific support for family farmers (Amaral & Basso, 2016; Moraes & Rocha, 2016). The overall result from all these programs was a significant decrease in the number of Brazilians suffering any degree of food insecurity between 2003 and 2015. In particular, cases of severe food insecurity (hunger) in the country declined 82%, leading to the removal of Brazil from the Hunger Map in 2014 (Rocha, 2016).

2.4 2016-2026: *Dismantling and Recovery*

Between 2016 and 2018, under President Michel Temer's administration, constitutional amendments for a cap on government spending led to a considerable reduction in the support for social programs (Bravo et al., 2018), including the Family Grant and Food Procurement such as the PAA. Although CONSEA was not officially abolished until 2019, the lack of federal support for FNS programs led to its ineffectiveness. These factors contributed to a new increase in the prevalence of food insecurity in the country (Figure 1).

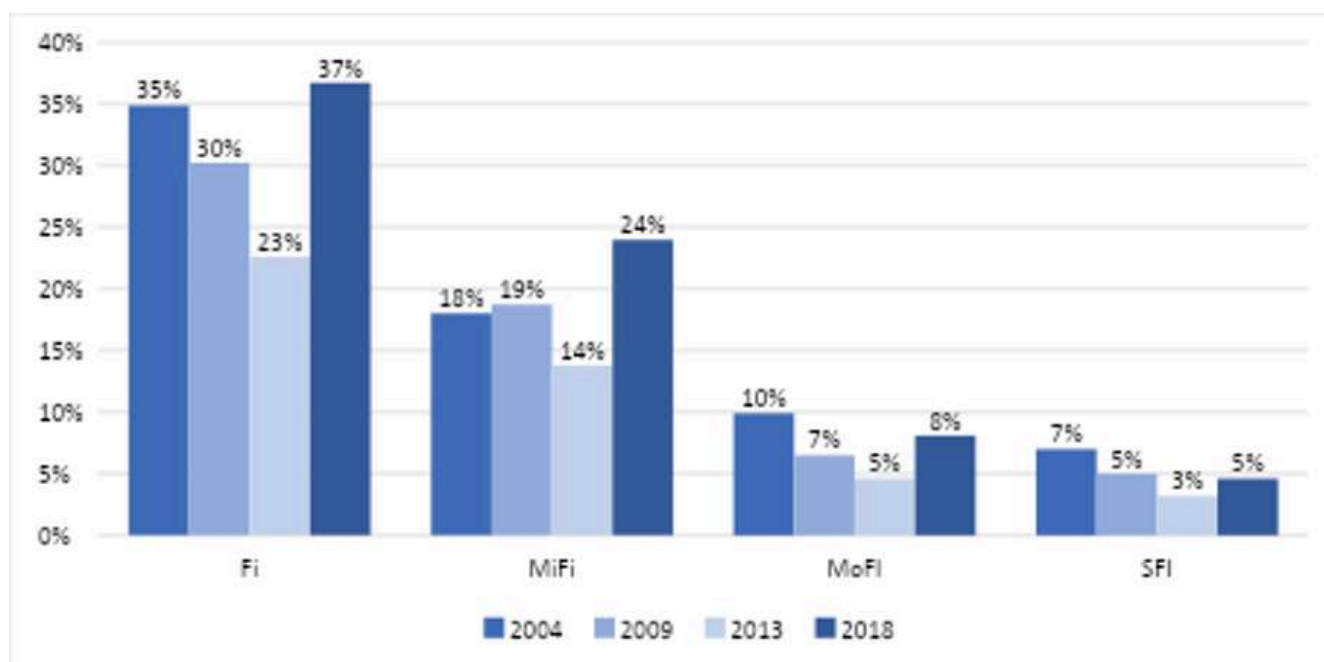


Figure 1. Prevalence of household food insecurity in Brazil in 2004, 2009, 2013 and 2018. Source: Adapted by the authors from IBGE (2025). Legend: FI: Food Insecurity; MiFI: Mild Food Insecurity; MoFI: Moderate Food Insecurity; SFI: Severe Food Insecurity.

In 2019, Jair Bolsonaro came to power as the new conservative president. On his first day in office, Bolsonaro formally extinguished the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security, a clear signal of the new government's lack of commitment to the right to food (Burlandy, 2024; Castro, 2019).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the difficulty in ensuring the human right to adequate food in Brazil, as the consequent increase in the unemployment rate led to a reduction in the income needed to ensure proper access to food. The crisis resulting from the deterioration of the country's economic conditions was quickly felt by the population most vulnerable to high unemployment and reduced income. The health crisis, superimposed on the food crisis that was already underway, further aggravated the situation throughout the country. A major concern centered on the rising number of children suffering food and nutrition insecurity as their physical absence from school sites due to the pandemic made it difficult for the National School Food program to reach them. Little was done by the federal government of the day to overcome these difficulties.

The *National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil*, conducted in 2022, indicated that over 33 million Brazilians were facing hunger (severe food insecurity) in the country (PENSSAN, 2022). The study also revealed that 58.7% of the population experienced some level of food insecurity—mild, moderate, or severe—indicating a setback that returned Brazil to a scenario similar to that observed in the 1990s.

While the four years of the Bolsonaro government (2019–2022) saw the dismantling or undermining of FNS policies and programs, the following four years of the new government of President Lula (2023–2026) were dedicated to reconstructing and improving them. Support and funding for old programs such as *Bolsa Família*, School Food, and the PAA were restored. The Lula government also supported new programs, such as the Solidarity Kitchen program. Originally developed as an initiative of the Homeless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Teto – MTST*) in response to the crisis emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic (Domingues et al., 2024), in 2023 Solidarity Kitchens became part of the set of public policies to combat hunger in the country (MDS, 2024; Salay, 2026). Solidarity Kitchens are run by civil society organizations (such as the MTST). They tend to be smaller spaces than Popular Restaurants, offering meals free of charge (Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, nd).

During this period of reconstruction, the country also experienced low unemployment rates, controlled inflation, and

growth in the average income of workers. As a result, by 2024, all levels of food insecurity (mild, moderate, and severe) had declined (Agência Gov, 2025b). The country was once again out of the Hunger Map.

3. Conclusion

Reflecting on the trajectory described above, a few points can be emphasized. First, it is important to recognize the centrality of understanding hunger as a political and social problem, a human-made and not a natural phenomenon. This understanding, presented brilliantly in the works of Josué de Castro, was fundamental in shaping the demand for public policies to combat food insecurity and guarantee the right to adequate food.

A second important point is to recognize the crucial role of civil society mobilization and participation in lobbying governments for more actions against food insecurity. Not only that, in Brazil, civil society has played a central role in the creation, development, implementation, and monitoring of FNS policies and programs (see Fagundes et.al, 2026 in this volume). Through councils and conferences, civil society participates in policy-making at all levels of government in the National Food and Nutrition Security System (SISAN) in construction in the country. The institutionalization of civil society participation is a unique feature of FNS policy-making in Brazil.

A final important observation to be made is that progress does not follow a smooth upward trend. There are “ups” and “downs”. Progress is realized when the “ups” are greater than the “downs”. The consolidation of FNS policy through the institutionalization of its most successful programs, combined with civil society participation, has been essential to guarantee that the “ups” have been greater than the “downs”.

In general, FNS policy-making in Brazil serves as inspiration for the boldness and success of its programs, as well as for their participatory nature. The *Bolsa Família*, School Food, Food Acquisition, Popular Restaurant, Solidarity Kitchen, and others, are examples of the possibilities on how to combat food insecurity. They serve also as examples of policy-making processes with the participation of civil society.

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Chapter 2 - Exercise in Democracy: Social Participation in Public Policies for Food Security in Brazil

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I. Introduction

In Brazil, social participation (also referred to as popular participation or social control) is a constitutional right in policymaking in many areas, such as health and social assistance. (Pinheiro, 2009). It combines the principles of participatory democracy and representative democracy, ensuring the population's involvement in the drafting, implementation, and monitoring of public policies in the three spheres of government: municipal, state, and federal (Mereles, 2016). Social participation is one of the pillars of Brazilian democracy (Andreassa, 2021), and it builds on the assumption that the Brazilian state recognizes that popular participation contributes to improving the performance of public administration (FNDE, 2023).

The Brazilian Constitution highlights the importance of social participation based on the understanding that society has multiple interests and needs and that the potential for solving problems is more significant with fairer, more participatory, and democratic decisions (Miwa & Ventura, 2020). Article 198 of Brazil's Federal Constitution of 1988 mentions the provision for “community participation in health-related actions and services”. Article 204 mentions the population's participation in formulating policies and controlling social assistance actions at all levels; and Article 29 mentions municipalities' attributions, recommending the cooperation of representative associations in municipal planning (Brasil, 1988).

Although it is a right guaranteed by the Constitution, the effectiveness of social participation often depends on the political will of the governments in power. In Brazil, there have been periods when dialogue between the state and society has been interrupted, with negative consequences for the most vulnerable groups (see Rocha et al., 2026, in this volume). Thus, civil society's involvement in public policy can be limited, in part, by government initiatives, which may or may not create the conditions for its realization. The political history in the country shows that, although constitutional, social participation is not always guaranteed (FNDE, 2023).

The focus of this chapter is the dynamic of social participation in public policies for Food Security in Brazil: from post-democratization institutionalization, through periods of threat and setback, to moments of resistance and the pursuit of reconstruction led by the force of civil society. It is possible to visualize the trajectory of social participation and understand how its institutionalization, based on the 1988 Constitution, was tested and resisted periods of political dismantling. The chapter also focuses on highlighting that Brazilian democracy is not a static system, but a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, in which social participation acts as a driving force.

This chapter provides an overview of the forms and functioning of social participation in policy-making in Brazil (Section II) and analyzes the institutionalization of social participation in food and nutrition security policy after the 1988 Constitution (Section III). We consider how this institutionalization served as the basis for much resistance during periods when social participation was undermined, as well as the basis for the reconstruction of spaces for social participation since 2023 under the new administration of President Lula. The Conclusion (Section IV) is a brief reflection on the “lessons learned” along this trajectory.

2. Institutionalization of Social Participation in Brazil

Social participation in policy-making in Brazil first came to prominence in the area of health, promoted by the sanitation movement in the mid-1970s. Social movements fighting for civil and political rights in the country under a military dictatorship gave priority to health rights (Kujawa, 2022). This movement included various interest groups such as academic researchers, health professionals, and regular users of the health system.

The 8th National Health Conference, held in 1986, was an important political and social milestone in the development of the principles of social participation in policy-making in Brazil. This conference demonstrated the urgent need for significant reform of the Brazilian public health system, supporting the creation of the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS) as a constitutional right and reinforcing the importance of social participation in this debate (Carvalho, 2014).

The 1988 Constitution established the SUS and the obligation of municipal, state, and federal governments to create institutional spaces for social participation in the development, implementation, and monitoring of public policies. After that, new legislation for specific policies incorporated civil society participation based on the concept of “active citizenship” (Gohn, 2019). It is believed that social participation in public management brings about a qualitative leap in actions, with the design of public policies, which better express the diversity of needs and ways of addressing problems and gain legitimacy in their implementation (Andreassa, 2021). The institutionalization of spaces for social participation was consolidated mostly in the form of “Councils” and “Conferences” in Law No. 8,142 of 1990 (Andreassa, 2021; Avritzer & Souza, 2013; Brasil, 1990; Moura, 2010; Valla, 2000).

2.1 Councils

Councils are institutionalized spaces for dialogue between organized civil society and government representatives. As council members, ordinary citizens can play an active role in shaping public policy, influencing improvements in laws, programs, and actions that directly impact their lives. Brazil has councils in different areas, such as education, health, the environment, social assistance, and food and nutritional security (FNS). In the Brazilian public policy system, there must be consistency and complementarity between the roles and responsibilities of councils at different levels of government: municipal, state, and federal (Gurgel & Justen, 2013; Pires et al., 2024).

Councils can be “consultative/advisory” or “deliberative.” Consultative councils offer guidance and suggestions to government bodies. Deliberative councils have the power to make decisions, guide, and transform debates into actions, determining the occurrence of public initiatives (Pires et al., 2024; Kujawa, 2022).

Councils are composed of representatives from the state and civil society who discuss the direction and development of public policies. They provide greater transparency to the state’s actions and impact the distribution of public resources, resulting in less waste and greater efficiency in the services provided, while taking into account the particularities and experiences of civil society. Councils debate and make political decisions, intervening in the implementation of public policies, questioning their functioning, and proposing changes and improvements (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2024). Council members do not receive extra remuneration for that activity.

The different councils work through meetings that follow a basic operational structure illustrated in Figure 1. It is recommended that a council meeting be held in a place that is easily accessible to the participants involved, with the date, time, and agenda announced in advance. Meetings are considered permanent spaces for debating public policy and are, for the most part, open to attendance by the general public as listeners. Council meetings follow a structure defined in the council’s internal regulations to ensure that decision-making processes are ethical, legal, democratic, and transparent (Mereles, 2016).

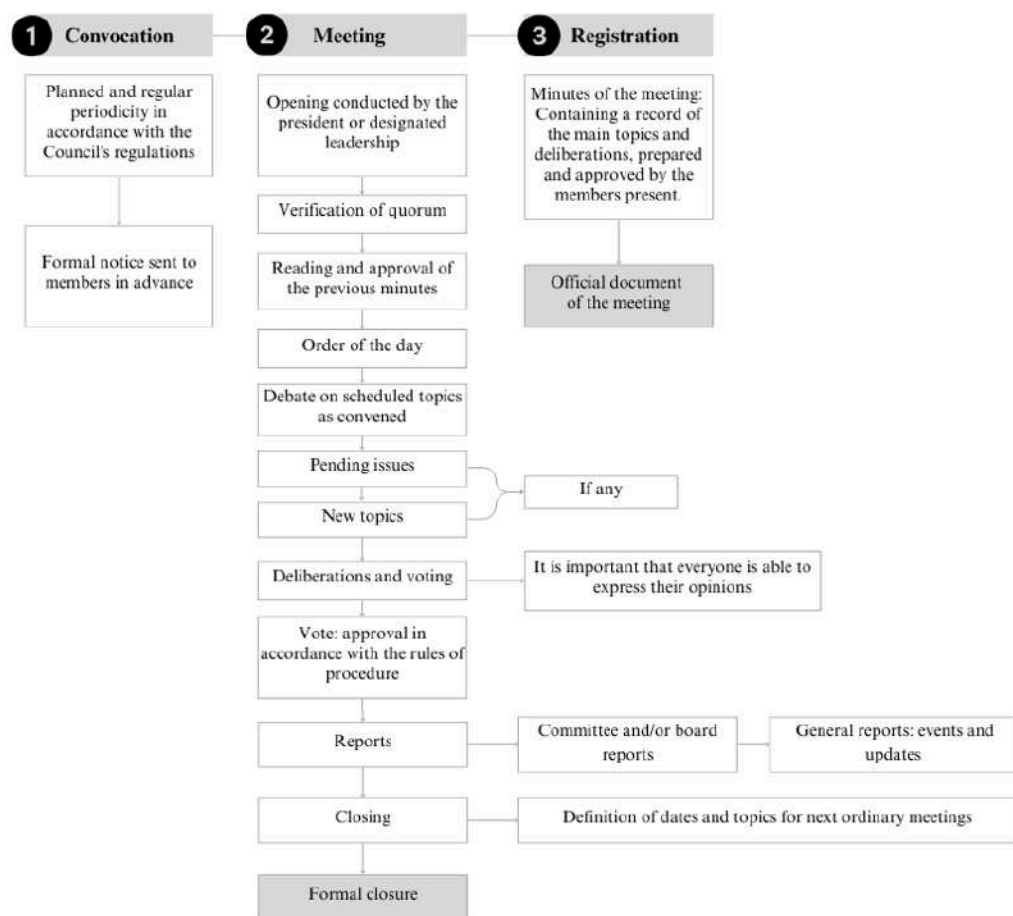


Figure 1. The general structure of council meetings (developed by the authors).

2.2 Conferences

Conferences are convened by the councils every four years, but may be convened at shorter intervals if necessary. They represent an opportunity to broaden debate and dialogue, in which elected delegates, respecting the public sphere to which they belong (municipal, state, or federal), propose ideas, defend needs and interests, and negotiate to achieve, in the best possible way, the will of the community.

Conferences evaluate public policies and improve their guidelines and actions through broad consultation with the population. They bring together different actors, such as experts, civil society organizations, citizens, and government officials, to define and reinforce political commitments. They evaluate issues, monitor plans/actions, identify priorities, assess future needs, and develop proposals (Carvalho, 2014; Lemos, 2018). Preparatory meetings, known as pre-conferences, help align the main demands of civil society. Delegates discuss the conference theme, so they must understand the demands of the population they represent (farmers, indigenous peoples, etc.) and the challenges and deliberations of previous conferences.

Municipal councilors participate in municipal conferences, and a few are elected as delegates representing the municipality at state conferences. From the state conferences, some delegates will also be selected to participate in national conferences. At each stage, conference programs should set aside time to elect delegates for the next stages. Delegates elected to the national conference must have been active in the previous stages, representing local demands.

This process begins at the local level, i.e., in the municipality, and goes up to the national level. The link between these levels follows the so-called “principle of ascendancy” (Figure 2).

Conferences in Brazil, as much as or even more than other forms of civil society participation—including participatory budgeting—have great potential for fostering democratic practices and creating alternative spaces for representation. The State is responsible for convening and funding councils and conferences; however, it is important to note that, despite this, the outcomes of these conferences are not controlled by the State (Maluf & Nascimento, 2009; Pinto, 2009). Funding challenges, however, remain in practice, given that the budget for many conferences spreads out across various ministries, with different priorities (Nascimento, 2012).

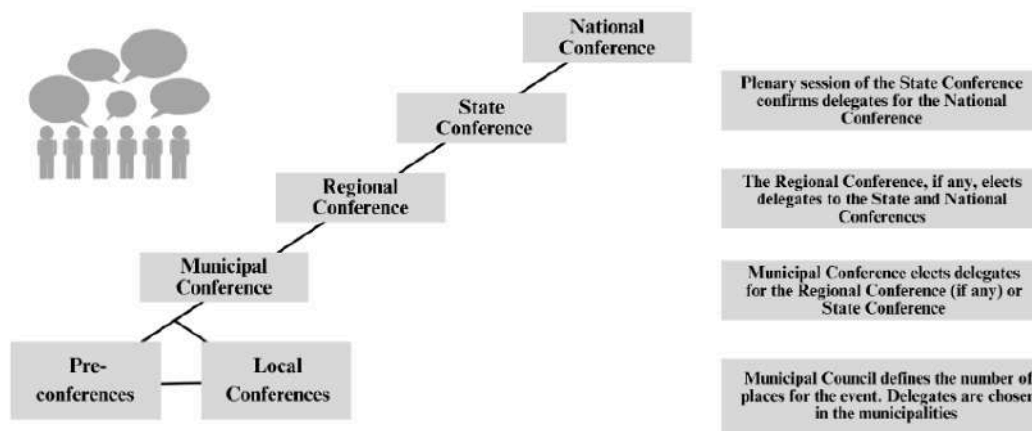


Figure 2. Principle of ascendancy for participation in conferences. Developed by the authors.

3. Social Participation in Food and Nutrition Security Policy: Institutionalization, Setbacks and Resistance

In Brazil, Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) is defined as “the realization of everyone’s right to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting dietary practices that respect cultural diversity and are environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable” (Casa Civil, 2006). Following the Brazilian Constitution, policymaking in this area provides for the inclusion of social participation, from the planning to the execution, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies (Casa Civil, 2006; Oliveira, 2017). Participatory governance in FNS encourages the sharing of experiences and knowledge, helps synthesize collective reflections that direct responses to food crises, and promotes the guarantee of the Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and Food Sovereignty of the population (Buruty, 2022).

The basic structure developed for the participation of civil society in policymaking through Councils and Conferences (described in section II) is also present in the area of Food and Nutrition Security. Here we describe the advances and setbacks in the consolidation of this structure (summarized in Figure 3), which culminates with the creation of a National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN) in Brazil.

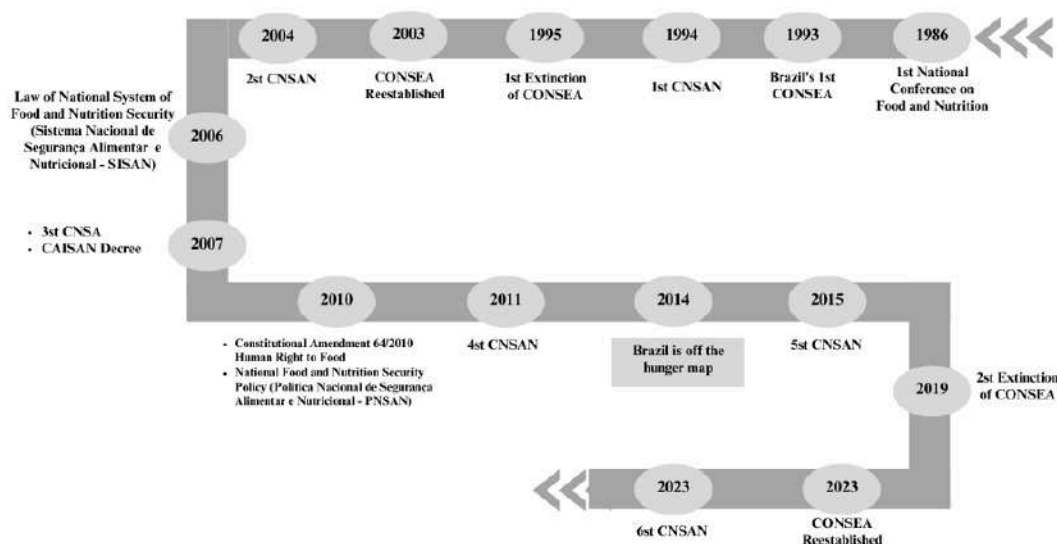


Figure 3. Milestones in institutionalizing social participation in Food and Nutrition Security policymaking in Brazil. Adapted from Casa Civil, (2006).

3.1 CONSEA's Trajectory

Prior to the creation of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), the First National Conference on Food and Nutrition held in 1986 was a landmark in raising awareness of FNS issues in the country (Abrandh, 2013). That conference highlighted the importance of the Human Right to Adequate Food and reinforced the need of integrating issues related to inadequate nutrition, such as malnutrition, overweight, obesity, and chronic non-communicable diseases. In the 1980s and the 1990s, these issues were not yet widely debated, but they gained momentum and became the focus of many conversations since then (Moraes et al., 2021a).

In 1993, under the leadership of Herbert (Betinho) de Souza and his very successful and popular movement (*Ação da Cidadania Contra a Fome e a Miséria e pela Vida* – Citizenship Action Against Hunger and Poverty and for Life), the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) was created. CONSEA was the first institutionalized space for government-civil society interaction for debating FNS issues at a national level. CONSEA is a collegiate body with an advisory and deliberative nature that seeks to promote FNS in the country, ensuring the population's Right to Adequate Food. CONSEA is directly linked to the Presidency of the Republic as an immediate advisory body, influencing in the formulation of FNS policies and in the definition of strategies to guarantee the Right to Adequate Food (Casa Civil, 2006).

CONSEA's work seeks to expand social participation and promote intersectoral action, especially in Health, Education, Social Development, and Family Farming (Oliveira, 2017; Faria et al., 2009; Moraes et al., 2021b). Social participation is achieved mainly by appointing $\frac{2}{3}$ of council members from civil society and $\frac{1}{3}$ from state representatives, requiring the council chair to be a civil society representative. In the selection of council members, attention is paid to diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, and geographic region of participants, seeking broad representation (Machado et al., 2024; Pinheiro, 2009). In 2025, CONSEA had 80 councilors, including full and alternate members.

Since its conception, there were two periods under which CONSEA did not function: from 1995 and 2003, and from 2019 to 2023. CONSEA was first abolished in 1995, during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who did not see the value of FNS as a separate area of social policy (Abrandh, 2013). At the time, despite CONSEA's abolition, civil society intensified its activism in food security through the Brazilian Forum for Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty (FBSSAN) in the following years. The Forum served as a central reference for social mobilization, advocating for the FNS agenda, and promoting the development of laws, guidelines, and policies in this area. FBSSAN also fought for the return of CONSEA and the creation of other spaces for civil society's participation in monitoring and evaluation of public

policies. This activism resulted in the reactivation of CONSEA in 2003 (under President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva) in a more structured and institutionalized way (Abrandh, 2013; Freitas, 2021; Oliveira, 2017). As part of a great public policy effort, CONSEA contributed to having the country out of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Hunger Map in 2014.

In 2019, on the first day of President Bolsonaro's administration, CONSEA was abolished a second time, through a presidential decree (Castro, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2022; Recine et al., 2020). This dissolution resulted in a significant loss of institutionalized space for debate and the fight for the right to adequate food in the country, drastically reducing social participation in FNS-related policy issues in the following four years. The Bolsonaro government neglected or completely dismantled many FNS policies and programs. As a result, there was an increase in food insecurity and hunger, further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil had returned to the Hunger Map (Rede Penssan, 2022).

Once again, civil society resisted and mobilized. In 2019, civil society convened the People's Conference on Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty, which had the participation of many of the organizations that were previously composing CONSEA. The main goal of the People's Conference was to build up resistance and develop strategies aimed at protecting FNS public policies (Nagib, 2020). The Conference also served as an opportunity for collective reflection on the importance of more robust institutionalization for full and continuous social participation in policy-making as envisioned in the Federal Constitution. In a context where social participation was officially undermined (under the Bolsonaro government), the important role of FNS activists became clear. FNS activists were there to strengthen social participation, contribute to the creation of spaces for articulation on the issue, and promote the development of skills through technical training and the dissemination of knowledge in different instances and territories (Ribeiro & Bógus, 2021).

Many councils at state and municipal levels maintained their activities and supported public protests and actions such as the *Banquetaço* ("Big Banquet"), a civil society mobilization for the free distribution of meals prepared with food produced by family farming, raising awareness in society about the importance of real food and social participation. The *Banquetaço* events, which took place in public spaces all over the country, brought together producers, farmers, cooks, nutritionists, chefs, social movements, agronomists, activists, and FNS scholars (Dória & Azevedo, 2019). *Banquetaço* also appeared at strategic moments and commemorative dates, such as World Food Day.

CONSEA returned once again in 2023 with the election of President Lula, reaffirming the federal government's commitment to ending hunger in Brazil. That same year, the 6th National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security was held, with the theme "Eradicating hunger and guaranteeing rights with real food, democracy, and equity". The Conference highlighted the importance of the commitment to mobilizing society, defending democracy, confronting hunger, and guaranteeing the Right to Adequate Food for all (CONSEA, 2023).

In his inauguration speech in 2023, President Lula emphasized that the main mission of his new term was, once again, to remove Brazil from the Hunger Map. The first year of the new government was dedicated to the recovery of essential programs, which had been previously undermined, such as the Family Grant Program (*Bolsa Família*), the National School Food Program (PNAE), and the Food Acquisition Program (PAA). The *Brazil without Hunger Plan*, coordinated by the Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family, and Fight against Hunger, reflected the new government efforts in advancing FNS public policies. Its main goal was to remove the country from the Hunger Map by 2030 and to ensure the human right to adequate food (MDS, 2024). The resumption of structural and emergency policies to combat hunger resulted in Brazil's exit from the Hunger Map ahead of the target year, in 2025.

3.2 *SISAN – the National System for Food and Nutrition Security*

Between 2003 and 2016, the fight against hunger and malnutrition gained centrality in the Brazilian federal government's political agenda. Civil society had an essential role in public policies during that period (Burity, 2022; Casa Civil, 2006; Maluf et al., 2021). The coordinated strategy of policies and programs and the implementation of participatory

governance contributed to Brazil leaving the FAO's Hunger Map in 2014, and being recognized worldwide as an example for the set of programs and policies that produced this concrete result (Castro, 2019).

CONSEA significantly contributed to the development of new programs (such as the Food Acquisition Program – PAA in 2003, as part of the Lula's government Zero Hunger strategy), and the improvement of old ones (such as the redesign of the School Food Program – PNAE in 2009). Its main accomplishments to date, however, have been leading the successful campaign to add the Right to Adequate Food to the Constitution in 2010 and, before that, the approval of the Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN) of 2006.

LOSAN launched the creation of a National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN), further institutionalizing the participation of civil society in the governance of FNS at all levels of government (Casa Civil, 2006; Oliveira, 2017). It established three institutional components for SISAN at the national level: (1) the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA), (2) the Conferences on Food and Nutrition Security (CNSAN); and (3) the Inter-ministerial Chamber for Food and Nutrition Security (CAISAN). The law also establishes that these bodies – Councils, Conferences, and Chambers – be set up similarly at the state and municipal levels (Martins et al., 2023; Oliveira, 2017; Vasconcellos & Moura, 2018).

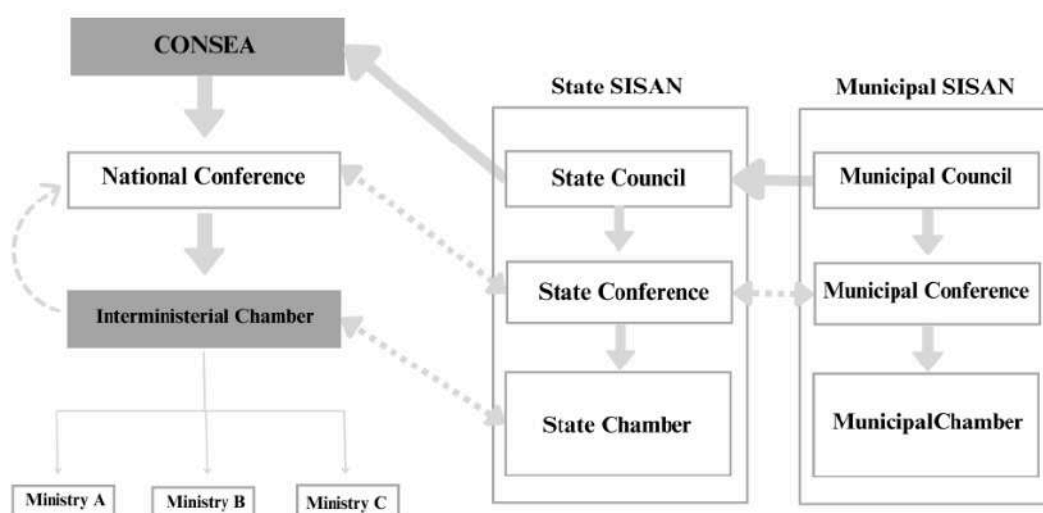


Figure 4. Components of the National System for Food and Nutrition Security – SISAN. Adapted from Casa Civil, 2006.

Four years after LOSAN's approval, a Constitutional Amendment included food as a social right in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution. This was a fundamental development, as it institutionalized food as a constitutional human right and, consequently, strengthened food and nutrition security measures (Casa Civil, 1988; Senado Federal, 2010). In the same year (2010), the government launched the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (PNSAN), defining the guidelines for drawing up Food and Nutrition Security Plans (PlanSAN) (Casa Civil, 2010; Oliveira, 2017). The formulation and consolidation of all these components were only possible with the creation of legal structures, instruments, and mechanisms for social participation, made possible by the strengthening of Councils and Conferences over the years (Maluf et al., 2021).

SISAN is a public, intersectoral, and participatory system that coordinates the three levels of government, different sectors, and organized civil society. It coordinates the interaction of these various sectors that facilitate access to adequate food, in addition to monitoring and evaluating the implementation and execution of FNS policies. Each component of SISAN has its own objective, but responsibilities are shared and complementary with the others, namely (Casa Civil, 2006):

CONSEA (National Council for Food and Nutritional Security): body responsible for the articulation between the government and civil society. It mobilizes civil society in the process of social participation.

CNSAN (Conferences on Food and Nutrition Security): space that brings civil society and government sectors together to debate and establish guidelines and priorities for the FNS agenda.

CAISAN (Inter-ministerial Chamber for Food and Nutrition Security): an advisory board that articulates and integrates actions of different federal ministries related to the FNS area. Its main objective is to coordinate the implementation of the National Policy and the FNS Plan, and prepare and monitor the Plan with goals, sources of resources, and monitoring and evaluation instruments (Brazil, 2024a; 2006).

National Conferences aim to monitor progress, discuss emerging needs, and assess previously established public policies. Over the years, they have adopted different angles of eradicating hunger, promoting the human right to adequate food, and organizing the FNS agenda as a State policy (Table 1). The policy governing national conferences ensures the participation of various actors and guarantees quotas for the representation of segments in situations of greater vulnerability. The organizing committee defines the number of participants and the distribution of vacancies among delegates, guests, and observers, according to legislation and the available budget. Delegates have the right to speak and vote, while guests and observers are guaranteed the right to speak but cannot vote.

Table 1. National Conferences on Food and Nutrition Security held in Brazil, 1994-2024

Edition	Year	Location	Themes	Total Participants	Total approved proposals
1 ^a CNSAN	1994	Brasília (DF)	Hunger: a national issue	–	117
2 ^a CNSAN	2004	Olinda (PE)	The construction of the National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security	1.400	153
3 ^a CNSAN	2007	Fortaleza (CE)	For Sustainable Development, with Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security	2100	145
4 ^a CNSAN	2011	Salvador (BA)	Adequate and Healthy Food: Everyone is right	1.996	166
5 ^a CNSAN	2015	Brasília (DF)	Real food in the countryside and the city: for rights and food sovereignty	2.107	384
6 ^a CNSAN	2023	Brasília (DF)	Eradicating hunger and guaranteeing rights with real food, democracy, and equity	2.187	248

Source: Update from Ramos et al. (2022).

When convening the CNSAN, the national CONSEA publishes the agenda to be followed throughout the country: (i) local stage; (ii) period of municipal conferences; (iii) period of conferences in the states; and (iv) National Conference, which will bring together all the proposals. In addition to the calendars of the stages, CONSEA publishes the criteria for the election of delegates, the objectives, and the agendas of the thematic axes, and structures for the debate on food and nutrition sovereignty and security, as well as for sustainable, supportive and fair socioeconomic development. Each state is responsible for monitoring the process of overseeing regional and/or municipal stages. For the conference's deliberations to be legitimate, the composition of delegates must be according to the representation of the segments on the councils (2/3 from civil society and 1/3 from the government). Specific regulations define the number of representatives. Civil society representatives are chosen by their peers, and managers from the respective sector/government agency appoint government representatives.

While SISAN guarantees institutional spaces for social participation in FNS policymaking through Councils and Conferences, a constant challenge is the relative low interest of civil society members to participate in those spaces (Almeida & Emmendoerfer, 2024; Balieiro & Macedo, 2022; Castro, 2019; Maluf et al., 2014). Some of the reasons for this include the heavy agenda of council members (Miwa & Ventura, 2020), but also the very lack of information about such opportunities and what they involve. A number of government-sponsored campaigns (Figure 5) attempts to encourage the participation of civil society.



Figure 5. Examples of government campaigns to encourage Social Participation in Brazil.

4. Conclusion

Brazil has a long history of mobilization of civil society in policy-making. Following the 1988 Constitution, many mechanisms for social participation in developing, implementing, and monitoring diverse policies in health and social assistance were developed. In the area of Food and Nutrition Security, a major landmark was the creation of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) in 1993. Institutionalized spaces for social participation, such as Councils and Conferences, and the construction of a National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN) are concrete examples of how the democracy envisioned in the Constitution have become functional.

However, the participation of civil society in policy-making and the very progress of FNS programs have not followed a smooth pathway. On the contrary, the history of Brazil shows the need for constant vigilance and hard work to fight setbacks, maintain gains, and build for further improvements. CONSEA has been abolished twice since its creation, successful FNS programs have been undermined, and Brazil went back to the Hunger Map just a few years after the great accomplishment of getting out of it. Nothing can be taken for granted, even when social participation is celebrated in the country's Constitution. Still, after the return of CONSEA in 2023 and a government more committed to food and nutrition security, Brazil has once again managed to escape the Hunger Map.

A lesson learned has been that the type of democracy envisioned in the 1988 Constitution requires much resistance against forces challenging it, constant reconstruction, and continuous incentives for popular participation. The participation and mobilization of civil society are needed when institutionalized spaces are available, but are especially important in times when FNS policies and programs are undermined and formal spaces for participation are threatened or destroyed. Policies such as SISAN encourage and enable social participation in policymaking, therefore strengthening civil society. In turn, a strong civil society is needed to continuously defend its gains in democratic participation.

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Chapter 3 - Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population: A Tool for Addressing Syndemic Problems

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1. Introduction

The Global Syndemic framework (Swinburn et al., 2019), linking the problems of obesity, malnutrition and climate change, highlights the unsustainability of current food systems. Brazil has presented, unfortunately, a prominent example of this syndemic manifestation. The country features among the largest food producers and exporters in the world, with practices that are harmful to human and environmental health. The agro-industrial model in Brazil has significantly contributed to climate change. Furthermore, food insecurity and unhealthy diets persist in a great part of Brazilian households. This situation results in malnutrition, obesity and other dietary risks for chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Systemic actions are necessary to change this syndemic trajectory (FAO, 2018; WHO, 2022).

In this chapter, we present the implementation of the Brazilian Dietary Guidelines as an important tool in simultaneously addressing the problems of obesity, malnutrition, and climate change. Published in 2014, the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (BDG, the “Guide”, or the “Brazilian Food Guide”) pioneered an innovative approach to dietary recommendations, achieving some well-deserved international prominence (Seed and Rocha, 2018; Terry, 2018; United Nations, 2015). The Guide encourages the consumption of fresh and minimally processed foods, purchased from local producers and traders, prioritizing those who sell organic and agroecology-based foods (Ministério da Saúde, 2014). The Brazilian Food Guide, by basing its standards and recommendations on the type of industrial food processing (Monteiro et al., 2010), can contribute to the regulation of food environments, through changes in food labelling, taxation of sugary drinks and other ultra-processed foods, and legislation governing which foods are served in institutional spaces, such as schools.

Section 2 describes the main features of the BDG, highlighting its recommendations for social and environmental sustainability. In section 3, we point out three areas in which the Guide has impacted legislation. Section 4 offers some final words in considering the importance of the Brazilian Food Guide as a tool for systemic changes.

2. The Brazilian Dietary Guidelines: A Systems Approach to Nutrition

The Brazilian Dietary Guidelines, launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Health, present an approach that understands nutrition as a complex system, not limited to nutrient intake alone, but also considers social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors. The Guide’s main objective is to promote adequate and healthy nutrition, recognizing the importance of the food system (production, distribution, and consumption), as well as the influence of eating habits and cultures (Ministério da Saúde, 2014).

In a pioneering approach, the BDG proposed a new classification of foods based on type of processing and presents

the idea that recognizing a healthy diet does not require counting calories but rather understanding how foods are made or processed. In the Guide, foods are classified into four types:

Products *in natura* or minimally processed (such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, milk, eggs, meats, tea, coffee, and water)

Products used as condiments in culinary preparations (oils, fats, sugar and salt)

Processed foods (such as canned or frozen vegetables and fruit, dried meat, canned fish, cheeses, and breads)

Ultra-processed foods (such as cookies, ice cream, sweets, breakfast cereals, cakes, cereal bars, instant soups, snacks, sodas, juices, frozen meals)

Based on this classification, the Brazilian Food Guide encourages the population to prioritize ‘natural’ and minimally processed foods, with an emphasis on predominantly plant-based options, while discouraging the consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). Its stated “golden rule” is “always prefer natural or minimally processed foods and culinary preparations to ultra-processed foods” (Ministério da Saúde, 2014; Monteiro et al., 2018; Silva, Louzada, & Levy, 2022).

The systemic approach embraced in the BDG is embedded in the 5 principles guiding its development, as well as in the 10 steps recommended towards healthy eating (here summarized in Table 1).

Table 1: Principles and Recommendations in the Brazilian Food Guide of 2014

Principles	Recommendations: Ten Steps to Healthy Diets
	1. Make food <i>in natura</i> or minimally processed the basis of your diet
	2. Use oils, fats, sugar and salt in moderation
1. Healthy eating is more than just ingesting nutrients	3. Limit consumption of ready-to-consume food and drink products
2. Recommendations on healthy eating must take into account time and place	4. Eat regular meals, paying attention, and in appropriate environments
3. Healthy and adequate eating is derived from a food system that is socially and environmentally sustainable	5. Eat in company whenever possible
4. Food guides must take into account diverse and varied sources of knowledge	6. Buy food at places that offer varieties of fresh foods. Avoid places that mainly sell products ready for consumption
5. Food guides contribute to a greater autonomy of individuals, families, and communities	7. Develop, practice and share skills in food preparation and cooking
	8. Plan time to give meals and eating the space they deserve
	9. When eating out, choose restaurants that serve freshly made meals. Avoid fast food chains
	10. Be critical of the information, guidance and messages conveyed by commercial advertisement of food products

The systemic approach addressing syndemic problems is clearly spelled out in the third principle of the Brazilian Food Guide: *healthy diets derive from socially and environmentally sustainable food systems*.

2.1 Aspects of Social Sustainability

The Brazilian Food Guide incorporates lessons from sociology, anthropology, and popular knowledge. The Guide promotes not only healthy food choices but also values and practices related to eating, such as regular mealtimes, valuing appropriate environments, and preferring food obtained through sustainable means. The document also highlights the importance of planning time for meal preparation, developing a critical attitude toward food information, and reclaiming culinary practices in the home. Guidelines include eating regularly, mindfully, in appropriate

environments, and in the company of others. These guidelines aim to restore social norms that regulate eating practices as a strategy to undermine the consumption of UPFs (Monteiro et al., 2018).

The Guide emphasizes the importance of enjoying food, diversifying eating habits, and encouraging culinary practices to promote a healthy and adequate diet, prioritizing natural or minimally processed foods. It also recommends culinary practices to promote, in addition to physical health, cultural identity, social belonging, culinary autonomy (Oliveira & Castro, 2022), collectivity, pleasure, and well-being. Cuisine is recognized as a complex system that incorporates ideologies, symbols, norms, and beliefs, transcending the simple preparation of food. These elements permeate the history, tradition, technologies, methods, ingredients, and participants of cooking, influencing territorial, gender, and class identities, among others. Furthermore, encouraging the development and sharing of culinary skills not only promotes healthy eating but also strengthens community ties, preserves cultural traditions, and honours ancestral knowledge related to food (Ministério da Saúde, 2014; FAO, 2013).

As the consumption of UPFs, such as cookies, sausages, soft drinks, and ready-to-eat meals, has been increasing (Martins et al., 2013; Moubarac et al., 2015; Camargo & Bós, 2022), the BDG work against this trend, encouraging higher consumption of traditional foods such as rice, beans, and cassava. In the broader perspective of the 2014 Guide, special consideration is given to traditional Brazilian dietary patterns, such as the famous “beans and rice”. These patterns are seen as more than simple food combinations; they are intrinsically linked to psychosocial and cultural aspects that impact individual well-being.

2.2 Aspects of Environmental Sustainability

Food system practices, such as the use of intensive chemical agriculture, the expansion of agribusiness-based agriculture, the production and marketing of UPFs, and global deregulation in the commodity food chain, can negatively impact the health of populations (IPES-Food, 2017). These practices are also conducive to food environments, which limit food choices, often leading to overweight, obesity, and food insecurity (Bezerra et al., 2024; Oliveira Neta et al., 2023; Kowalsky et al., 2022). In current food systems, decisions about what, when, where, and how to produce often overlook health principles and are primarily driven by economic profits, which contribute to environmental degradation and climate change (Triches, 2020).

In Brazil, the food system is based on monocultures that provide raw materials for the production of UPFs and feed used in intensive livestock farming (Norde et al., 2023). The industrialized approach has made the food system a major source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Meat production, especially beef, is a significant contributor to these emissions, and 90% of Brazil's food system emissions result from the expansion of agricultural areas over existing vegetation areas (SEEG, 2023). Balancing increased food production with environmental protection, social equality, and poverty reduction in both urban and rural areas is essential to mitigate and reduce the harmful effects of the country's food production (Martinelli et al., 2010).

The Brazilian Food Guide highlights the importance of nutrition recommendations, which consider the impact of food production and distribution methods on social justice and environmental integrity. It advocates for agroecology and the empowerment of small farmers and rural communities, strengthening their resilience and adaptation capacity (Fernandes, 2009). In this aspect, the Guide is in tune with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in recommending “sustainable diets” as those with “low environmental impact that contribute to Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) and healthy lives for present and future generations”. It should be emphasized that a sustainable and environmentally sound diet must be affordable (Trijsburg et al., 2021), and the implementation of government policies that address food and social protection is crucial to achieving food sovereignty (Ministério da Saúde, 2013; Rodrigues, Kauchakje, & de Oliveira, 2023). The key to ending hunger and protecting the planet lies in transforming current food systems into a model that addresses all these issues (von Braun, Afsana, Fresco, & Hassan, 2021).

Agroecology has multiple meanings for farmers, communities, and indigenous groups (Niederle, de Almeida, & Vezzani, 2013). Unlike conventional farming systems, which often focus on monocultures and mass production of staple

foods for ultra-processed products, agroecology encourages crop diversity and farming practices that enhance the nutritional quality and variety of food, thereby reducing reliance on ultra-processed foods linked to obesity and other chronic diseases (Altieri & Nicholls, 2020). By implementing practices such as establishing and maintaining agroforests, protecting vegetation cover, using green manure, avoiding pesticides, and respecting local fauna and natural resources, agroecology also helps to lower greenhouse gases through carbon sequestration and decreased emissions contributing to the mitigation of climate change and boosting the resilience of agricultural systems against extreme weather events (Nepstad, Stickler, Soares-Filho, & Merry, 2008). Furthermore, it aims to improve access to fresh and nutritious food for communities facing adverse conditions (Nolasco, Lahsen, & Ometto, 2016; Cozer, Triches, & Perondi, 2023), especially in rural and marginalized areas where food insecurity is more common.

Beyond nutritional recommendations, the Brazilian Guide suggests the need for efforts to strengthen the resilience of the entire food system. It encourages: (1) adoption of agroecological practices, especially by family farmers (Altieri & Nicholls, 2020); (2) implementation of public policies supporting family farming (Grisa & Schneider, 2014); (3) organization of social movements like the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which have been vital in advancing agrarian reform and agroecology, empowering family farmers to adopt sustainable practices and resist pressure from industrial agriculture (Fernandes, 2009); (4) growing scientific evidence that agroecological systems can boost productivity, improve climate resilience, and increase biodiversity (Tittonell, 2014); (5) expansion of education and training initiatives in agroecology (Petersen, 2013); (6) strengthening of market initiatives such as agroecological fairs and community-supported agriculture (CSA), which facilitate direct producer-to-consumer sales, fostering sustainable production and food security within the concept of “real food”.

3. Impact of the Brazilian Dietary Guidelines on Policies: Some Examples

The BDG serve as a technical reference tool for professionals and policymakers across various sectors, such as health, education, agriculture, and sustainability (Monteiro et al., 2018). However, it does not constitute a public policy in itself. Its effectiveness depends on the existence of intersectoral governance mechanisms that enable its incorporation into institutional agendas (Maluf & Reis, 2021). Brazil's experience with food and nutrition security policy demonstrates that structures such as the Inter-ministerial Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security (CAISAN) and the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) are essential for articulating actions between government and civil society, providing legitimacy and effectiveness to public initiatives (Pinheiro et al., 2021). Moreover, civil society engagement is crucial not only to legitimize the Guidelines but also to advocate for their implementation and monitor governmental actions (Carvalho & Oliveira, 2020).

Three policy areas in which one can see the impact of the Food Guide are in the School Food Programme, food labelling, and taxation of ultra-processed foods.

3.1 Restricting UPFs in School Meals

Brazil's National School Food Programme (PNAE) is one of the largest in the world, serving over 40 million students enrolled in all stages of public schooling, from daycare centres to the end of high school (FNDE, 2025; Rocha et al., 2026). Schools play an important role in shaping children's eating habits (Drouka et al., 2023). In recent years, Brazilian legislation has advanced in defining restrictions on the use of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in school meals, a measure considered important for promoting the full growth and development potential of children and adolescents (Parizotto et al., 2021). This is particularly important considering the growing scientific evidence linking UPFs consumption to problems such as obesity and metabolic diseases, due to the high amount of sugars, fats, sodium, and additives in these products (Mendoza-Herrera et al., 2024; Lane et al., 2024).

A significant milestone in implementing the Guidelines was a legislative resolution to limit the purchase of UPFs to a maximum of 20% of the total funds allocated to school meals under PNAE (Anvisa, 2020a). The same resolution also prohibits the purchase of soft drinks, cereals with additives or sweeteners, candy and similar products, cookies and crackers, cakes with frosting or filling, among other foods, using PNAE funds (Anvisa, 2020a; Canella et al., 2022). For children aged 0 to 3 years in daycare centres, there is a complete ban on the provision of added sugar and ultra-processed foods.

Another important measure consistent with the BDG is the legal provision for the use of at least 30% of PNAE resources towards purchases of food from family farming, primarily from local producers (Brasil, 2009). This can not only boost the local economy and increase the production of fresh and minimally processed foods, but it also favours the use of foods with better nutritional value to students, even contributing to their academic performance (Cohen et al., 2021).

3.2 Food labelling

Nutritional labelling is a tool to inform consumers about food composition, thus encouraging healthier food choices (Temple, 2020). Recently, Brazil adopted new rules for front-of-package food labelling, aiming at facilitating the identification of products with high levels of sugars, saturated fats, and sodium, thus following the BDG (Anvisa, 2020a).

Among the changes introduced since the launch of the BDG is the mandatory adoption of the front-of-package nutrition labelling in a magnifying glass format, acting as a warning to indicate excess added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium in products containing these nutrients in high amounts. New rules also define guidelines for the nutrition facts table to make it clearer and more accessible, including adjustments to content, format, and legibility, and restrictions on the use of nutrition claims on foods and beverages, preventing labelling practices that could mislead consumers (Anvisa, 2020b). These changes are aligned with the recommendations of the Food Guide and aim to present consumers, in an objective and easy-to-understand manner, with information about the high content of nutrients that are relevant to health (Rubio, 2022).

3.3 Taxation of ultra-processed foods

Considering the scientific evidence linking excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods to an increase in chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, taxing these foods has been proposed as an effective measure to discourage their consumption and promote healthier food choices (Jaime et al., 2015). In this regard, the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA) recently proposed increasing taxation on ultra-processed foods as a strategy to discourage consumption of such products (CONSEA, 2024). While this proposition has met considerable opposition (particularly from the food industry), taxation of ultra-processed foods is now on the agenda for policy discussions in the country (Sobrinho, 2024).

Additionally, subsidizing natural or minimally processed foods is an effective strategy to make these products more accessible to the population (Blakely et al., 2020). Subsidies can include tax reductions, the promotion of farmers' markets, and the direct purchase of products from family farms for school feeding programs (Andreyeva et al., 2020).

4. Final words

The Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population of 2014 pioneered an approach to nutrition recommendations, which

takes into account the syndemic nature of malnutrition. It highlights the importance of a systemic view of health problems associated with not only the consumption of food, but also to how food is produced and distributed. The Guide moved away from nutrients to spotlight foods. It did not shy away from pointing out the social and environmental directions the food system should take to promote well-being. Its recommendations are guiding individual food choices, but also considerations for public policies on school food, food labelling, and taxation. The concern with environmental sustainability is also explicit in the BDG, with recommendations for purchasing foods that are local, produced by family farmers and through agroecology.

The importance of the BDG goes beyond their educational role. The Guide stands out as a strategic tool for promoting healthy, just, and sustainable food systems.

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Chapter 4 - Food Services as Strategic Settings for Food Security: The Central Role of Menu Planning

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I. Introduction

Food services refer to settings that prepare and distribute meals on a large scale in institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, workplaces, and social programs (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018). The field of food services has traditionally been viewed through a technicist lens, primarily focusing on operational efficiency, sanitary control, and cost management (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 2015). However, in the face of increasing global concerns such as food insecurity, environmental degradation, and the burden of diet-related chronic diseases, it becomes urgent to broaden this perspective. Food services can play a strategic role for implementing sustainable and health-promoting food practices (Ministério da Saúde, 2014).

Sustainability goes beyond environmental concerns, encompassing the social and economic dimensions of food chains. Food production, distribution, and consumption directly impact natural resources, biodiversity, and working conditions in both rural and urban areas. Thus, sustainable food systems require integrating strategies that promote agroecology, reduce food waste, value local food cultures, and encourage conscious and responsible consumption (HLPE, 2020).

Food systems determine the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food, which are the pillars of food security (Domene et al., 2023). It is essential to strengthen public policies aimed at food and nutrition security, aligned with the principles of sustainability and the human right to adequate food. Integrating these concepts, as well as reconciling interests for a common agenda among them, can contribute to building fairer, more resilient, and healthier food systems, promoting public health and social equity while preserving the environment and ensuring the well-being of future generations.

In this context, the concept of *One Health* becomes particularly relevant. *One Health* acknowledges the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, emphasizing that changes in one domain can have profound effects on the others (WHO, 2025). It is important to recognize that food services are an integral part of food systems, playing a strategic role in promoting sustainable practices, ensuring food and nutrition security, and advancing health outcomes for populations. By adopting a *One Health* approach, institutional food services can not only enhance public health through nutritious meals but also promote more sustainable food production systems that protect human health (WHO, 2025).

The relationship between sustainability and food systems has been widely discussed over the past decades, reflecting growing concerns regarding the environmental, social, and economic impacts of food production. Current food systems, shaped by agribusiness hegemony in both production and consumption models, have exacerbated various socio-economic and environmental crises on a global scale (FAO & WHO, 2019). It is important to highlight that food systems encompass different food environments, including food services and institutional food units, which are influenced by political, social, structural, environmental, and demographic factors. These factors directly impact food quality, particularly regarding the promotion of more sustainable dietary practices (HLPE, 2017; United Nations, 2015).

This chapter argues that food services, also called collective feeding, should not be limited to technical functions. Rather, they offer an opportunity for systemic and transformative actions that integrate sustainability, public health, and food security. As such, the chapter explores how the role of nutritionists in food services can be expanded beyond

routine menu planning into a broader framework of policy implementation and social impact. We then transition into practical applications, with a focus on institutional experiences and research developed at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte in Brazil. This includes strategies for reducing environmental impact through sustainable public procurement, healthy menus, workers' health, and food waste reduction. Finally, we conclude with reflections and recommendations for strengthening the role of food services in promoting health, equity, and planetary sustainability.

2. Food Services as Space for Action on Food Security in Brazil

The interface between public health and nutrition is a fertile field for promoting Food Security (FS), particularly when considering food services as a privileged space for action. To address the intersection between food services and food security, it is essential to begin with a conceptual and historical understanding of the different scientific fields, namely “Public Health” and “Nutrition”. Public health, characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, encompasses knowledge and practices aimed at health promotion, disease prevention, and the organization of health systems (Osório & Schraiber, 2015). The relationship between public health and nutrition is based on the notion that public health is a broad field of knowledge and practice that unfolds into subfields with specific cores of expertise. Nutrition, in turn, is a fundamental subfield, with specializations that connect both to public health and to food security. In this context, food and nutrition are recognized as social determinants of health that directly influence individual and collective well-being (Nunes, 2009).

The practices and actions related to healthier and more sustainable food services that enable menu planning from a food security perspective are supported by Brazilian government and academic initiatives, as well as by contributions from non-governmental organizations (NGO). In this context, social media has emerged as an important platform for disseminating these initiatives, as many NGO, collectives, and social groups use digital spaces to inform and engage the population, share knowledge, and promote healthier eating practices (Greenhow et al., 2019).

The field of food services has undergone various transformations, both in its theoretical-scientific foundations and in the scope of its practices. In 2005, Brazil's Federal Council of Nutritionists designated this field as “Food and Nutrition Services” (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2005). However, researchers and specialized faculty have adopted other terms, such as “Food and Nutrition in Meal Production” (Kac, Proença & Prado, 2011) and “Food Services for Collectivities” (Bosi & Prado, 2011). More recently, in 2018, the Council standardized the field's designation as “Nutrition in Collective Food Services” (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018).

According to a Federal Council of Nutritionists resolution (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018), which defines the responsibilities of nutritionists in Brazil, the field of Nutrition in Collective Food Services encompasses the planning, organization, management, supervision, and evaluation of Food and Nutrition Units, with a focus on producing meals that are healthy, safe, and nutritionally adequate for consumers. The main responsibilities of nutritionists in this field include managing services, planning and supervising meal production, ensuring food hygiene and nutritional quality, developing food and nutrition education programs, designing and implementing menus, and adopting actions that promote sustainable development. The resolution also highlights the importance of nutritionists in promoting health and ensuring food and nutrition security within food services, whether institutional or commercial (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018).

In Brazil, the collective and institutional food service sector, which encompasses companies responsible for providing meals to groups, including industrial kitchens and food services in corporate, hospital, and school settings, play a key role in the economy, creating approximately 350,000 direct jobs (ABERC, 2024). Additionally, it is estimated that the sector provides meals for 17.5% of the Brazilian population daily, covering businesses, schools, hospitals, and other institutions (ABERC, 2024).

Thus, collective food services play a central role in promoting food security by ensuring access to adequate food, encouraging healthy and sustainable eating practices. Beyond service management itself (e.g., personnel management, cost control, and infrastructure planning and supervision), food services connect with food security through:

Access to Adequate Food: Food services implemented through public policies, such as the Brazilian School Food Program and Popular Restaurants (see Rocha et al, 2026, in this volume), ensure access to balanced and safe meals for populations in situations of social vulnerability. These initiatives directly contribute to food security by reducing food insecurity and guaranteeing the human right to adequate food.

Safe and Healthy Eating: Food services promote balanced menus based on nutritional guidelines and dietary recommendations, while also ensuring food safety and hygienic-sanitary conditions throughout food production processes. These practices are aligned with the principles of food security, which emphasize food quality, safety, and dietary diversity.

Sustainability: Food services incorporate sustainable practices by prioritizing foods from family farming, reducing food waste, valuing organic and agroecological products, promoting the rational and efficient use of natural resources such as water and energy, and minimizing the environmental impacts of food production systems and menus. These actions align with food security principles that advocate for more sustainable and resilient food systems.

Food and Nutritional Education: Food services also include food and nutrition education actions, such as cooking workshops, lectures, and educational campaigns, aimed at raising awareness of healthy and sustainable eating habits. These initiatives are essential for empowering individuals and communities to make informed and autonomous food choices.

The development of sustainable and food security-promoting menus is a challenge that requires the integration of knowledge and practices from public health and nutrition. Given the responsibilities of nutritionists as a core professional practice, these encompass activities related to menu planning and all actions required for its effective implementation, integrating principles of food security, sustainability, and public food policies, with the industrial kitchen or food services serving as a privileged locus of action. The activities undertaken are based on a “nutrition-based culinary” grounded in “dietetics” (Bosi & Prado, 2011) and include conceptual and technical tools from the field of management as important instruments for food services (Kraemer, 2014).

The actions involved in menu planning not only contribute to health promotion and disease prevention, but also strengthen responses to the global syndemic (the combined and interacting pandemics of obesity, undernutrition, and climate change), promote the sustainability of food systems, and ensure the human right to adequate food (Swinburn et al., 2019). The planning of menus that promote food security should be an essential practice aimed at aligning collective feeding with the principles of sustainability and health promotion. From this perspective, such planning should involve prioritizing the purchase of food from local producers, seasonal or harvest-based foods, especially those grown by family farming; reducing the use of ultra-processed foods; promoting the full utilization of food; and engaging the community in food and nutrition education actions (Ministério da Saúde, 2014).

Moreover, it is essential in this process to adopt initiatives aimed at workers in the food service sector itself, promoting a more humanistic and inclusive people management approach, particularly focused on striving for a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable diet for socioeconomically vulnerable groups, primarily with the aim of advancing the achievement of sustainable development (Brito et al., 2024). Considering the importance of public policies for the food service sector, with an emphasis on ensuring food security, it is essential to approach food systems as central to promoting sustainability and healthfulness in diets.

2.1 Food and nutrition policies governing food services in Brazil

In Brazil, Law No. 11,346 of September 15, 2006, which established the National System of Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN), aimed to ensure the Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF). Article 2 of this law states that: “Adequate food is a fundamental human right, inherent to human dignity and essential for the realization of other rights, and public authorities must adopt the necessary policies and actions to promote and guarantee Food Security (FS)” (Brasil, 2006).

Additionally, the law emphasizes that “the adoption of these policies and actions should consider environmental, cultural, economic, regional, and social dimensions” (Brasil, 2006). Public food policies thus serve both as theoretical

frameworks and as tools to promote, protect, and fully realize food security and, consequently, to guarantee the Human Right to Adequate Food. These food and nutrition policies often vary in scope, with some being universal, applicable to the entire population, and others targeting specific segments of society, such as women, children, students, workers, the elderly, and homeless individuals. Additionally, they may interface with other policies to define responsibilities for these groups.

Public policies directed at food and nutrition security are not new. Since the post-World War I period, the Brazilian state has intervened in food and nutrition. During this time, food exports to countries at war led to an internal supply crisis in Brazil, compelling the government to control food stocks and regulate prices (Mazon, 2009; Acuña & Cruz, 2003; Nascimento, 2012).

Starting in the 1930s, with advances in scientific knowledge, the field of food and nutrition emerged as a science, profession, and public policy in Brazil (Vasconcelos, 2002). At the same time, the impact of nutrition on various pathologies was recognized, as was the association between low food intake and malnutrition-related diseases, which reinforced the need for public policies to address these issues. The proposal and development of actions in the field of collective feeding gained momentum, leading to several initiatives, including the establishment of the minimum wage (1940); the Social Security Food Service (SAPS, 1940), a precursor to the Worker Food Program (PAT, 1976); the National Food Commission (CNA, 1945); the creation of the National School Meal Campaign (1955), a precursor to the National School Feeding Program (PNAE); and the National Food and Nutrition Program (PRONAN, 1973) (Vasconcelos & Batista Filho, 2011).

These policies are often implemented in food services. According to the Federal Council of Nutritionists, a food service is “a management unit where all technical and administrative activities necessary for meal production are carried out, up to the distribution of meals to healthy and ill collectives, with the objective of maintaining, improving, or restoring the health of the clientele served” (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018). In this context, meals are distributed in stages throughout the day, according to the clients’ presence, and are planned by nutritionists to meet their nutritional needs. The operations and purposes of these communal collective eating settings (catering or food services) should be guided by public food and nutrition policies, enabling the planning and provision of healthy and sustainable meals for groups. From this perspective, the Brazilian National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNAN) serves as the main guide for these practices, specifically through Guideline 2 (Promotion of Adequate and Healthy Food) and Guideline 9 (Intersectoral Cooperation and Articulation for Food and Nutritional Security).

2.2 Menu planning as a strategic tool for healthy and sustainable diets

According to the Federal Council of Nutritionists (Conselho Federal de Nutrição, 2018), a menu is “a set of foods and preparations intended for human consumption, planned in accordance with the nutritional and physiological needs of an individual or group”. It encompasses the sequence of preparations that make up a meal or the meals consumed over a specific period.

From a management perspective in a Food and Nutrition Unit, the menu is the primary tool guiding decisions related to restaurant management. It influences everything from the physical and material aspects of the unit to issues concerning the staffing and composition of the food handling team, as well as cost management (Abreu, Spinelli & Pinto, 2019). From a commercial standpoint, the menu serves as both a communication channel with internal clients (food handlers) and external clients (diners), as well as a sales tool, showcasing the type, standard, and variety of options available at the restaurant (Silva & Martinez, 2019).

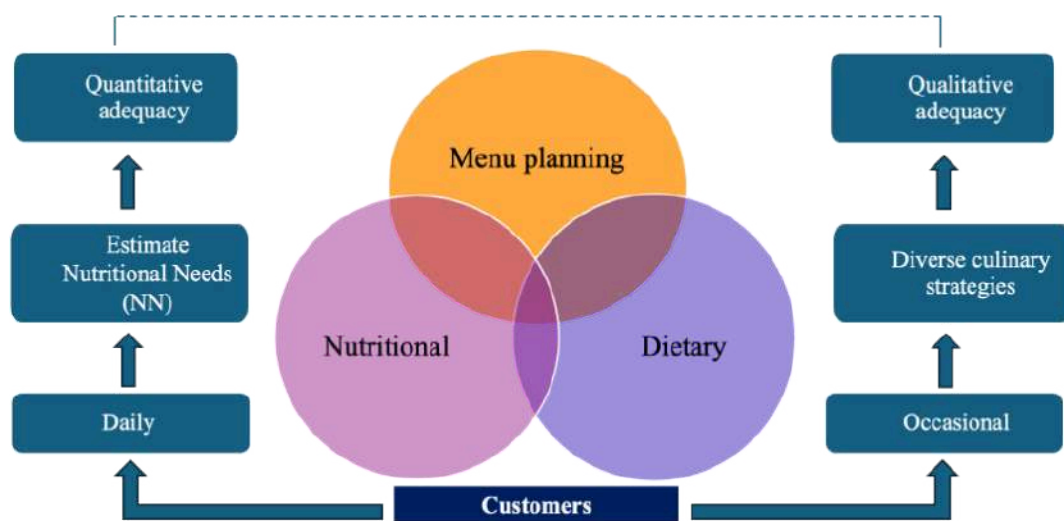


Figure 1. Nutritional and food dimensions of menu planning in collective feeding. Source: Authors

Menu planning should be guided by two complementary dimensions: the nutritional and the dietary (Figure 1). Nutritional planning refers to the attention given to the nutritional needs of the clientele for whom a particular menu is intended. It must consider individual data to determine the average characteristics of the population, such as weight, height, age, physical activity, work-related activities, and other factors that may influence the classification of nutritional status. The objective of data collection is to assess the nutritional status of the population, ideally through random sampling of participants, to obtain representative data that will determine the epidemiological profile of the population. The average data of the population will serve as a basis for calculating energy and nutrient requirements, following specific recommendations for each group or population (Vieira, Japur & Vannucchi, 2012; Silva & Martinez, 2019; Philippi & Aquino, 2017).

The subsequent food planning, following nutritional planning, involves defining the diet by considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quantitative aspects imply that food should be provided in sufficient quantities to meet the energy and nutrient demands of the clientele. Qualitative aspects refer to the nutritional and sensory quality of the foods and culinary preparations, developed with ingredients that reflect the dietary habits and cultural practices of the clientele, represent local biodiversity, and consist predominantly of fresh, minimally processed, and processed foods, while avoiding ultra processed products. These aspects should also account for the temporal availability of foods, as well as their identity and social representations (Veira, Japur & Vannucchi, 2012; Abreu, Spinelli & Pinto, 2019; Silva & Martinez, 2019; Ministério da Saúde, 2014; Proença et al., 2008).

In this context, the Brazilian Dietary Guide (Ministério da Saúde, 2014) currently serves as the primary reference integrating food, nutrition, health, and sustainability, offering a wide range of concepts, clarifications, guidance, and strategies for healthy and adequate eating. Acknowledging that nutrient intake from food is essential for health, but emphasizing that it is food that is consumed, and reclaiming the term “real food”, the guide explores and advocates for the countless combinations of foods and their preparation methods, the behaviours that define eating habits, and the social and cultural dimensions of food practices as ways to value both the act of eating and the food itself (Ministério da Saúde, 2014; see also Lima et al, 2026, in this volume).

Food and nutrition professionals responsible for menu planning in food service establishments should use this guide as an ally in building a path toward offering healthier and more sustainable meals, whether in the broad commercial food market or in institutional food services. In the latter, it is crucial to emphasize the role of nutritionists as technical agents responsible for the implementation of public policies aimed at promoting public health and well-being, ensuring food and nutrition security, particularly those targeted at communities, such as the National School Food Program (PNAE) (Ministério da Educação, 2009), food acquisition and distribution programs, the Worker Food Program, and Popular Restaurants, among others.

In collective feeding, the role of nutritionists is divided into mandatory and complementary activities, according to Resolution No. 600 of 2018 from the Federal Council of Nutritionists (Conselho Federal de Nutrição). The primary activity highlighted is menu planning according to nutritional needs, based on a nutritional diagnosis of the clientele, while respecting regional, cultural, and ethnic dietary habits (Vieira, Japur & Vannucchi, 2012). However, when working with occasional clientele, as in various commercial food services, conducting a nutritional assessment and working with estimated calorie and nutrient goals based on nutritional needs can be a difficult task. Thus, a viable alternative is to plan menus by employing a broader range of culinary strategies, varying cutting and preparation techniques, using cooking methods that preserve, highlight, or add nutritional value to the food, and offering the greatest possible variety of healthy preparations in the distribution line (Proença et al. 2008). This approach helps qualitatively adjust the meals while maintaining alignment with the promotion of food security.

The *Framework for Food and Nutritional Education for Public Policies* (MDS, 2012) recognizes food and nutritional education (FNE) as a strategic field for food security and health promotion. Its actions play a fundamental role in preventing and addressing contemporary food and nutrition-related challenges. In this sense, the development and implementation of FNE programs within food service settings represent an important strategy to raise clients' awareness of healthier eating practices, encourage sustainable consumption, and support the reduction and control of food waste.

3. Case studies – Connecting Theory and Practice

3.1 *Food services in a university restaurant*

A research project led by researchers at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), aimed at generating data to support the development of healthier and more sustainable food policies in food environments such as restaurants and institutional food services. It included a compilation of experiences conducted at a university restaurant in the Northeast of Brazil, encompassing studies on environmental footprints, evaluation of public food procurement, food waste and development of byproducts using food residues. From the perspective of the environmental impact of water use in meal production, a menu assessment used water footprint analysis. Based on the findings of these studies, environmental footprint indicators such as water- and carbon-use were incorporated into the technical data sheets of the menu preparations in the restaurant (Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019).

Concerning the sustainability and the promotion of food security in menu planning, researchers also evaluated the public food procurement carried out by the restaurant. The study evaluated public food procurement, emphasizing the origin of the food products, the classification of foods according to their level of processing, as well as their water footprint (Nogueira et al. 2020). Other initiatives have been implemented in public educational institutions, such as public calls for procurement in federal institutes. According to De Souza et al. (2023), although significant progress has been made in enabling the acquisition of food from family farming for these institutions, further efforts are needed to enhance the diversity of the products supplied. Strengthening structural and logistical conditions could represent an effective strategy to improve both the quality and variety of foods provided through family farming, thereby fostering environmental, social, and health dimensions of sustainability.

From a systemic perspective on food, which encompasses the assurance of the human right to adequate, safe, and healthy nutrition, researchers also addressed studies examining the risks of exposure to pesticide residues through diet. For example, the study conducted by Da Silva et al. (2024) analyzed menus offered in institutional food services in terms of the estimated intake of pesticide residues and demonstrated that the foods provided in these menus may be contaminated with multiple pesticide residues. The pervasive presence of pesticide residues in daily consumed foods underscores the necessity for greater attention to the source of the food, ensuring access to healthy and safe collective consumption.

Regarding food waste reduction – an issue of critical relevance within the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability – the university dining hall has implemented actions aimed at minimizing food losses and waste throughout the entire production process. This follows compliance with the Brazilian law on solid waste (Brasil, 2010), which requires the development of a “waste management plan” (including diagnosis, actions for waste reduction, possibilities for reuse and recycling, as well as environmentally appropriate disposal). Aquino et al. (2022) conducted a study to evaluate waste management in the restaurant by quantifying waste throughout all stages of the food production process and proposing strategies for its reduction. In this assessment, both plate waste and leftovers were considered components of overall food waste. It is important to highlight that the generation of waste and food losses is substantial in food service operations, and therefore, addressing this issue should be considered a key strategy for ensuring food security.

A large portion of organic waste is still sent to landfills or open dumps, generating leachate, toxic gases, and significant environmental impacts (FAO, 2011). Collective food services, such as university dining halls and school cafeterias, contribute substantially to this waste due to the high number of meals prepared and the large-scale processing of ingredients. Composting emerges as a policy-recommended alternative, capable of converting waste into organic compost, reducing environmental impacts, and closing nutrient cycles. When integrated with urban agriculture, this practice promotes food security, the production of fresh food, and environmental awareness, reinforcing the need to train citizens and professionals with a social and ecological perspective on waste management. In this regard, researchers highlighted the extension project developed by LabNutrir in the Department of Nutrition at UFRN entitled “Nutrients Back to the Plate: Building Knowledge for Food Waste Recycling through Composting” (Nutrir, n.d.). Composting activities at the garden laboratory were expanded to encompass all clean organic waste generated by the university dining hall, particularly residues from vegetable processing. This initiative not only optimizes waste management but also contributes to nutrient recycling and the promotion of sustainable foodservice practices.

Research such as this advances knowledge in the field of food services by generating evidence on the environmental, social, and economic impacts of meal production. By integrating these dimensions, the study strengthens the understanding of how food services operate within broader food systems and highlights the importance of connecting sustainability, food security, and nutritional outcomes. Establishing the connections among these research fields is essential, as it supports more informed decision-making and the development of integrated strategies for sustainable meal planning and food service management.

3.2 Food and Nutrition Education through the Worker Food Program

The Worker Food Program (*Programa de Alimentação do Trabalhador* – PAT) is a federal policy established in 1976, implemented in partnership with medium and large scale private employers, offering meals to people at their place of work. Several studies have evaluated the dietary aspects of meals provided through the Worker Food Program, highlighting both progress and challenges in its implementation (Savio et al. 2005; Bandoni & Jaime, 2008; Canella, Bandoni & Jaime, 2011). Although research has identified significant prevalences of overweight, abdominal obesity, and nutritional inadequacies, especially the low availability of fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats, as well as excessive amounts of total fat and cholesterol, the program remains an important tool for promoting food and nutrition security among Brazilian workers.

Findings from the research conducted at UFRN led to the development of cross-sectional studies (Bezerra et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2020; Costa et al., 2022), as well as a longitudinal study (Torres et al., 2020), which compared manufacturing workers from PAT-participating and non-participating companies. The studies showed that workers in participating companies, particularly men, presented unfavorable nutritional indicators, such as increased waist circumference and a higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome. However, the results also showed improvements in specific parameters, including lower saturated fat and sodium intake at lunch, as well as favorable results observed among female participants, who experienced lower blood pressure and modest reductions in obesity.

Considering these findings and recognizing the persistent nutritional risks among the industrial workforce, the same research team developed an extension project to promote food and nutrition education for all workers at participating companies, regardless of their participation in the studies. The initiative aimed to address the limitations of the Worker Food Program by implementing evidence-based health promotion strategies aligned with the Brazilian Food Guide.

The project included educational activities focused on healthy eating, using accessible language and culturally appropriate materials to encourage critical reflection on food choices and eating practices. Activities included in-person guidance on planning and preparing balanced meals adapted to the nutritional needs of workers, as well as interactive sessions emphasizing the importance of minimally processed foods and the reduction of ultra-processed products in daily diets. In addition to the educational component, the project also incorporated health promotion initiatives, such as blood pressure checks, individualized counseling for those with high blood pressure, and referrals to primary health care services when necessary. Educational brochures were distributed in the workplace, reinforcing key messages about healthy eating, cardiovascular risk prevention, and practical tips for organizing meals, both at work and at home (Santos, 2021).

By interacting directly with workers and promoting autonomy in food-related decisions, this outreach initiative represented a concrete step from research findings to community intervention. It not only responded to the evidence of nutritional inadequacies observed among workers assisted by PAT, but also sought to foster a culture of health promotion in the workplace, an essential strategy for improving long-term eating habits and reducing the risk of chronic diseases (Santos, 2021).

The workplace represents a strategic environment for promoting healthy eating habits and preventing diet-related chronic diseases, especially among low-income populations with limited access to health information and services. In this context, the composition of meals offered by institutional food services, such as those of the Worker Food Program, plays a central role in defining workers' eating habits and health outcomes. The development and implementation of nutritionally balanced, culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable menus can serve not only as a health-promoting intervention but also as a catalyst for a broader transformation of the food system, realizing the Human Right to Adequate Food and achieving Food Security in Brazil.

4. Conclusion

This chapter advocates for a paradigm shift in the field of food services, calling for a transition from an only technical perspective to an approach grounded in systemic thinking and social responsibility. To move in this direction, food services must intentionally integrate sustainability, food systems, and food security into menu planning practices. When operationalized in this way, menus become strategic tools capable of influencing production chains, consumption patterns, and waste management practices.

The Brazilian experience, supported by robust public food policies and institutional innovations, offers valuable contributions for international audiences. These experiences highlight the importance of intersectoral governance, public procurement policies, and the central role of nutrition professionals in translating policy principles into daily practices.

Public policies targeting collective food services such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), the Worker Food Program (PAT), and the Popular Restaurant Program represent concrete instruments for operationalizing sustainable and equitable food systems. These programs not only guarantee regular access to adequate meals for millions of people but also offer institutional platforms for implementing menu planning practices that align with principles of health promotion, environmental sustainability, and social justice. By incorporating criteria such as the procurement of food from family farming, the valorization of regional biodiversity, and the reduction of ultra-processed foods, these policies reinforce the role of the State in shaping food environments and advancing the human right to adequate and sustainable food. The integration of nutrition science with food sovereignty and sustainability agendas in

these settings is essential for consolidating intersectoral actions that respond to the structural determinants of hunger and malnutrition.

Within this framework, the planning of menus emerges as a strategic axis capable of articulating sustainability goals with operational and nutritional parameters. A sustainably planned menu not only meets the nutritional requirements of the target population but also ensures the rational use of resources, favours agrobiodiversity, and encourages the inclusion of plant-based preparations. Furthermore, large-scale meal production offers a crucial opportunity to implement practices that simultaneously address environmental impacts and guarantee the human right to adequate food. Thus, the menu becomes a powerful tool for promoting sustainable food systems, influencing consumer choices, and transforming institutional environments into healthy eating environments that meet the physiological and cultural needs of the collective.

Looking ahead, the future of food services depends on their capacity to adopt prescriptive and action-oriented approaches that connect menus to food systems. This includes strengthening food and nutrition education actions, promoting sustainable procurement, reducing food waste, and embedding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into food service management. By doing so, every meal served can contribute not only to individual well-being but also to the resilience of food systems, the health of communities, and the sustainability of the planet.

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Chapter 5 - Challenges Implementing the School Food Program in Rio Grande do Norte: Local Micronutrient Supplementation and Full-Time Schooling Expansion

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I. Introduction

The human right to adequate food, guaranteed in the Brazilian Constitution, is granted when Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) is ensured. Since the early 2000s, Brazil has made significant progress in reducing Food and Nutrition Insecurity (FNI), although not without periods of major setbacks (see Fagundes et al., 2026, and Rocha et al., 2026a, in this volume; Neves et al., 2021). In 2014, the country was declared out of the Hunger Map by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). However, a few years later, a survey conducted in 2021/2022 showed that more than half of Brazilians (58.7%) experienced some degree of Food and Nutrition Insecurity. In Brazil's Northeast region, the survey showed even more alarming results, with FNI affecting 68.1% of the population (PENSSAN, 2022). Fortunately, after a change in government in 2023 that restored a number of previously neglected social programs, the country was out of the Hunger Map again in 2025, with less than 2.5% of its population experiencing hunger (FAO/IFAD/UNICEF, 2025).

Brazil's School Food Program (PNAE) has played a central role in combating FNI in the country (Rocha et al., 2026b; Vasconcelos, 2013). Launched in 1955, through the years the program has been substantially modified and expanded, both in terms of budget and population coverage. PNAE is a nationwide and universal program, implemented in all public schools and childcare centres in the 5,570 municipalities in Brazil's 26 states and the Federal District (Nogueira et al. 2016). It covered more than 40 million students in 2023, spread out over the three levels of publicly funded schools that compose the educational system: federal, state, and municipal.

Under PNAE, the federal government transfers funds to cover most of the cost of food on a student per-capita basis, while state and municipal governments are responsible for covering all other costs associated with providing school meals according to specifications detailed in the legislation of 2009 and modifications thereafter. Table 1 indicates the funds transferred in 2023 by the federal government to cover the number of meals and nutritional requirements in different modalities.

Table 1. Funds transferred by the Brazilian federal government per student

Level/Modality	Value per Student (R\$)	Meals	Nutritional Needs
Nursery School (Creches)	1.37	2 small meals	30%
Elementary and High School	0.5	1 small meal	30%
Youth and Adult Education (EJA)	0.41	1 small meal	30%
Elementary School (Indigenous and Quilombola*)	0.86	1 small meal	30%
Elementary Education (Full-Time)	1.37	2 small meals and 1 lunch	70%
High School (Full-Time)	2.56	2 small meals and 1 lunch	70%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on PNAE/FNDE Resolution No. 02/2023 (FNDE, 2023).

(*) According to Art. 2 of Brazil (2003), the remaining quilombo communities are considered ethnic-racial groups that refer to themselves as having their own historical trajectory, with specific territorial relations, a presumption of black ancestry, and a history of resistance to oppression.

The implementation of a nationwide public policy such as PNAE may have some different local characteristics depending on how subnational partners choose to participate. In federalism, there is a particular relationship between the central government and subnational governments, which affects the design of public policies such as PNAE.

Monteiro Neto (2014) points out that in the theory of federalism, the concept of decentralization of government is a fundamental idea. One of the main aspects is the so-called vertical decentralization, that is, one in which a central government shares power with subnational governments. According to Bonduki and Palotti (2021), in federative countries, nationalized social policies may face the challenge of striking a balance between vertical coordination seeking to promote some level of unity of actions and their compatibility with a wide range of state capabilities at the local/regional level. Traditional mechanisms, such as policy standardization, can ensure consistent provision of services in programs, but they must be combined with efficient arrangements of inter-sectoral and intergovernmental coordination.

In Brazil, after the Federal Constitution of 1988, state governments have taken on important roles in the provision (and, hence, co-funding) of services (Licio et al., 2021). For decentralization to be feasible, subnational governments must be endowed with not only economic and financial resources, but also with institutional capacities (Gomides and Pires, 2014; Monteiro Neto, 2014). It is this challenge that may sometimes lead to failures of implementation, because subnational governments have fewer financial and human resources to keep up with the proposals of a central government.

The National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) under the Ministry of Education (MEC) is responsible for PNAE's legislation and monitoring, while states and municipalities oversee its local execution (Bonduki and Palotti, 2021). There is the centralization of the main financial resource for the program, provided by the federal government, but variations in its implementation depend on the local capacity of states and municipalities.

In this chapter, we report on two studies looking at local attempts to complement the basic services provided by the National School Food Program in the Northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte (RN). In section 2, we report on a research project concerned with identifying barriers to the successful implementation of NutriSUS (a micronutrient supplementation strategy) through the School Food Program in a small town. The study proposed to highlight key behavioural problems during the implementation of the program, which could compromise its effectiveness.

In section 3, we look at how the state of Rio Grande do Norte attempted to address the challenge of keeping up PNAE's national standards with the increase of full-time education in the state through the creation of a new program, the *Pague Mais Alimentação* (Pay More Food) in 2022. Under the State Department of Education, Culture, Sport, and Leisure (SEEC/RN), the new program proposed an increase in state funding for PNAE in the public schools implementing full-time periods. The study identifies the main local groups which lobbied the state government in developing this new program.

2. Behavioural Barriers for the Implementation of a School-based Micronutrient Supplementation Program in Brazil

Malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, is driven by inequality and poverty, and there is not necessarily a technical solution capable of solving these problems in isolation. In this context, nutritional supplements and micronutrient fortification are emergency strategies that aim to mitigate the effects of nutritional deficiencies (Coutsoudis et al. 2019). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2016), there should be coordination of actions aimed at the prevention and control of micronutrient malnutrition. There is a variety of interventions in this area: fortification at the point of use with Multiple Micronutrient Powder (MNP), fortified foods, supplementation with isolated nutrients (Iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin D...), and lipid-based nutritional supplements (LNS). In choosing an

intervention, issues such as cost, effectiveness, feasibility, and acceptability must be considered in the implementation of actions.

MNP supplementation is usually carried out through a strategy of home fortification, but it can also be done through fortification at the point of use, where the supplement is added to meals in service networks such as schools, for example. This type of fortification differs from industrial fortification, where the addition is done by the industry, and processed foods are used as vehicles for fortification. WHO's recommendation (WHO, 2016) indicates the use of MNP as a preventive measure against micronutrient deficiencies, targeting early childhood populations. The program is recommended where anemia has been identified as a public health problem, prioritizing children aged 6 to 23 months with the aim of improving iron levels and reducing iron-deficiency anemia, though the age group of 2 to 12 years can also be included as a target audience.

The use of MNP globally is high. Data from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's (UNICEF) NutriDash report (UNICEF, 2024a) show that in 2020, around 10 million children received supplementation. While significant, this number reflected a decrease in MNP supplementation during the COVID pandemic. In 2022, for instance, over 14 million children received MNP supplementation across 36 countries. (UNICEF, 2024b)

In Brazil, the high prevalence of anemia and other nutritional deficiencies among children aged 6 to 23 months led to the creation of a Multiple Micronutrient Powder program (NutriSUS) in 2015 (Freitas et al. 2023). NutriSUS was originally developed as a point-of-use fortification program to be implemented in the school environment. That seemed to be a good strategy given PNAE's reach throughout the country. While a mandated and funded federal program, NutriSUS was to be implemented at the municipal level, through the collaboration between primary health care units and local public schools and daycare centers.

2.1 Study location, research subjects, and methodology

Our study was carried out in the city of Currais Novos, a small municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. The city of Currais Novos was chosen because it experienced a decline in the number of children reached by NutriSUS between 2018 and 2019. According to data from the Currais Novos Health Department, in 2018, 81.9% of the 628 children eligible to participate in the program actually received the MNP supplements. The coverage dropped to only 70.2% in 2019, prompting calls for an evaluation of the program. We worked with eight daycare centres, out of the 10 in the city. The data generated were collected during the development of a strategic plan to improve the implementation of NutriSUS from July to November 2019.

The research subjects were participants in the preparation of the strategic planning to improve the implementation of NutriSUS in Currais Novos. They included school principals and teachers, cafeteria workers, managers from the education department and education professionals, and children's caregivers (parents, grandparents, and others). All participants gave consent through the Free and Informed Consent Form and signed the Voice Recording Authorization Form. The research project received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte.

In the methodology of our study, we followed four phases of an action research process (Nascimento et al. 2020): 1. Planning; 2. Focus groups with the school community; 3. Presentation of the partial plan, and 4. Public consultation of the plan with the community. The main product of this project was a strategic plan to improve the implementation of NutriSUS in Currais Novos.

Conversations in the focus group meetings at the daycare centres and conversations with managers at the secretariat level were recorded and transcribed. In the data analysis, a decision map was constructed following the *Practitioner's Guide to Getting Started with Behavioural Science Applications to United Nations Policies, Programs and Administration* (United Nations Innovation Network, 2022) and the BASIC behavioural insights tool of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019). The main behavioural problems at the tactical-operational level were

identified according to the decision stage in which they were analyzed using the ABCD framework for analyzing behavioural problems from the BASIC tool

This map focused on designing choices that occurred in the daycare centres. The analysis of this study concentrated on behavioural problems, and the diagnosis was comprehensive, examining both structural and behavioural issues. At the management level, the emphasis was on the tactical-operational level of implementation, since strategic planning for NutriSUS is carried out at the federal level.

The theory that anchored our analysis is found in Behavioural Science. Behavioural Science can contribute to public planning, through analyses leading to better choices in the design of public policies, making them more effective. The behavioural approach in public policies allows for the analysis of unintentional attitudes of those involved, which impact public programs. Through this understanding, it is possible to arrive at Behaviour Insights (BI) and propose changes that can lead to better results (United Nations Network, 2022). The application of BI requires an understanding of the context in which the public policy is applied, as behavioural traps may occur if the same solution is applied to different realities. Moreover, the use of BI must undergo a robust democratic debate regarding public permissions and ethics (TOPS, 2017).

Social policies and programs, which prioritize individuals in social vulnerability, must take particular care. The cognitive load of poorer individuals tends to be higher due to the large number of decisions they need to make due to scarcity (Lichand et al. 2022). As theorized by Banerjee and Duflo (2012), there are a series of decisions that most individuals in more developed countries do not need to make because their environment already takes care of them (such as access to clean piped water and reliable health services). These decisions are barely noticed as they are deeply embedded in the system, allowing people to take better care of themselves and be free from such concerns.

Understanding how the contexts of social and economic vulnerability affect individuals' behaviours in the implementation of public policies is an expanding agenda. Complex problems, like widespread nutritional deficiencies, demand public policies formulated with attention to structural issues (financial, human, technological, logistical and scarcity of resources), and behavioural attitudes of users and implementing bureaucrats.

2.2 Results

In total, 97 members of the school community and program management in the health sector participated in the various stages of the project, with some members attending more than one meeting. Preschool teachers (43.3%) and caregivers (19.6%) were the most prevalent participants throughout the stages of the project. It is noteworthy that daycare centre directors had low participation throughout the research, revealing a low level of engagement from the tactical management level in the development of the planning.

In data analysis, we built a decision map (Figure 1). This map focused on the choices that took place in daycare centres. Rectangles represent the flow of action and diamonds represent the decision behaviours. The map revealed five main behavioural problems, further discussed below:

- The school does not communicate effectively with caregivers
- Caregivers do not attend the meeting at the daycare centre
- Caregivers do not authorize the child to participate in the program
- Cafeteria workers fail to administer the supplement
- Children do not accept supplemented preparation

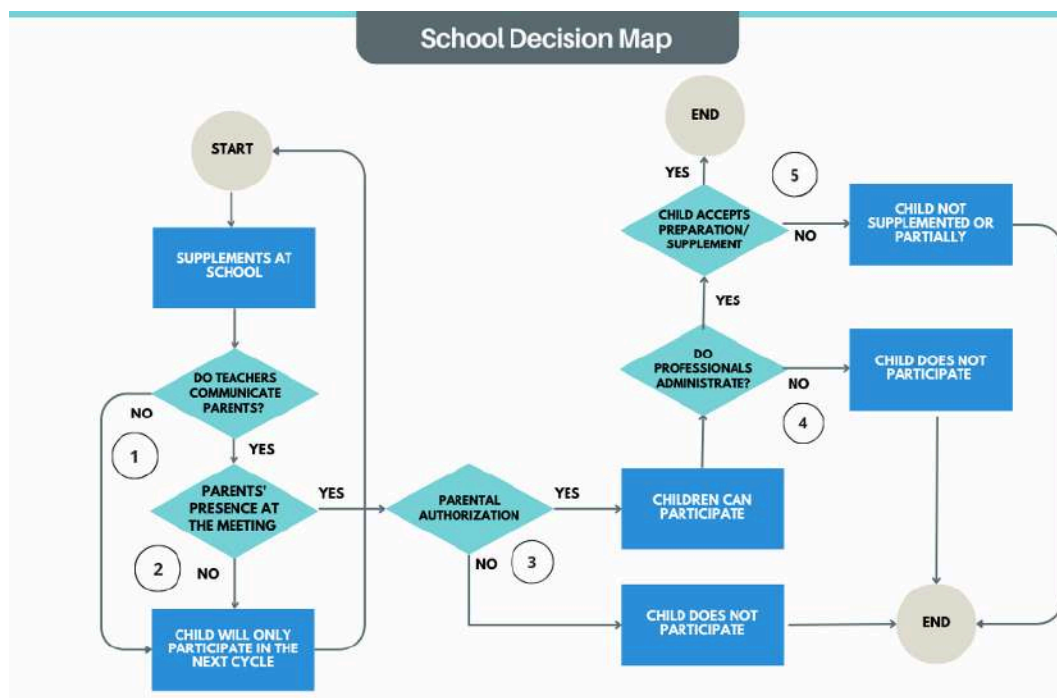


Figure 1. Decision map of choices made in daycare centres. Source: Authors.

The school does not communicate effectively with caregivers about the program and scheduling meetings for authorization

The invitation to caregivers to a meeting is the first stage of contact between the school and family members. Participants reported little flexibility in the meeting days suggested by the health program coordinator. Supplementation cycles last two months with intervals of 3 or 4 months. If the caregiver does not attend the first meeting, the child does not participate in the initiated cycle.

The behaviour of school personnel is also influenced by their interactions with each other and with the population (Hopkins & Lawlor, 2023). Within their routine, directors and teachers sometimes struggle to maintain engagement in program activities due to their existing workload. Procrastination or forgetfulness in communication may have affected the number of notified caregivers. The fragmented management of health and education exacerbated this difficulty, as Community Health Agents in the areas where the daycares are located could assist in the communication process, as outlined in the program's technical manuals.

Caregivers do not attend the project meeting

Non-attendance at the meeting, even after being notified by the school, limits the possibility of clarification that these meetings intend to provide. The target audience, coming from public daycares where children are from households with greater social vulnerability, may be a factor explaining such behaviours. Unavailability to attend the meeting at the suggested time might result from task juggling or even forgetting the date and time. Mental overload, resulting from a significant number of decisions, particularly among female caregivers, and lack of support networks, can exacerbate unavailability. Banerjee and Duflo (2012) clarify that people in poverty tend to make decisions differently as they are involved in complex issues in the present time, while health care or a meeting that can happen at another time is a future concern. Present needs are more pressing. Non-participation may also reflect a lack of recognition of supplementation as something important with real impacts on the child's health (Banerjee & Duflo, 2012).

Caregivers do not authorize the child's participation in the program

The formation of beliefs can result in behaviours that are not always rational; there may be misguided predictions based on prejudices and falsehoods (OECD, 2019). Parental refusal to authorize participation, despite attending meetings, indicates conflicting information from various sources in explaining supplementation and its possible results. During the study, caregivers reported myths (mistaken beliefs) associating supplement consumption with obesity or diarrhea.

The fact that micronutrient deficiencies do not have immediate physical manifestations can lead to the perception that they are not important. In a study in Vietnam, health professionals identified the lack of rapid and visible benefit from fortifiers as a barrier to parent adherence (Nguyen et al., 2016). To prevent these beliefs from leading to inappropriate behaviours, it is crucial for the strategy adopted to be closely aligned with the community dynamics of families. Involving local leaders in the persuasion strategy can be a key point for spreading accurate knowledge.

Cafeteria workers cannot manage the supplement during meals

With the introduction of NutriSUS in their schools, cafeteria workers and assistants faced a new demand that needed to be balanced with the requirements of regular school feeding. During focus groups, cafeteria workers reported a high number of children to manage with fortification. Difficulties related to dividing subgroups within classes due to family authorizations were noted. Transferred children from other daycares, who were not identified as having already received the supplement, were also cited as a complicating factor. Dias et al. (2022) point out that micronutrient supplementation programs like NutriSUS are targeted policies, requiring family authorization, and participation must also consider if the child receives supplements from other sources. This can create additional challenges for frontline workers.

Additional services in the health system can overload professionals, as these services are often added to their work routine without additional incentives (Palmer et al. 2013; Korenromp et al. 2016). In a study conducted in Nigeria with MNP distribution, health professionals showed low initial motivation to participate, as it was an additional task to their health unit routines. Complaints about work overload and inadequate compensation were reported (Korenromp et al. 2016).

Children do not accept the supplemented preparation

There is an adaptation of usual menus to appropriate preparations for fortification, which, according to the Brazilian Ministry of Health (2022), include solids like rice or beans and semi-solids like porridge and purees. Reports indicate that to include these preparations, traditional items were removed from the daycare menus, leading to changes in the meals offered to children. Rejection of school meals by children is a multifactorial issue and cannot be attributed solely to the supplement, but study participants noted that the supplement leaves a residual taste perceived by the children. Some food handlers reported using the strategy of adding the supplement without the child seeing it, but noted that in very clear preparations, the color of the supplement is noticeable.

The per capita funds transferred for school meals in Brazil is low, which may affect the quality of the preparations and, ultimately, their acceptability. An evaluation of a policy implemented by the Polish government to address childhood obesity found that immediate pleasure from food overshadowed rational decisions, such as avoiding processed foods, as health problems associated with their consumption were seen as distant concerns (Olejniczak et al. 2019).

3. The *Pague Mais Alimentação* Program

Many observers have been concerned that the funds transferred by the federal government (see Table 1) are not adequate to meet all the requirements under the PNAE legislation. According to data from the School Food Observatory PNAE had lost half of its purchasing power in the previous 14 years owing to inflation. Brazil's National Education Plan 2014-2024 had proposed a 10% increase in government expenditure on education, but that budget increased by only 5.5% (OAE, 2024).

At the same time, the public school system in Brazil is undergoing a revolution, with plans to implement full-time (rather than half-day) periods (Agência Senado, 2025). This brings significant implications for PNAE. While it is required under legislation to meet 30% of the daily nutritional needs of students in school for half-day periods, it must now meet at least 70% of the daily nutritional needs of full-time students, significantly increasing the cost of the program (FNDE, 2020). Thus, the transition to full-time schooling presents many challenges for the implementation of PNAE at the local level (Carvalho et al., 2017).

In 2016, the federal government launched the Program for Promotion of Full-time Secondary Education. This program

was created to assist in achieving the target of 50% of full-time enrollment, as provided for in the National Education Plan (Secretaria de Educação e Cultura do Estado do RN, 2018).

In Rio Grande do Norte, implementation began in February 2016 in 10 schools under different Regional Boards. The expansion of schools was intensive between 2016 and 2019, a pre-pandemic period. By 2025, 607 public schools in RN were implementing full-time periods (Secretaria de Educação e Cultura do Estado do RN, 2025). The number of students in this new modality has been increasing in recent years, with 10,589 students in 2019, 28,882 in 2024, and 36,882 in 2025 (Rio Grande do Norte, 2025). The ordinance guiding this implementation explicitly establishes that full-time schools shall be granted all educational, administrative, and financial conditions required to plan and implement educational activities.

The second study reported here looks at how the state of Rio Grande do Norte attempted to supplement PNAE resources coming from the federal government in the adoption of full-time schooling. The study was conducted in collaboration with two coordination offices of the Department of Education, Culture, Sports, and Leisure (SEEC/RN): the Office of the Under-Secretary for Student Support (SUASE), and the Office of Secondary Education (SUEM), in charge of managing and implementing political-pedagogical projects in secondary schools. Data were collected from management reports produced by the above-mentioned offices; documentary research on ordinances made by the state government of RN; and the conduction of two focus groups, in August and December 2019, respectively: one with managers from SUASE, and one with managers from SUEM, with a total of 16 participants. The participants signed an Informed Consent Form. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte

3.1 Main findings

Analyses made by the Office of Secondary Education (SUEM) between 2017 and 2018 showed the main weaknesses in the implementation of PNAE in the full-time modality of education: inadequate infrastructure (such as insufficient utensils and equipment, as well as inappropriate kitchens and cafeterias), and difficulty in offering a menu which would meet 70% of students' nutritional needs. The need to offer students a greater number of more complex meals presented a significant challenge for the schools moving to full-day schedules. In most cases, the meals were prepared in smaller kitchens with little capacity for serving them. In some schools, the rooms in cafeterias did not meet students' increased demand. While school cafeterias previously produced and offered students one snack, they now resembled small or medium-sized restaurants that produce three meals per day.

SUEM and SUASE took a series of actions to mitigate these difficulties, for example, bidding for the purchase of stoves, refrigerators, and freezers – expenses greatly offset by new federal transfers for the implementation of the full-time modality. However, the funding transferred by the federal government for purchasing food under PNAE was considered inadequate to meet the required 70% of nutritional needs of students in full-time schooling. The *Pague Mais Alimentação* program was created to supplement the federal funding (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of funding allocations for school meal budgets in public state schools in Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil.

Level of education – Modality	Value per student	Value per		Meals
	PNAE/FNDE (R\$)	student PMA/ RN (R\$)	Total (R\$)	
Elementary and secondary School	0.50	0.46	0.96	1 small meal (30% of nutritional requirements/day)
Youth and adult education	0.41	0.46	0.87	1 small meal (30% of nutritional needs/day)
Elementary Education (Full-Time)	1.37	3.00	4.37	2 small meals and 1 lunch (70% of nutritional needs/day)
Secondary Education (Full-Time)	2.56	3.00	5.56	2 small meals and 1 lunch (70% of nutritional needs/day)

Source: Prepared by the authors based on FNDE Resolution No. 02/2023 and Pague Resolution No. 05/2022.

Two groups were essential in lobbying the state government for greater funds through the *Pague Mais Alimentação* program. The first was the group of professionals directly involved in the implementation of the PNAE (school principals, nutritionists, kitchen and cafeteria personnel, and managers from the government departments linked to the program). This group was particularly critical of the top-down approach of the federal government in launching the full-time schooling project without proper local consultations. It pointed out that the increased resources made available for the implementation of the project were not sufficient for the needed infrastructure transformation or the hiring of the extra personnel required.

The second group engaged in lobbying the government was composed of members from the councils responsible for the monitoring of PNAE: the School Food Councils and the state Food and Nutrition Security Council (see Fagundes et al., 2026, in this volume, on the importance of councils in the implementation of food security policies in Brazil). This group was particularly important in pointing out the insufficiency of the resources transferred by the federal government in meeting the nutritional requirements of PNAE in a full-time school schedule. Year after year, discretionary decisions to increase federal transfers to PNAE did not keep up with the rate of food inflation in the country. With the adoption of full-day schooling, it became even harder to meet PNAE's requirements to have at least 30% of food purchased from family farmers, less than 20% of food classified as ultra-processed, and still supply 70% of students' daily nutritional needs (Rocha et al., 2026b).

4. Final Remarks

Given the capillarity of the School Food Program in Brazil (it is present in all public schools throughout the country), it is often seen as potential ground for the implementation of other policies targeting children. That was the case in the failed attempt to implement NutriSUS as a pilot program in Rio Grande do Norte. The first study reported here (section 2) identified five behavioural problems that contributed to that experiment's failure. It is, thus, not surprising that the NutriSUS program has undergone changes and will no longer be administered as point fortification in schools.

The second study reported here (section 3) shows how subnational federative entities play a significant role in funding and operationalizing programs such as PNAE. In full-time education, the implementation of PNAE faces greater limitations because the program needs to supply more than twice as many calories per student and serve a meal (lunch) with a higher degree of preparation complexity. The study highlighted the inadequacy of federal funding and its year-to-year discretionary adjustments (not automatically adjusted for inflation).

Common to both studies is the suggestion of failures of top-down decision-making in a federative context. Much of the behaviour problems identified in the NutriSUS project could be anticipated, and possibly avoided, with proper previous consultation and conversations with local managers and implementers of PNAE. While those local groups

were not able to prevent the failure of the NutriSUS project in schools, they have been central in lobbying the state government for the supplemental resources needed for PNAE under full-time schooling.

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PART 2 - AGENCY AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION: ANTI-RACISM AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Chapter 6 - Precarization of Precariousness: Work Process, Hunger and Food insecurity of Non-White Food Delivery Drivers in Curitiba, Brazil

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“I have worked hungry several times carrying food on my back”. “I work hungry every day” (Vieira, 2020).

1. Introduction

In June 2020, testimonies from motorcycle and bicycle delivery drivers sparked a public debate in Brazil regarding their precarious working conditions and the risks they encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic (Manzano & Krein, 2020). The Labour Reform in Brazil radicalized the precarious nature of work under neoliberalism (Brasil, 2017), creating informal, just-in-time employment for workers. Workers began entering into intermittent employment contracts with application companies, also known as apps. The new law significantly benefited app companies because they were not obligated to provide basic rights to their employees, let alone the minimum wage, paying them only for the services rendered and disregarding their working hours (Abílio, 2020).

Many unemployed and informal drivers have sought jobs on digital food delivery platforms. This *platformization* often left delivery drivers unaware of earning rules, creating a dependence on these services (Grohmann, 2020). However, the broader context of informality includes aspects of entrepreneurship, individualization, and empowerment, showcasing a tension between control and feelings of liberation among workers (Pinheiro-Machado, 2004 & 2009). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has highlighted issues related to platform workers, focusing on labour rights, social security, income adequacy, and working hours. While platforms claim to be intermediaries, they control rules concerning pay, delivery times, and the inclusion or exclusion of drivers (ILO, 2025).

In Brazil, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the use of digital platforms for food delivery due to social isolation. Rising unemployment also led many to turn to these platforms for income. In 2022, a national survey showed that almost 1.5 million people in Brazil worked through digital platforms. Of these, 778,000 (52.2%) were employed by transportation apps, and 589,000 (39.5%) by food or product delivery services (IBGE, 2023).

The pandemic-induced surge in demand for food delivery services in Brazil discovered instances of abuse and unsafe conditions among delivery drivers (Manzano & Krein, 2020; Abílio, 2019; Aquino et al, 2020). Similar issues have been reported in China and India (Parwez, 2022; Bajwal et al., 2018; Chan, 2021), particularly affecting those working for app delivery platforms (Abílio, 2019).

The debate over regulating app delivery drivers in Brazil has gained momentum since the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the precarious conditions of their work, as noted by Paulo Galo of the Antifascist Delivery Workers Movement (Carvalho, 2020). In 2024, a bill proposed by the federal government aimed to formalize this activity. The proposal issue is still under debate (March 2026), receiving support from some delivery workers' unions and government parliamentarians, while facing strong opposition from researchers, delivery driver groups, and the platforms themselves (Moncau, 2024). Legalizing and acknowledging food delivery workers as employees with guaranteed rights is still far from a resolution in Brazil.

A national survey from 2020, carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* – IBGE) amid the COVID-19 pandemic, found that most workers in certain categories were Black

men. Younger workers opted for motorcycle and bicycle delivery driving due to lower investment costs, while older Black men pursued car and truck driving to escape unemployment (IBGE, 2020). In 2023, a survey in Campinas, Brazil, found that around 60% of 200 app delivery drivers were Black, with 90% being male. These workers dealt with long hours, sleep deprivation, hunger, and unsafe conditions, leading to health issues like systemic arterial hypertension, particularly affecting Black drivers (Abílio and Santiago, 2024).

Additionally, there is a concerning rise in racism and violence against Black delivery drivers. In 2024, Nilton Ramos, a delivery driver from Rio de Janeiro, was shot for refusing to go upstairs of a residential building for a delivery. This case caught the attention of the entire Brazilian media (Augusto et al, 2024; Espírito Santo, 2024).

This chapter explores the working conditions of Black delivery drivers in Curitiba, Brazil, from 2021 to 2022, focusing on how structural racism exacerbates their precarious situations, impacting their income and health.

2. Methods

The study was conducted in Curitiba, a city with a population over three million people in its metropolitan area. A qualitative, hermeneutic approach helped develop the research design, themes, and analyses based on empirical findings, including participant voices and contextual factors, aiming to understand social issues (Minayo, 2014). Fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with two delivery drivers' organizations: the Union of Delivery Drivers of Curitiba and the Movement of Anti-fascist Delivery Drivers of Curitiba. These organizations helped clarify the categories and the delivery dynamics, and identified the areas to explore.

After identifying the research participants, a semi-structured script was developed with 50 open and closed-ended questions. These questions aimed to collect socioeconomic data, work characteristics, eating habits, health routines, food insecurity (FI) status, job satisfaction, access to health services, and opinions about the COVID-19 pandemic. The Brazilian Food Insecurity Scale (EBIA), consisting of 14 closed-ended questions, was used to assess food security, measuring individuals' perceptions of food access in terms of quantity, quality, and regularity (Segall-Corrêa et al., 2014).

Food insecurity, as defined in this chapter using the EBIA scale, refers to the consistent deprivation of food in quality and quantity at the household level. Conversely, food security is legally guaranteed in the Brazilian constitution, ensuring safe and regular access to food that meets cultural, environmental, social, and biological needs without compromising other essentials (Segall-Corrêa et al., 2014).

Research began with an initial test involving food delivery drivers from the mentioned Union, followed by fieldwork from August 2021 to April 2022. The study started at four waiting locations to understand the dynamics of the delivery service industry. Drivers then identified six additional locations in downtown with a higher concentration of delivery personnel. This approach provided insights into the delivery landscape, key players, and workers' daily experiences.

In total, ten points were covered in the study. Participants were recruited through direct engagement at these locations, with inclusion criteria focusing on anyone involved in food deliveries, while excluding those delivering items other than food, passenger drivers, and those handling pre-scheduled deliveries.

The interviewees were selected using the data saturation technique (Minayo, 2017) for each delivery category. When responses started to repeat, the researcher shifted to another *point* to interview a different delivery category. The researcher conducted sequential visits to gather additional information and build rapport with the participants, while maintaining a field diary to document observations. Engagement with social media groups for delivery workers also facilitated ongoing discussions for clarification after the interviews.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Public Health at the University of São Paulo (opinion number 4,464,082, CAAE 40767320.8.0000.5421, December 15, 2020). All 94 interviewees signed the Free and Informed Consent Form.

2.1 Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to organize and support descriptive statistical analyses, as well as to perform chi-square tests. Food Insecurity (FI) items were counted and classified according to the proposed levels of mild, moderate, and severe insecurity (Segall-Corrêa et al., 2014), measured at the household level. To evaluate hunger during the work period, ten questions about eating practices were classified as adequate or inadequate based on the NOVA classification from the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population (Ministerio da Saude, 2014).

For qualitative analysis, NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., Version 10, 2012) was used to code and develop themes from participants' responses. The core meanings from these themes were produced inductively (Minayo, 2014) and all findings double-checked by the research team.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Differences between the profiles of White and non-White delivery workers in their work processes and their consequences

A total of 94 delivery drivers participated in the study, consisting of 71 motorcyclists and 23 cyclists simply by responding to the questionnaire. Due to the demands of their work, only 74 in-depth interviews were conducted, besides the questionnaire, as they often received sudden calls or had to attend a refresher course at the Curitiba Motorcycle Delivery Drivers Union (SINTRAMOTOS).

As illustrated in Table 1., out of a total of 94 delivery workers, 29 were professional motorcycle food delivery drivers, 7 were self-employed motorcycle food delivery drivers, 12 were outsourced motorcycle food delivery drivers, 23 were motorcycle food delivery app drivers, 19 were bicycle food delivery app drivers, and 4 were self-employed bicycle food delivery drivers. Since only one Indigenous delivery worker and three Asian workers were interviewed, whose work process experiences and socioeconomic profiles were similar to those of Black delivery workers, we created the category non-White to group them together.

Table 1. Drivers by Delivery type and race (White or Non-White)

Race X Drivers Mode	Professional motorcycle food delivery drivers	Self-employed motorcycle food delivery drivers/ Direct delivery for establishments	Outsourced motorcycle food delivery drivers	Motorcycle food delivery app drivers	Bicycle food delivery app drivers	Self-employed bicycle food delivery drivers/ Direct delivery for establishments
White (50)	18	1	6	9	12	4
Non-white (42)*	9	6	6	14	7	0
Did not declare race	2	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL (94)	29	7	12	23	19	4

(*) Non-White category includes Black, Asian and Indigenous.

As shown in Table 1, the highest number of White drivers are considered professional motorcycle food delivery drivers. This category of drivers are trained and regulated by unions and traffic authorities, often referred to as “red

plate” couriers. They can work informally or formally. The next category, self-employed motorcycle delivery drivers, make direct deliveries without formal contracts for daily fees. Outsourced motorcycle delivery drivers are employed by companies that provide delivery services to restaurants. Motorcycle food delivery app drivers operate through delivery apps and typically work for multiple platforms. Bicycle delivery app drivers, similar to motorcycle delivery app drivers, deliver via apps or independently without formal contracts. Lastly, self-employed bicycle food delivery drivers work directly for the restaurants without a formal contract or another company mediation.

Table 2. Average years of education and additional job position among food delivery drivers in Curitiba – PR, 2023

Age and Jobs X Drivers Mode	Professional motorcycle food delivery drivers	Self-employed motorcycle food delivery drivers/ Direct delivery for establishments	Outsourced motorcycle food delivery drivers	Motorcycle food delivery app drivers	Bicycle food delivery app drivers	Self-employed bicycle food delivery drivers
Average years of education	13.5	11	11	11	9	–
Additional job position	4	2	5	9	5	–

As shown in Table 2, Professional motorcycle food delivery drivers are the group with more years of education. Motorcycle food delivery app drivers have the highest number of drivers with additional job positions. Abílio, (2020) shows that informal employment affects all bicycle delivery workers, contributing to low monthly earnings and perceived job insecurity, especially for platform drivers. The long distances traveled for deliveries lead to significant physical exhaustion, with most workers living more than ten kilometers from their delivery points.

Table 3. Age range among all food delivery drivers researched

Age Range	All food delivery drivers
< 20 years old	1
20 – 35 years old	59
36 – 55 years old	31
> 55 years old	2

Table 3 shows that the majority of food delivery drivers were young, corroborating the national profile that also shows a young demographic, particularly those aged 30 to 39 (Ministerio do Trabalho, 2022). Among all categories, other research has shown that typical bicycle delivery workers are the poorest, young and unemployed individuals from city outskirts, relying on physical strength and working extensive hours for minimum wage (Abílio, 2020).

Many bicycle delivery drivers aspire to become motorcycle ones, their only perceived avenue for advancement (Abílio, 2020; Aliança Bike, 2019). While app-based bicycle drivers earn less than motorcycle drivers, they earn more than self-employed drivers, who have the lowest salaries and work fewer hours.

The bicycle drivers group faces considerable challenges, particularly regarding physical effort and safety, especially among Black workers. Delivery drivers reported difficulties with heavy grocery deliveries, lack of ergonomic bags, and excessive physical demands. Furthermore, disparities exist in the working conditions of non-White delivery workers compared to their White peers.

The average monthly income of professional motorcyclists is higher compared to other categories, while self-employed bicycle delivery workers have lower earnings. Non-White delivery workers have higher informality, lower monthly earnings, and work more hours per day, which seems paradoxical. In Brazil, compared to other private sector

White workers, Non-White workers face higher informality, longer hours and lower earnings. Delivery app drivers are highly dependent on platforms for income, with 84.3% relying on them. Non-White delivery drivers are more likely to have informal jobs, which can lead to lower earnings (IBGE, 2022b).

Non-white workers often hold informal and less paid positions, according to a recent worker's profile national survey (IBGE, 2025). This research shows that even when they do secure such roles, they earn less, highlighting their exposure to precarious working conditions. Other studies reveal that the food delivery sector consists mainly of younger Black men riding motorcycles and bicycles due to lower initial investment costs. In contrast, older Black men tend to seek car and truck driving jobs to escape unemployment (Manzano & Krein, 2020; Abílio, 2020; Abílio & Santiago, 2024). In our sample, the largest percentage of non-White delivery workers is app-based motorcyclists (61%).

Platform work is primarily found among marginalized groups, including migrants and/or Black residents of outlying areas/outskirts (Abílio, 2020). In our research, many young Black people and those from low-income communities rely on bicycles for delivery work because they cannot afford motorcycles. As a result, Black platform cyclist delivery workers are particularly vulnerable, with limited opportunities for growth and facing risks such as bicycle theft. In contrast, White cyclist delivery drivers, often from middle-class backgrounds, view delivery work as a temporary or healthy activity and may have better employment options.

Racial disparities are apparent: all White delivery workers who tested positive for COVID-19 could take time off, while less than half of Non-White workers diagnosed were able to do the same. Additionally, Black delivery workers struggle to access health services despite having higher rates of chronic diseases. These challenges stem from lower incomes and a reliance on app-based delivery methods, making it difficult for workers to take unpaid leave or access health services, especially during COVID-19.

This research shows that non-White delivery drivers start from more precarious conditions than White drivers, facing financial debt, limited education, and reduced access to public services. Consequently, working for these platforms often fails to provide stability or social advancement for this group. The higher mortality rate among the Black population during COVID-19 is not an isolated fact, but rather a consequence of structural racism and unequal living and health conditions (Dantas, Silva e Barbosa, 2022).

"I have a lot of debt, I need deliveries to pay these debts, you know?" (M_App10)

"I sold my car to pay rent, basic bills, my job as a (...) doesn't always pay because of the pandemic, now it's gotten worse, and deliveries were going well at the beginning, but now they're going less because of the easing of restrictions, so my income has dropped a lot and I've started accumulating debt" (M_App9)

The app often penalizes delivery workers for issues beyond their control, assigning debt or blocking accounts without clear explanations. As a result, workers can find themselves blocked and out of work for days, even if the customer wasn't home or provided the wrong address. This immediate punitive action is perceived as unfair.

Moreover, the first core meaning of the research shows that structural racism within these platforms forces Black delivery drivers to work longer hours, exposing them to greater risks while earning less. This precarious situation diminishes their quality of life, leaving little time for leisure, education, or rest:

"So now, today, my quality of life has dropped a little, you know, because of this stress that... that, that turned into trying to maintain myself. Trying to correct this, to improve, you know, my quality of life, because I think it has dropped a little (...) I have to have cataract surgery but I can't stop because of the deliveries" (C_AppF)

"On my first day of delivery I was already injured and Uber even called me if I could make the delivery" (M_App10)

A study by the University of Campinas, in Sao Paulo state, where 39,3% of the population is Black (which contrasts with the total Black population of Curitiba of 24%), revealed that about 60% of app delivery workers and motorcycle freight drivers are Black, with 90% being male (Abílio & Santiago, 2024). Among them, 65.7% reported having experienced a work-related accident, and 45% had been unable to work for over three months due to these accidents. Additionally, 70% expressed fear of being involved in an accident, which, combined with high workloads and limited sleep (an average of 5 hours per day), has negatively impacted their mental health (Abílio & Santiago, 2024). The study also noted that 60% of workers with high blood pressure are Black, highlighting how the lack of recognition of delivery drivers as workers disproportionately affects this group (Abílio & Santiago, 2024). Consequently, Black delivery drivers encounter greater health risks and deeper racial inequalities, placing them at the forefront of the "uberization" trend.

Other research on informal workers supports these findings, showing that those with more illnesses face longer delays in earning money to receive treatment and struggle to access healthcare services (Pinheiro-Machado, 2004).

3.2. *Precariousness of Black Delivery Workers Due to Structural Racism*

Beyond job-related risks and class prejudice, non-White delivery drivers also deal with harassment and racism, reporting experiences of harassment from platform customers more frequently than their White counterparts, contributing to their precarity and dependency in the workplace. Hence, *structural racism increases the precarization of Black delivery workers*.

This first core meaning highlights the structural racism faced by Black delivery drivers, forcing them to work harder and exposing them to increased risks of harassment and discrimination. The study views racism as a fundamental issue embedded in the political and economic structures of society, producing inequality and violence (Gonzales, 2020). Black delivery workers uniquely reported experiences of customer harassment and prejudice during their deliveries:

“Once I didn’t have a profile picture and the person started being racist because they thought I was Black, they said a lot of bad things” (C_AppAut2)

Some delivery drivers have faced racial abuse on the platform. For instance, one worker reported experiencing racial abuse in a store, but the food delivery platform unexpectedly blocked his profile afterward.

“I was once mistaken for a thief because I was resting after a delivery in front of a house. The owner came to annoy me and told me to leave because it wasn’t the right place to stay, and that the neighbors were bothering me” (C_App3)

“There are some very rude customers, they tell us to go up to the apartment, they want us to park in a place we’re not allowed to, they give us a ticket, they go to the person’s house, in the condominium, they don’t pay tips, they delay our time to receive another call. Then they say it was late, that it’s cold or bad, they curse us, they say they won’t give us the code. Yesterday a girl threatened not to give us the code if I didn’t go up” (M_App10)

“I was kicked out of Ifood [food delivery platform] because I went to make a delivery and the customer didn’t confirm, it was before this thing of giving us the code, you know? I was in debt, I had to move to another city and use another profile to make deliveries, otherwise my family would end up living on the streets” (M_App8)

“I get a lot of disrespect for deliveries, I find it humiliating, the customer belittles them, they even said bad things about my motorcycle, that I was late, they called me a bum, that I was nothing and had nothing” (M_App10)

The research found that Black delivery drivers encountered more frequent reports of blocking and expulsions. They are required to deliver packages to apartment doors, which can lead to low customer ratings and fewer delivery opportunities. Photos of delivery workers are shown to customers upon order confirmation, making them susceptible to racist insults before delivery. While late deliveries can affect White delivery people, Black delivery workers often face additional racist remarks and lower scores. A nationwide survey revealed that 30% of Black delivery drivers received threats of punishment and blocking (IBGE, 2025).

According to the movement “Black Sisters in Law”, 22% of discrimination cases against delivery drivers involve racism, and over 15% of aggressive acts towards Black delivery drivers occur due to failures in delivering directly to apartments (Augusto et al, 2024). One delivery driver noted the heightened prejudice they face, especially in condominiums and luxury restaurants. Other studies confirm frequent verbal and racial violence against these workers (Rodrigues, Moreira and De Lucca, 2021). Abilio (2020) points out that Black delivery drivers, particularly young ones, often find work in precarious and poorly paid conditions, which increases their vulnerability. The fear of being mistaken for thieves leads to decreased performance and earnings after experiencing violence.

The same dynamics apply to health. When working, delivery workers reported that they risk their health through potential accidents, theft, or exposure to contamination. When at home or in other environments, they often feel they are sacrificing income that could improve their living conditions. This situation helps explain their low usage of primary and secondary healthcare services within the Unified Health System (SUS) (less than 10% of the sample).

3.3. Hunger and food insecurity among Black workers

The instability of delivery work, characterized by inconsistent income and customer racism, contributes to hunger and food insecurity among workers. Notably, food insecurity is higher among Black delivery drivers, as shown in the table below.

Table 4 – Food Security and insecurity among food delivery drivers researched

Race (White or non-White)	Food Insecurity Drivers (FI)	Food Secure Drivers (FS)
% White (50 total)	27 (54%)	23 (46%)
% non-White (black, indigenous and asian) (42 total)	29 (69%)	13 (31%)

Black delivery drivers show higher percentages of food insecurity (FI) than White drivers. The sole indigenous participant in the study had severe FI. Black drivers also reported eating more during work than White drivers. However, White drivers bring more food from home and have healthier eating habits, consuming more fruits and varied foods than Black and indigenous drivers, who rely on pizza, snacks, and ultra-processed items.

“When possible, I buy a lunch box and share it with someone. I can’t buy salad because it goes bad. Sometimes I bring food from home, but I can’t keep bringing it because I eat it cold. Sometimes I go without eating because I focus on finishing my shift” (M_App8)

“I always bring cookies from home if I’m hungry, and from time to time I eat food or buy snacks and savory snacks at fast food restaurants. The workload is high, so sometimes I can’t eat” (M_App11)

“I carry snacks all the time and I get hungry, barbecue, Outback, pork ribs make me really hungry. Sometimes I eat snacks that customers don’t pick up” (M_App9)

The only indigenous person interviewed was in a situation of hunger (severe food insecurity):

“We serve food to people on time, but we don’t eat properly (...) This is the first time I’ve stopped to eat snacks (salad, chicken croquette and pastry), I usually don’t stop, I just have breakfast and come back to work (...) If I had it at home I would eat better” (C_App11)

Only White delivery workers reported utilizing popular restaurants, which are a federal public policy, present in Brazilian cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, which provide low-cost meals with universal access or free of charge for some of the most vulnerable groups. (For more, see Rocha et al, 2026, in this volume). Access to popular restaurants suggests a broader strategy for food security (FS). Only four of them reported visiting these restaurants regularly, while five were aware of them but did not go, and 85 were generally unaware.

Regarding their family’s food diet, a higher percentage of White delivery drivers reported it as good or excellent (74%) compared to Black and Indigenous drivers (63%). Additionally, more Black and Indigenous drivers reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their diet (56%) compared to Whites (33%). The higher mortality rate among the Black population during COVID-19 is not an isolated fact, but rather a consequence of structural racism and unequal living and health conditions.

These findings align with recent national surveys showing higher food insecurity (FI) among the Black population (Rede PENSSAN, 2023). For instance, between 2021 and 2022, severe food insecurity was 6.6% for households with a White reference person, compared to 10.2% for those with a Black reference person. Black female heads of households were particularly affected, experiencing higher rates of moderate and severe FI (Rede PENSSAN, 2023). Historically, hunger disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups such as the poor and women. In 2024, data indicated that the Black population comprised about 70% of households affected by food insecurity, while White individuals faced 28,5% (IBGE, 2025).

Informality contributes to food insecurity. The II VIGISAN Survey in 2022 shows that households led by unemployed or informally employed individuals experience higher rates of food insecurity, with 61.8% of White households and 78.5% of Black households reporting this issue. Women-led households face higher rates of moderate and severe food insecurity at 49.0%, compared to households led by men at 40.9% (Rede PENSSAN, 2023).

Informality is more common among the Black population, who also have lower education and income levels (IBGE, 2022a). Only 6.1% of households in informal situations report food security, while 20.5% of those in formal employment do (IBGE, 2025). Additionally, 49.5% of individuals feel hungry throughout the day, struggle with meal variety, rely on ultra-processed foods, and have low water intake (Abílio & Santiago, 2024).

The second core meaning shows that *structural racism exacerbates food and nutritional insecurity*, particularly among Black and indigenous food delivery workers, who face greater challenges compared to their White peers. The accompanying graph highlights this intersection of race and employment status in relation to food insecurity.

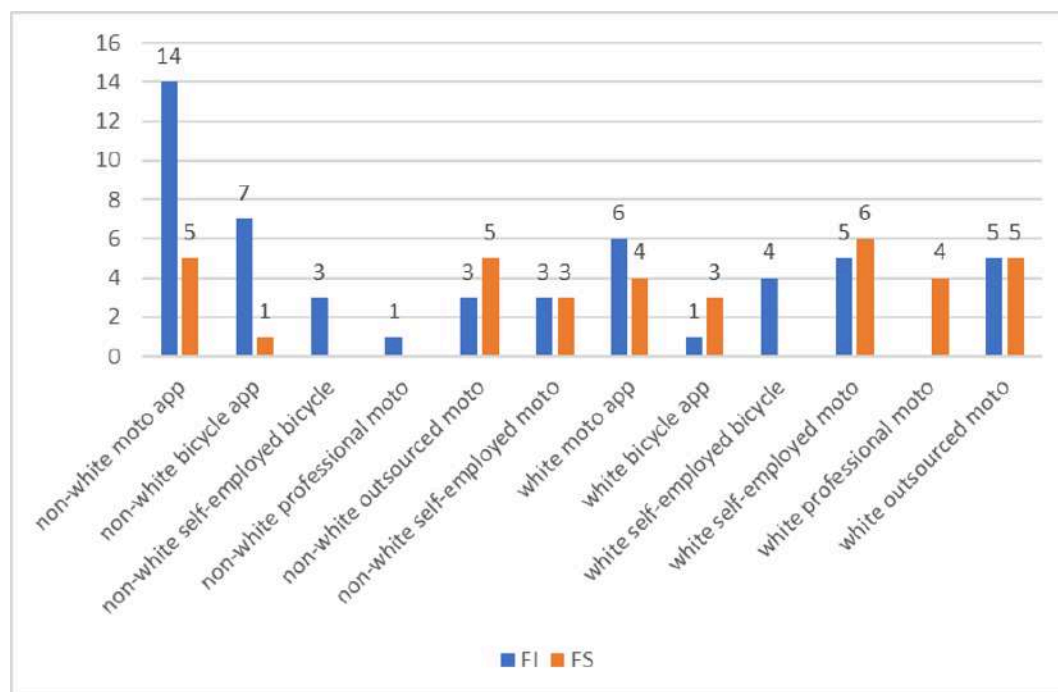


Figure 1 – Food insecurity and food security among food delivery drivers according to work mode & race/colour in Curitiba – PR, 2023

The chart shows that non-White app delivery moto drivers and cyclists are the ones with the highest food insecurity, followed by White moto apps drivers and self-employed moto drivers, which shows that the work process of app-based delivery harms proper nutrition for both non White and White people, but has more severe consequences for non-White delivery workers. Additionally, the delivery process affects FI levels. Motorcycle drivers, the only professionalized group with formal work and higher earnings, do not have any person classified under FI, whereas bicycle and app-based drivers do.

Food insecurity and work conditions are interconnected. Food-insecure delivery workers, primarily Black cyclists, struggle to improve their situations. Their just-in-time work process results in insufficient income to enhance their families' food security or pursue better job opportunities. At home, they feel they miss earning opportunities, leading them to deliver food even while hungry. In summary, these workers often prioritize improving their home diet over investing in food while working, which perpetuates their cycles of hunger and food insecurity.

4. Conclusion

The precarious work conditions and structural racism perpetuated by delivery platforms and customers place non White delivery workers at a disadvantage, resulting in lower incomes, challenges in achieving financial stability and

social mobility, and negative impacts on food, nutrition, and health. The precarization of precariousness was observed in the study through the intersection of an already precarious job and the heightened precariousness faced by non White delivery workers, whose work process ultimately reinforces the unfavorable socioeconomic conditions from the outset.

These challenges are particularly pronounced for non White delivery drivers, who experience ongoing prejudice due to the social devaluation of their profession, as well as direct instances of racism. This discrimination can undermine their customer scores and foster a climate of distrust, leading to fewer deliveries, longer wait times, extended working hours, and lower monthly income. In essence, the structural racism embedded in both the platforms and customer behaviour has harmful material effects on non White delivery drivers, complicating their ability to leave these platforms due to unfavorable working conditions.

There exists a relationship between hunger at work and food insecurity at home, causing a cycle of dependency. Food-insecure delivery workers, predominantly non White and bicycle delivery workers, find themselves trapped in this work process, unable to improve their circumstances. While on the job, they often cannot earn sufficient income to enhance their families' food situations, advance their professional qualifications for better job prospects, or maintain adequate self-nourishment. Conversely, when at home—an environment where they could potentially secure better food—they feel they're missing out on delivery opportunities and, thus, income. This leads to a financial strategy that prioritizes improving their home diet for themselves and their families, typically at the expense of food investment during work hours. Therefore, it can be concluded that delivery workers in vulnerable positions often continue to work while experiencing hunger. In doing so, their labour contributes to the hunger and food insecurity faced by this group.

The government, in turn, fails due to its difficulty in pressuring platforms to recognize their work status, in enforcing legislation that benefits these workers, and in having trouble including them in public policies, such as popular restaurants, an urban food security policy that could be beneficial but ends up not reaching this audience. In this sense, the research project itself helped in the recognition of this public policy by the couriers.

Regarding the behaviour of the delivery platforms, one of the food delivery platforms created an insurance policy to provide access to health services and psychological support. However, among the delivery workers interviewed, only one reported having utilized these services; the rest either were unaware of the service, found it excessively bureaucratic, or did not meet the required criteria for eligibility.

The failure to recognize delivery workers as employees absolves the company of any legal responsibilities. Consequently, additional services are presented as “bonuses,” or as one delivery worker put it, “to enhance the company's image in society”. Despite the suffering and numerous violations of human rights—including the rights to life, health, decent work, and adequate food (the latter not addressed by any platform to date), companies continue to assert that they operate within acceptable standards and ultimately provide opportunities for these workers. This approach perpetuates and reinforces the dynamics of informal labour inherent in a capitalist system.

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Chapter 7 - Food Systems and Food Sovereignty of Traditional Peoples of the African Matrix in Brazil: Critical Reflections

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1. Introduction

Throughout Brazil's history, structural racism has separated Black knowledge, bodies, and ways of life from social and political legitimacy. Crossing this “abyssal line” (Santos, 2007) is both an individual and a collective journey. For a long time, this abyssal line led the Black population to question their own Blackness, to deny their ancestry, to avoid identifying themselves with a collective identity, and to break from the historical trajectory preceding enslavement. This line persists. However, with the courage of our ancestors, we can cross this line and reclaim the knowledge and practices from the “other side,” such as the food traditions inherited from African peoples in the diaspora. By doing so, we begin to reconstruct our subjectivities.

This chapter summarizes findings from the research project “Public Health and Traditional Peoples of African Matrix for the Promotion of Food and Nutrition Security” (OBHA, 2024). The project was a collaborative process carried out between 2019 and 2022 by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), and the national, state, and municipal executive coordination of the National Forum for Food and Nutritional Security of Peoples of African Matrix (FONSANPOTMA) (Egger & Silva, 2022). The chapter presents results from the three research fronts of the project, analyzed critically by FONSANPOTMA:

Traditional Peoples of African Matrix: Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Security in Interface with Public Health — a research front that conducted a participatory diagnosis and mapped the Food and Nutrition System of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (SISANPOTMA), identifying challenges and the potential for ensuring food sovereignty. The main objective of the first research front in the project was to conduct a participatory assessment to characterize the food systems of the Peoples of African Matrix – POTMA (Matos et al., 2023). Palm (2021) asserted that food sovereignty considers “the right of peoples to define their own policies, sustainable strategies for food production, distribution, and consumption, ensuring access to food for the entire population based on small- and medium-scale production” (Via Campesina, cited by Palm, 2021). Food sovereignty must respect cultural diversity, different production methods and management structures, with women playing a fundamental role. The research in this front was conducted after an in-depth exploration of ancestral wisdom that emphasized the integration of food, nature, and culture and offered solutions to contemporary challenges, as a counterpoint to the current hegemonic food system, which favours the food industry and agribusiness (Egger & Silva, 2022).

Traditional Peoples of African Matrix and the Conflict Map of Environmental Injustice and Health in Brazil — a research front that highlighted the connections between territorial rights violations and the impacts on food systems and community health (Rocha et al., 2023). It aimed at deepening the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks surrounding territorial struggles, health, and food sovereignty of the POTMA. The initiative was part of the “Map of Conflicts Involving Environmental Injustice and Health in Brazil” (Porto et al., 2013), an instrument coordinated by FIOCRUZ in partnership with various civil society organizations.

The Map systematized reports from populations affected by situations of environmental injustice across the country,

giving visibility to conflicts related to pesticide contamination, the expropriation of traditional territories, and threats to the health and lives of entire communities. It contributes to expanding the understanding of how environmental racism, unequal access to public policies, and the violation of territorial rights directly impact the ways of life, food systems, and health of traditional peoples, including those of African matrix.

Mouth that Eats Everything – Food from Diverse Worlds: A Dialogue between Traditional People of African Matrix and Public Health – a documentary research front that aimed to raise awareness and give visibility to ancestral and spiritual food practices, reaffirming the role of collectivity, oral traditions, and ancestry. The collective construction of the documentary, developed by the research group “Food of Diverse Worlds: A Dialogue between Traditional African-Matrix Peoples and Collective Health” (Fasanello et al., 2023), represents a milestone in FONSANPOTMA’s efforts to systematize and characterize SISPOTMA. This initiative aimed to dispel the misconception that SISPOTMA is solely a religious expression connected to diaspora-based practices. The initiative acknowledges and gives visibility to the way of life and organization of the original peoples of the African continent.

These research fronts enabled access to narratives and experiences that reveal the depth of ancestral food practices. They complement each other, addressing distinct methodologies, but all seeking to uncover collective health and food sovereignty for Traditional Peoples of African Matrix¹ (*Povos Tradicionais de Matrix Africana* – POTMA). Additionally, the research teams included traditional authorities and leaders, and their theoretical frameworks were based on POTMA knowledge systems. Their methodologies respect oral tradition as a legitimate form of knowledge construction and recognize the centrality of ancestry in the POTMA way of life.

This chapter describes the main background considerations for the project (section 2), the research methodology adopted (section 3), and key findings and reflections derived from the three research fronts (section 4). The chapter’s conclusion includes reflections on the future of research, emphasizing the need for Brazilian institutional recognition of SISPOTMA, its integration into public policies, and the strengthening of alliances between traditional knowledge and critical knowledge production in Brazil. We have also added an “Acknowledgement” section at the end of the text. We feel it is very important to recognize the vast number of people who contributed, collectively, to this project. Nevertheless, we apologize for any possible omissions and errors we may have incurred here.

2. Background Considerations

When the practices of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix are reduced to mere religious expressions, their civilizational foundations are discarded, reinforcing colonial *epistemicide*² (Santos, 2018). By recognizing POTMA as bearers of memory, language, and autonomy, we embark on a journey of self-discovery. In this process, we recover our belonging to a people, reaffirm our roles as guardians of civilizational principles, and reconnect with an autonomous food system built on the freedom to know who we are and where we come from. In the context of forced diaspora, it became necessary to *reterritorialize* (Sodré, 1988) knowledge and power within national and international political structures. Food plays a central role in this process, as it transcends imposed borders and divisions, serving as a vehicle for resistance and cultural continuity.

The discursive category of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix was developed in Brazil through the articulation of Afro-religious movements—as they were then called—along with Black movements and movements of traditional peoples and communities during the formulation and implementation of the Racial Equality Promotion Policy in 2003 (Brasil, 2007; Morais & Jayme, 2017). One of the objectives of this policy was to devise a term that would encompass plurality, diversity, origins, cultural influences, and numerous forms of self-identification, while also expressing the congruence of the unifying aspects of these peoples throughout the national context (Morais & Jayme, 2017). The Brazilian 2022 Census (IBGE, 2023) revealed a significant increase in people self-identifying as Traditional Peoples of African Matrix³, which jumped from about 588,000 in 2010 to more than 1.8 million in 2022.

Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (POTMA) are defined as groups that organize themselves around civilizational values brought to Brazil by Africans during the system of enslavement (Silva Neto, 2019). The POTMA established their

own territories characterized by community life, hospitality, and the provision of services to the community, based on African worldviews.

The resilience and resistance of these peoples have manifested in various ways, but the reterritorialization of African-origin spaces is particularly notable. When people are forced to migrate, they reconstruct a place that reflects their ancestry and educates future generations. According to Ndandalakata (2009), “The day will come when all the leaves scattered from the African continent during enslavement will gather into a single forest”.

The POTMA have shown resilience in the face of a long history of slavery that led to the deterritorialization of Black populations, restricting their ability to grow, prepare, and consume their traditional foods. Historically, this system has devalued not only the foods, but also the methods of production, preparation, and consumption—reducing these practices to religious symbols and ignoring their sacred, nutritional, and biomythical value, since all food is sacred—but especially denying the traditional African medicine brought to Brazil (Mulanji, 2021). Any food that can be shared with nature—encompassing its production, trade, processing, and consumption in a ritualistic, domestic, and family-oriented way for subsistence rather than profit—becomes a sacred food. This food is capable of bringing biological, mythical, mental, and social balance; in other words, it brings true health (Mulanji, 2021).

The Brazilian Food Guide (Ministério da Saúde, 2014) asserts that strengthening traditional diets is a protective health measure that promotes biophysical, biological, nutritional, environmental, and social balance. While choosing food as the guiding thread for achieving biopsychic-mental, environmental, and social balance and health, the POTMA affirm a sustainable and relational system rooted in the philosophy of *Sankofa*⁴: looking to the past, walking firmly in the present, and envisioning the future through ancestry. The food system of the POTMA is not a relic of the past; it sustains life and ensures the continuity of all living beings on Earth.

The Food and Nutrition System of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix shows food as something to be shared with nature and with all who identify as POTMA or who are willing to share this sacred relationship with food. From birth and initiation into tradition to the return to the ancestral mass—symbolized by physical death—traditional food is central to the lives of the POTMA and to collective health. Thus, revealing the Food and Nutrition System of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix is more than just describing food practices: it is the affirmation of an ancestral and collective worldview in which food nourishes the body, the spirit, memory, and the ongoing struggle.

3. Research Methodology from a POTMA Perspective

The tools used in the research project reported here are grounded in principles aligned with anti-colonial methodologies and aim at critiquing and analyzing the political system of health and food security in which Traditional Peoples of African Matrix are embedded. For instance, we have incorporated, alongside traditional research tools, the concept of *bolo’bolo* (Widmer, 1986). *Bolo’bolo* represents a thread, a “string of multicoloured beads,” like those worn around the necks of different peoples who form the original peoples of the Americas, Africans, and those of African origin. This thread has a link—something that anchors the action: *ancestrality*, meaning everything that preceded us and contributed to our arrival here.

The choice of participatory research (Matos et al., 2023) was motivated by the need to build knowledge that would support the development of strategies to promote food sovereignty and public health for the POTMA. The methodology used was the participatory diagnosis (FLACSO Brasil, 2015) and focus groups for fieldwork, which allowed the identification, characterization, and systematization of SISANPOTMA, as well as the main issues that either enhance or hinder the promotion of food sovereignty, nutritional security, and public health for the POTMA. The participatory diagnosis was conducted through interactions with leaders and traditional authorities of African descent in 16 Brazilian municipalities where FONSANPOTMA operates⁵.

Beyond geographical diversity—including larger and smaller cities—the research also ensured balanced representation of the three largest traditional African matrix groups in Brazil (Bantu, Jeje, and Yoruba), incorporating an ethno-cultural perspective. The research themes included racism, public health, agroecology, food sovereignty,

nutritional security, and food systems. These themes intersect with the formal concept of traditional peoples and communities.

The conceptual foundation of this methodology is rooted in orality, horizontality, and the principles of the African matrix found in these traditional diaspora communities. These principles are symbolized by elements such as the Yoruba people's *òkòtò*, which represents a growth process—a spinning top that balances on a single point in a spiral motion. Similarly, the *Ikodia*, for some Bantu peoples, serves as a code, while for others, it shares the same spiral movement of rolling. The Jeje people's serpent, *Dã*, which bites its own tail, symbolizes circularity in motion.

When engaging with the food culture of the POTMA, it is necessary not only to describe the food but also to recognize and incorporate the unique methodologies of these communities. Our work has made it clear that researchers must integrate themselves into this ongoing and cyclical movement—nobody let go of anybody's hand⁶—even when these principles come into conflict with academic norms. The presence of researchers who came from the Traditional Peoples and Communities themselves contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of the subjects being investigated, since these individuals shared the codes, principles, and ethics of these collectives, enabling access to layers of meaning that often remain invisible to outside perspectives.

The research path was guided by the motivation to break down the separation between researchers and research subjects, promoting the joint production of knowledge. This approach dissolved hierarchical boundaries between the subject and object of research, with beads linking together along the string, 'bolos', forming a unified whole, "bolo." This inclusivity extended from the selection of sources to the structuring of the project and the composition of the research team.

At every stage of the research, the participation of all individuals within the territory was rigorously ensured. For instance, the selection of participants occurred through community coordination and internal recognition, with the nomination of members for the focus groups being endorsed by the collective. Listening was conducted attentively and openly, valuing the participants' voices and always seeking to reaffirm their leadership and the collective commitment that guides community practices. The research considered the specific contexts of each location, consulting nature through oracles recognized and acknowledged by the communities and their respective traditional territorial units (UTTs)⁷.

To validate this methodology and the written account, it was essential to affirm principles such as orality, circularity, and unconditional respect for elders in all their forms — human, plant, animal, and mineral. Likewise, there was an emphasis on the commitment to younger generations, since, from the community perspective, even those who are one minute younger must be considered in all collective actions.

Orality is not limited to the act of speaking; it is realized through the reproduction of knowledge by means of everyday elements and practices. It is expressed through dialogues, festivities, and songs, which preserve and transmit ancestral memory. In the UTTs, these practices are observed and organized in a circle, with chants that narrate stories. The elders lead and respond, and the younger members assume specific roles, actively participating in community life. This dynamic ensures the continuity of knowledge, strengthens the collective, and reaffirms the centrality of oral tradition in the construction of knowledge.

The research was designed to affirm its significance in preserving biodiversity and maintaining environmental balance while highlighting the legacy of ancestral knowledge from African-matrix peoples, safeguarded within UTTs as a unique way of life that sustains public health. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was conducted entirely in a virtual environment, following these steps:

- Selection of 16 field researchers to contribute to local engagement, planning, execution, and data compilation from meetings and focus groups.
- Training of the 16 field researchers.
- First municipal-level meeting.
- Preliminary systematization of data from municipal meetings to outline the problem situation and guide the planning and methodology for subsequent focus groups.
- Conducting six focus groups, each with two sessions, totalling 12 meetings.

- Systematization of findings after each round of focus groups.
- An extended meeting for presenting the results of the participatory diagnosis.

The research coordination team selected two additional researchers through a simplified selection process. Sixteen researchers from FONSANPOTMA were recruited for the field research team, comprising 63% women, 94% Black and mixed-race individuals, 50% with completed postgraduate degrees, and 56% affiliated with a research institution or university. It is important to highlight that all individuals selected as field researchers were directly linked to FONSANPOTMA and were all members of the POTMA. Authorities and community leaders participated in the research, forming 12 focus groups, totalling 36 hours of activity. We developed a dialogical and situational process for constructing research data, which, according to Geertz (1989, 2002), are relational and the result of human interactions.

The plurality of the research team was fundamental to the quality and depth of the participatory diagnosis conducted in this study. Composed primarily of Black individuals, women, members of Traditional Peoples and Communities of African Matrix, and with significant engagement in academic and research institutions, the team reflected a wide range of knowledge, territories, traditions, and experiences. This composition not only ensured representation but also enabled legitimate access to the cultural, ethical, and spiritual codes that structure the ways of life of the POTMA. Such diversity was essential for characterizing the food systems of these people, as it allowed the accounts, practices, and knowledge related to food to be understood in their symbolic, ancestral, and everyday dimensions, autonomy, and food sovereignty. The sensitive and qualified listening of this team contributed to revealing the centrality of food as an expression of identity, spirituality, and cultural resistance.

In the first research front, municipal meetings were held for each territory to present the study to the members of the FONSANPOTMA municipal coordination of the territories researched, to identify problem situations to be developed in the focus groups, and to propose the nomination of three participants to join the focus groups. The municipal meetings followed a pre-established Excel framework, where the rows represented each stage of the food system (production, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal), and the columns were divided into the following categories: challenges/pains; joys/opportunities; social actors involved; and foods mentioned.

Additionally, records were made regarding the foundation and organization of the municipal FONSANPOTMA and the key issues debated that related to the research themes (racism, food sovereignty and agroecology, public health, and traditional African-matrix peoples). Participants were also encouraged to collectively identify three foods, ranked by priority, for in-depth discussion in the focus groups on the food system.

Two meetings were held with each focus group to achieve the proposed objectives. The first focus group meeting involved presenting the systematization of the key issues identified in the municipal-level meetings concerning the food systems of the POTMA, defining the problem situation, and detailing the food system stages for each of the foods selected by each municipality. The second meeting focused on identifying opportunities to promote food sovereignty and public health for the POTMA, as well as mapping the power dynamics between social groups and local authorities and identifying allies and partners.

In the second research front, two cycles of workshops explored and documented cases of environmental conflicts involving POTMA. Some of the cases identified and systematized by the research team were selected to later compose the Map of Conflicts Involving Environmental Injustice and Health in Brazil⁸, after analysis and validation. The Map functions as a permanent system for monitoring and denouncing socio-environmental and health-related conflicts, acting as an observatory that gathers data, narratives, and critical analyses of the various forms of environmental injustice experienced by vulnerable populations. Incorporating cases related to the POTMA helps to give visibility to forms of violence that have been historically silenced. The map broadens the recognition of the centrality of territory, spirituality, and food sovereignty as inseparable dimensions of health and dignity for these peoples.

The documentary research front aimed to produce and distribute a medium-length documentary focused on the food sovereignty and nutritional security of the POTMA, in dialogue with collective health and the struggle for rights, ensuring their protection in a context of racism and a historical genocide (Fasanello et al. 2023). The collective construction of knowledge, founded on intercultural dialogues between the POTMA and researchers in the field of

collective health, represents an intersection of sensitive scientific findings, engaged art, and knowledge developed through social struggles.

Workshops played a crucial role in contextualizing concepts vital to understanding the relationship between the POTMA and their territories. The concept of “body-territory,” discussed by traditional leader Kota Mulanji, (2021) emphasized that the POTMA food traditions are deeply connected to ancestry, spirituality, and the environment. The food sovereignty of the POTMA, on the other hand, was framed in contrast to industrialized food systems, reinforcing agroecological practices. The SISANPOTMA system was understood as an expression of resistance, identity, and spirituality, transcending nutrition, preserving cultural life and ecological balance.

Thus, the documentary emerging from this research project presented a memory-driven narrative, emphasizing food relations, market interactions, and collective life. Its poetic narrative bridged the themes of death, life sustenance, and oral tradition, ensuring memory is not lost to time. The project collectively affirmed the existence of a unified SISANPOTMA, despite regional variations, and reinforced the philosophical conception of the POTMA, unifying diverse ethnic and geographical perspectives.

As a systematization of the POTMA Food System, the documentary emerged as a form of expression closely aligned with orality, complementing the written materials produced by the other research fronts. More than that, it embodies the symbolism and unique language of the POTMA elements that have no direct translation into the academic world, being accessible only through sensitivity and interaction. In the documentary, one can observe spaces common to society as a whole—such as shorelines, markets, roads, and fields—through the perspective of the POTMA, revealing how these places reflect their food concepts and maintenance practices, an essential aspect of the project. It was in the captured images that the role of women’s bodies became most powerful — the notion of *matrpotency* (Alves et al. 2022) serves as an example — and in the act of speaking about food while handling and enchanting it, something that the rigidity of written language often denies, but which the sensitivity of visual art can convey.

For us, POTMA, lived experience and ancestral reality are closely tied to territory and knowledge passed down through interactions with our elders, through circles and parties. Researchers could not physically visit territories due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. They had to protect their elders while also dealing with illness and loss within the community. The possibility of conducting part of the work online enabled hundreds of hours of dialogue and exchange with these communities. Undoubtedly, the technical skill and experience of the documentary’s researchers were decisive in ensuring the best use of this rich material.

Despite the challenges, the project facilitated exchanges among five Brazilian states (Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, and Pará) and the Federal District (Brasília). The documentary research front alone involved 24 sound, filming, and photography technicians, two coordinators, and two artists responsible for poetic and visual transcription. In a time of economic crisis, this single research front financially sustained many community members.

Through a systematic process of conceptual discussions, audiovisual training, scriptwriting, and editing, knowledge systems were interwoven. Initial meetings covered topics such as “Ancestral Knowledge and Intercultural Dialogues,” “Orality and Documentary in Social Struggles,” “Racism and Its Intersections,” “Introduction to Documentary and Its Aesthetic Discussion,” and “Food as a Central Axis of Sustainability and Resistance”. After workshops, the collective scriptwriting of the documentary film was developed.

The *bolo'bolo* research methodology (Fasanello et al. 2018) fostered new diagnoses and perspectives. The narratives were shaped through the lens of each body-territory, ensuring that from scriptwriting to filming, all aspects were reflected and shared by members of the POTMA. The involvement of the Ecologies, Epistemologies and Emancipatory Health Promotion of FIOCRUZ (NEPES) and the Audiovisual production company *Couro de Rato*⁹ ensured the preservation of subjectivity in documentary construction, granting it a reparative character that challenges structural racism, preserves ancestral knowledge and practices, and recognizes an independent food system essential for our organized and ancestral existence.

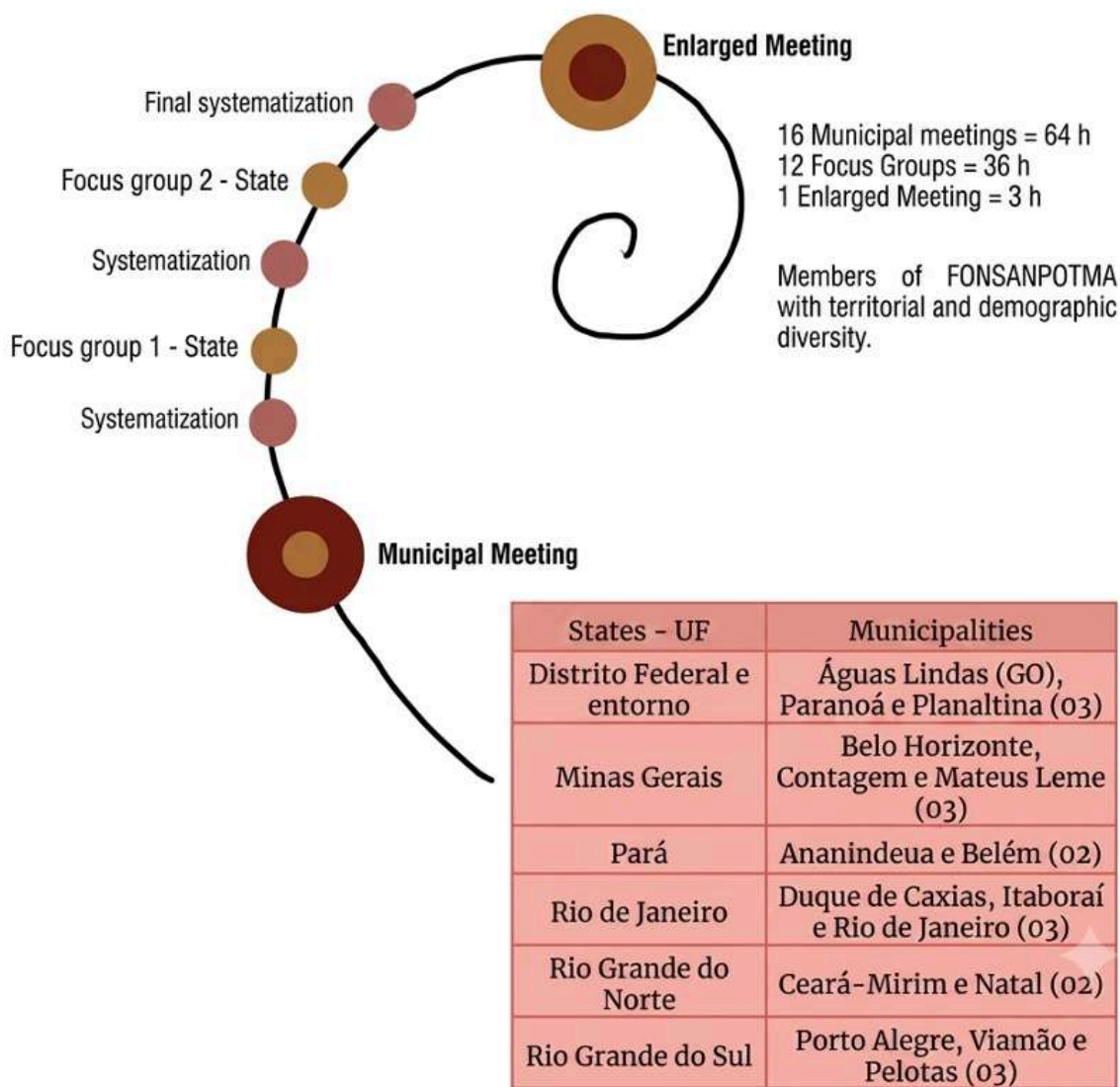


Figure 1 – Representation of Diagnostic Methodology. Source: Matos et al., 2023.

4. Key Findings and Reflections

The project confirmed the existence of distinct food systems rooted in the socio-organizational principles of people who have historically suffered from racism within capitalism, which have prevented them from achieving food sovereignty. Despite these challenges, the POTMA's food system continues to promote public health and to preserve tradition. Characterizing this food system by detailing the processes of production, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal of traditional African-matrix foods helped highlight resistance strategies and propose ways to promote food sovereignty and security.

The POTMA's understanding of health is not based on the dichotomy of health versus disease, but as a state rather

than a fixed condition. Although international and national organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO, 2026) and the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) (Brasil, 2026) recognize health as a dynamic state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being—not merely the absence of illness—the dichotomy between health and disease remains deeply rooted in social practices and perceptions. This reductionist view, inherited from Western biomedical paradigms, continues to influence public policies, clinical practices, and collective imagination, where being “healthy” often simply means “not being sick.” In traditional communities, health is understood relationally, involving balance with nature, ancestry, spirituality, and collectivity—dimensions frequently ignored or undervalued by biomedical models that focus on the physical body and medical intervention. Thus, even with conceptual advances, a gap persists between the complexity of social experiences and institutional frameworks that continue to operate according to dichotomous logics.

Three key findings from the research project are essential in characterizing the food systems of the POTMA and the potential of its food sovereignty: 1) the importance of territories for communal eating and preservation of cultures; 2) the role of animal husbandry and slaughtering; and 3) the fight against prejudice and against the demonization of the POTMA's food traditions.

4.1 Reterritorialization and the Traditional Territorial Units (UTTs)

A key cultural feature identified in the research project is that communal eating is a fundamental stage of SISANPOTMA. For example, within traditional territorial units, hands are preferred for eating. This gesture expresses ancestral knowledge that integrates body, food, and care, allowing the temperature of the food to be assessed even before it reaches the mouth, thus promoting a more conscious and harmonious relationship with the act of eating. At most, wooden spoons or other natural materials may be used.

Africans in the forced diaspora built *terreiros*, *ilês*, *manzos*, *terreiras*, *roças*, *batuques*, and *xangôs*—traditional territorial units of African matrix (UTTs) that enabled the reterritorialization (Silva Neto, 2019) and the preservation of their food cultures. In academia and society in general, these spaces have been labelled in different ways, such as sects, religions, and cults, terms often adopted by the people themselves.

Throughout history, POTMA have suffered crimes against humanity, including slavery and displacement — not only from their physical spaces but also from their ethnocultural identities. They had to create new territories to revitalize their fragmented cultural universe, engaging in a process of reterritorialization (Sodré, 1988). The establishment of traditional territories of the African matrix in Brazil enabled continued contact with Africa, both geographically and symbolically.

Sacred spaces — from waterfalls to crossroads — are integral parts of the traditional territories of African matrix traditions. Sacred sites were reterritorialized from Africa to places where the ancestral relationships of the POTMA, their civilizational markers, and their interactions with the immaterial world could be reconstructed, relocated, and reconnected with what was left behind due to the transatlantic slave trade and forced displacement.

The gathering of leaves is a good example of this process: when the peoples of African matrix were displaced, they dialogued and made alliances with Indigenous peoples, re-signifying the act of gathering and recognizing in the leaves and plants found in the new territories a continuity with African ancestry. This example shows how woods, forests, and fields became traditional territories — reterritorialized and reinterpreted through the experience of the diaspora. Many leaves and seeds were brought from Africa during and after slavery; however, without the resignification in relation to native Brazilian species, it would not have been possible to ensure the cultural, food, and spiritual resistance and resilience that continue to sustain these communities today.

To think politically and resist oppression requires going beyond the Western concept of territory as a mere resource or property. For the POTMA, territory is understood as an integral space of life, identity, spirituality, and knowledge production. Living and existing in fullness is only possible through respect for their territories, which encompass far more than the Western notion of land ownership. UTTs are recognized as spaces of safety, affection, memory, familiarity,

and collective care. These territories are sacred and alive, as they are nourished by relationships of belonging, ancestry, and reciprocity with nature. To occupy and preserve the territory is an original right, guaranteed not only by human laws but also by the sacred foundations and cosmologies of traditional peoples. In this sense, territory for the POTMA is a collective, spiritual, and political good, essential to food sovereignty and health.

A traditional authority, upon occupying a UTT, personalizes that space, transforming it into a *body-territory* (Egger & Silva, 2022). This concept symbolizes the deep connection between the physical embodiment of traditional authorities and the ground upon which they walk. It implies that the body of the spiritual or community leader is intrinsically linked to the territory, serving as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, practices, and values. The traditional authority, therefore, not only inhabits the space but also carries it within themselves, nurturing it with sacred knowledge and ensuring the continuity of cultural and spiritual practices.

“Our first territory is our body, followed by the land we walk on, the soil and roots that nourish us, the waters that sustain us, and the humanity and violence imposed upon us. Our sustainability is continuously denied... History tells us about all the losses we have suffered due to the struggle over territory”(Egger & Silva, 2022, p. 31).

When observing a UTT, one can see that it is not merely a geographic space but a living organism, where all elements – the soil, the water, the plants, and the human beings – are interconnected. This understanding reinforces the idea that the territory is a space of resistance, where communities assert their identity, preserve their knowledge, and fight for the protection of their rights. The Western concept of religion, derived from the Latin *religare*, does not capture the complexity of the civilizational matrix of African diaspora peoples. Understanding territoriality as a way of life is crucial for dismantling colonial remnants that continue to mischaracterize POTMA. The history of enslavement created an unequal society in which wealth and land were granted to some while others, knowledgeable about the land and its cultivation, were enslaved.

“We will only achieve sovereignty when we have our own territory—the territory that our bodies demand: the sun, the soil, the rain, the water, the roots, the leaves, the fruits, the forest.”(Egger & Silva, 2022, p. 35).

According to Yoruba linguistic tradition, the concepts of life, territory, and world are embodied in a single word: AIYÊ. “Aiyê is life, aiyê is territory, and aiyê is world.” (Egger & Silva, 2022, p. 35). This philosophy shapes how POTMA understand territoriality and why it is essential to consider it in discussions about food.

Historically, African-matrix territories were established in areas far from urban centers, often in rural zones or on the outskirts of cities, due to the territorial exclusion imposed on Black populations after abolition. Denied access to land by the Brazilian state, Afro-diasporic peoples – especially Black women – exercised forms of resistance and resilience by collectively occupying marginalized regions, where they were able to reconstruct their ways of life, spirituality, and sociality. These processes of collective occupation gave rise to traditional territories, structured around ties of ancestry, solidarity, and community organization.

However, urban expansion has increasingly integrated these spaces into urbanized settings, limiting access to the environment and its resources. Structural racism continues to dehumanize Afro-diasporic peoples, subjecting them to displacement, criminalization, invisibility, physical attacks, and epistemicide (Santos, 2018, as cited by Porto, 2021).

In the absence of legal frameworks recognizing the collective ownership of UTTs, POTMA remain vulnerable to land grabbing, real estate speculation, and dispossession. This expulsion manifests both through the direct pressures of urbanization and through environmental destruction surrounding the UTTs – such as water pollution, deforestation, and the filling-in of sacred areas. In response, POTMA are, once again, forced to migrate in search of more preserved areas, permanently or temporarily reconstructing their territories in a historical continuum of displacement, resistance, and the reestablishment of bonds with nature and the sacred.

4.2 Animal Husbandry and Slaughtering

The role of animal raising and slaughter in the UTTs was the subject of much debate in the research project. For the POTMA, animal slaughter in religious contexts is not a “sacrifice” in Western terms, but an ancestral gesture of profound

connection with life, with the cycles of nature, and with spirituality. The animal is received, cared for, and greeted, and its death is part of a process that honours life and nourishes the collective. In the *terreiro* (ritual space), everyone shares the food prepared according to ancestral knowledge, beginning with the elders, for they are the ones who care for the generations and safeguard wisdom. Feeding the elders first is an acknowledgment of life's circularity: those who feed today must be nourished tomorrow. When this order is broken, we risk losing the bonds that sustain care, belonging, and the very continuity of the community.

Most groups shared experiences of production and animal husbandry within UTTs. Where production knowledge was lacking, groups described rituals aimed at restoring or reterritorializing food within UTTs. This includes ensuring food remains as “alive” as possible, meaning closer to its origin, by minimizing intermediaries and reducing the detachment of food from its native territory. For example, purchasing live animals is considered essential to understanding the conditions in which they were raised, their environment, diet, treatment, transportation, vaccination, and possible contamination by hormones or pesticides.

For POTMA, tradition is based on the principle of recognizing the other: “I am because we are.” Respect stands in opposition to violence, and nourishment is seen as the maintenance of life. Death does not exist as living beings continue to live on another plane. In the case of animals traditionally slaughtered, it is understood that they are part of the food system and that their energy becomes part of those who feed on them. Hence, it is essential to know where they come from, how they were treated, and whether they were free from mistreatment. Ritual and domestic slaughter is carried out by specific individuals who are recognized both by the community and by the oracle as being qualified to perform it. The animal is not viewed merely as food, but as a sacred being, received with care — it is cleaned, caressed, prayed over, and integrated into the community through a prolonged and careful ritual.

Unlike institutionalized religious slaughter practices such as halal and kosher — which are widely disseminated and industrialized — slaughter in Afro-Brazilian traditional territorial units stands in opposition to consumerism. It requires that the animal be raised with respect, and that its meat be shared among all, becoming part of a specific communal cuisine that strengthens ties of collectivity and solidarity. This ritual and food logic was recognized by the Federal Supreme Court (STF) in 2019, following an intense public debate (Barbiéri & Oliveira, 2019). The law now ensures the right to slaughter animals according to the traditional precepts of POTMA, especially within the context of their religious rituals. The STF's decision, while recognizing the constitutionality of ritual slaughter and affirming its importance for the preservation of POTMA, also revealed the limitations of Brazilian institutional frameworks regarding the full protection of these peoples. The Court acknowledged the validity of the rite but did not guarantee the material and political conditions for its safe and dignified execution. In other words, the State remains uncommitted to ensuring the proper oversight of the production chain, offering no support for animal transportation, and no specific public policies that fully secure the food and spiritual rights of these communities.

Community nourishment in the traditions of POTMA is not limited to humans: it also involves plants, the earth, water, air, and the ancestors. It recognizes and respects the interdependence among all elements of life. In traditional slaughtering, nothing is wasted — everything has a purpose and a destination within the logic of care and circularity. When a goat is slaughtered, its hide may be used to make sacred drums. The meat is prepared and shared with the entire community and with anyone who wishes to eat, and part of the food is returned to the earth as an offering, acknowledging its generosity and closing the cycle of food that comes from and returns to its source. This practice reveals a sophisticated integration between different stages of work within the *terreiro*, which interweaves spirituality, sustainability, autonomy, and sharing. The preparation of food, the rituals, the traditional utensils, the chants, the timing of the fire, and the knowledge about the land come together in a collective process that strengthens community bonds and reaffirms ancestral memory.

The traditional food system of the African matrix is founded on values of reciprocity, respect for the cycles of life, and reintegration into the original mass from which everything came — the earth, the water, the air, and minerals. One feeds the earth, the fire, the ancestors, and the collective. The food system comes from a *cosmoperception* that does not separate the human from the non-human, the spiritual from the material, or the sacred from the everyday. In this sense, the dominant Western logic — which imposes a fragmented and utilitarian view of the world — not only disrespects

these traditions but also threatens life itself by promoting the destruction of the earth, water, and ancient sustainable ways of existence.

4.3 *The Demonization and Criminalization of POTMA Food Systems*

For POTMA, “eating is equivalent to living, maintaining, preserving, initiating, communicating, and reinforcing individual and collective memories” (Lody, 1998). Reflecting on food sovereignty, Makota Valdina stated that there was no need to go to the “white man’s world” for medicine. Instead, people would go into the forest to find remedies: “We had the space to learn, and everything was healthy... If we had pain, we didn’t go to the white man’s pharmacy; we went to the forest” (Makota Valdina, cited by Mulanji, 2021). She further asserted that food is at the core of African thought and philosophy. “Feeding is an act of exchange: when I receive, I give back through nourishment; when I wait, I feed others first; when I give thanks, I do so through food” (Makota Valdina, cited by Mulanji, 2021).

Nutrition for the POTMA is not limited to the biological act of eating; it goes beyond that—it exists to sustain both the cosmos and health: “For us, nutrition is not just about trace elements and the nutritional value of components; it is directly linked to the power of *biomythic balance*. Therefore, having control over food production and commercialization is essential. Food is sacred, but it must also be made sacred to remove the ‘white man’s ills’ from it” (Nogueira, 2021). Food must be respected—free from pesticides, aggressive methods, and violence—only then can it generate balance. For the POTMA, food is cyclical and must be understood as *biomythic security* (Mulanji, 2021). In other words, it is not only what is consumed that needs to be made sacred, but what is returned to nature as well. The return of fruits, grains, or other foods containing pesticides disrupts *biomythic security* (Mulanji, 2021).

The different ways of eating were used by European colonizers as a means of intensifying violence against African peoples who were forcibly taken to the Americas. Eurocentric “modernity” excluded and annihilated other possible worlds under the justification that the population should be “modernized”. Many strategies were employed, including the demonization of the social, cultural, and health practices of the POTMA (Silva, 2019 and 2021). This has built a social imaginary in Brazil that negates, delegitimizes, and even criminalizes the ancestral and traditional knowledge of the POTMA, within a structurally and violently racist society.

The demonization of the knowledge and sensitivities of the POTMA affected and continues to affect their food sovereignty, generating social inequalities. One central strategy in this has been the demonization of the symbols, practices, and sacred foods of these peoples. The figure of Exu, a fundamental *orixá* in Yoruba cosmologies and in Candomblé, was systematically demonized, being associated with the figure of the devil in the colonial Christian tradition (Claudia Regina Alexandre, cited by Kota Mulanji, 2021). This demonization extended to rituals and dietary practices linked to the worship of Exu and other *orixás*.

In this process, sacred foods — such as sheep and goats, which play a central role in the rituals and diet of traditional peoples of the African matrix — came to be associated with negative, impure, or even diabolical images. This racist symbolic construction not only marginalizes African-matrix religious and food practices but also reinforces discourses of hatred that dehumanize POTMA, making their knowledge and ways of life invisible. Food, far from being merely a nutritional or cultural matter, became a field of symbolic and political contestation — in which colonial and religious violence is expressed through the control, denial, and criminalization of ways of eating and of feeding the sacred.

It is essential to reflect on the term “demonization”. Its use here is not about reaffirming colonial perspectives in political struggles but about acknowledging the role Christian ideology has played in erasing the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and other traditional communities. This is not an attack on biblical cosmology, but a recognition of its power over society and how it has, historically, served the epistemic erasure of POTMA. The expansion of capitalism and Christianity across the world was simultaneous and often imposed by force on militarily dominated peoples. When people say, for example, that Brazil has a Catholic culture, what remains unsaid is that it also has a colonial, capitalist, Eurocentric culture built on the removal of nature from the center of civilization.

From slavery to abolition, Black people have always had their culture marginalized and discriminated against. Even

though significant struggles led to the 1891 Constitution and Decree 119-A of 1890 guaranteeing freedom of worship, religious practices of the African matrix continued to be criminalized indirectly (Silva, 2019). Instead of explicitly banning these religious expressions, authorities used the 1890 Penal Code to classify them as offences against public health. Police authorities, guided by Christian, racist, and colonial moral values, used their discretion to control and persecute practitioners (Silva, 2019).

The criminalization of SISANPOTMA persists today through unreasonable sanitary regulations and legislation. Similarly, municipal master plans often deny or restrict access to traditional territories, privatizing areas used for cultivation or gathering. Thus, in the current context, food sovereignty is compromised, and the knowledge of the POTMA is often criminalized, preventing small producers from accessing areas essential for the production of leaves, fruits, and other traditional foods.

5. Conclusion

The systematization of the Food and Nutrition System of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (SISANPOTMA) is more than a research effort. It is concrete proof of the existence of a living, ancestral, and collective system that sustains the lives of POTMA, despite centuries of denial and violence. The research conducted between 2019 and 2022 brought this system into visibility and demonstrated that it is rooted in everyday practices that span territories, bodies, and generations. We did not invent this system — we revealed its existence using methodologies that respect orality, spirituality, and the circular nature of traditional knowledge.

The systematization of SISANPOTMA is not merely a description of food practices, but the affirmation of an ancestral political-civilizational project, in which body, territory, nature, and food are inseparable dimensions of health. However, it is important to emphasize that SISANPOTMA cannot be reduced to a single, closed systematization. Fully understanding this system requires a multifaceted analysis that considers structural racism, symbolism, and orality as central dimensions of the thought and organization of POTMA. Ignoring these layers makes any real grasp of this complexity impossible.

Recognizing and protecting the food knowledge and practices of traditional peoples of the African matrix is a fundamental step not only toward ensuring cultural and religious rights (CAISAN, 2023) but also toward sustaining other possibilities of living and relating to the planet. It is a call to decolonize public policies, justice, and the ways we think about food, care, and life.

Throughout the research fronts, we collectively produced knowledge, practiced critical interculturality and decolonial pedagogy (Walsh, 2009), and created tools to reflect on the coloniality of knowledge, the hierarchization and racialization of people, collectives, and systems of thought (Lander, 2005). To do so, it was necessary to understand that defining the problem situation already reflects the complexity of POTMA's ways of thinking, and how their knowledge cannot be fragmented.

The effective promotion of food sovereignty for the POTMA is directly linked to combating racism and achieving structural changes in power and domination relations within society. The socio-organizational principles of these peoples indicate that food sovereignty extends beyond food practices within the traditional territorial units (UTTs); it represents a societal project that respects ethnic, racial, and regional specificities while enabling autonomy at all stages of the food system and facilitating everyday food choices in homes, schools, workplaces, and public and private spaces.

The conflict map presented narratives of violations of territorial, environmental, and food rights, revealing structural and environmental racism in its multiple forms: from the expulsion of people from traditional territorial units to poisoning by agrochemicals; from the erasure of traditional planting and cooking methods to the disrespect for sacred food offerings. The documentary *Boca que Tudo Come* allowed us to give back to the research community what we received from it: through the strength of orality, imagery, and affection, it conveys ancestral wisdom in an accessible, sensitive, and mobilizing language.

If traditional food is under threat, ancestral knowledge itself is at risk. When POTMA are not allowed sovereignty over

their own bodies, food, and production methods, they face food insecurity. Thus, ancestral knowledge preserves life. It is impossible to think of SISPOTMA without decolonizing knowledge, ensuring cognitive ¹⁰ and environmental justice, guaranteeing food sovereignty, securing traditional territories, and combating racism through the legal, historical, and social recognition of POTMA.

Further research must continue exploring the impact of structural racism on SISPOTMA and promoting traditional food practices in a globalized world. Strengthening partnerships among academia, grassroots organizations, and POTMA movements remains essential for sustaining this fight for social justice and food sovereignty. Moving forward requires a commitment to valuing POTMA's knowledge systems and strengthening their autonomous forms of organization. It means recognizing that food for POTMA is sacred – and that the struggle for food sovereignty is sacred as well. The future of their food system is not just a projection: it has already begun and moves forward with the steady steps of those who, as the Sankofa philosophy teaches us, look back to walk ahead – with dignity, belonging, and freedom.

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It is also essential to pay tribute to the Elders who keep the struggle alive: Mãe Nalva, Ancestrality Coordinator of FONSANPOTMA; Mãe Vera Soares, General Coordinator of FONSANPOTMA; and, on behalf of all the Municipal FONSANPOTMA groups, Pai Aurélio, coordinator in Brasília. For the continuation of this struggle, we also extend our thanks to our youth coordinators, Mukembo e Verônica, who reaffirm that our names will not disappear “behind the portrait,” as processes such as this chapter allow us to continue telling our own story.

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FONSANPOTMA, the National Forum for Food and Nutritional Security of Peoples of African Matrix, is an organization created by recognized traditional authorities of *terreiro* communities, knowledge networks and territorial units. It seeks to ensure food sovereignty, combat institutional racism, and promote cognitive and environmental justice. Since 2012, it has acted as a national platform for political advocacy, representation, and knowledge production on the POTMA food system. Organized as a network, it includes national, state, and municipal structures in 14 states and 50 municipalities. It is recognized for its role in public policy formulation and mobilization strategies rooted in Afro-Brazilian traditions¹¹.

Since its inception, the collective body that gives life to FONSANPOTMA has focused on food security within UTTs, seeking public policies that go beyond religious considerations. This work has included the development of the First Sustainable Development Plan for Traditional African-Matrix Peoples and Communities (SEPIR, 2013), the Handbook of Traditional African Matrix Peoples and Communities (SEPIR, 2016), and the Legal Framework for Traditional African Matrix Peoples and Communities, Bill 1279/2022 (Camara dos Deputados, 2022).

The research coordination was led by researcher Regina Goulart Nogueira, appointed by FONSANPOTMA, and, as of November 2020, researcher José Pedro da Silva Neto, appointed by Fiocruz. The call for applications was widely publicized, receiving 214 submissions, of which 174 were validated. These applications came from all 27 Brazilian states. Among the applicants, 71.9% identified as Black or mixed-race, 51.4% were affiliated with CNPq/ The Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development research groups, and 60% were directly connected to POTMA communities. Ultimately, researchers Luana Lazzeri Arantes and Camila Carvalho de Souza Amorim Matos were selected.

The field research team included: Aisha Angéle Leandro Diéne (Kota Lembamueji), Caroline de Castro Pires (Ìyá Caroline de Òsun), Cleyton Silva de Araújo (Doté Olissassi), Flávio Henrique de Oliveira Santos (Ìyàwó de Òsun), Francisca Luciene da Silva (Ìyá Temi de Oya), Helenira Martin Lopes (Helenira de Yemanjá), Julia de Oliveira Jordao (Oyá Tobi Irè), Keila Nascimento Rocha (Cigana Topázio), Kenya de Fatima Oliveira (Nengua Dandalumenu), Leonardo Vieira Silva (Bàbá Logun Ominsile), Rebeca Osabunmi de Lima Monteiro (Osabunmi), Regis Moreira Pinto (Tata Kitanji), Samuel Pedro da Silva (Muzenza Mona Nkosi), Simone do Socorro Miranda Mendes (Ìyá Egbé), Tiago Alves Ferreira (Mvula Kenan), Virginia Lunalva Miranda de Sousa Almeida (Ìyá Nalva de Òsun) and a volunteer, Pamela Nogueira.

Workshops were led by Glícia Caldas Goncalves da Silva, Marcelo Firpo de Sousa Porto, Kota Mulanji (Regina Nogueira), Juliano Palm, Asogun Aderbal Moreira, Tania Pacheco, Iyalorixá Vera Soares, Iyalorixá Virgínia Lunalva Miranda de Sousa Almeida (Mãe Nalva), Iyalorixá Luízinha de Nanã (Heloisa Helena Costa), Tata Luazemi (Roberto Braga), Dr. Julio José Araujo Junior, Helder Câmara, Iyalorixá Bernadete de Odé (Bernadete Souza Ferreira), Babalásé Moacir de Omolú, Ilzever de Matos Oliveira Babalorixá Edvaldo, and Makota Kinanjenu.

The research front that led to the documentary “The Mouth That Eats Everything” was coordinated by FONSANPOTMA’s communication leadership, represented by Maria Aparecida da Silva Lessa, the coordination of ancestry, represented by Babalorixa Odesi (Manoel Domingues), and the Ecologies, Epistemologies, and Emancipatory Health Promotion Research Group (Nepes/ENSP) at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), through Marina Tarnowski Fasanello.

The filming, direction, and editing team included members from POTMA: Alessandra Silva De Oliveira (Alessandra de Xapana), Ana Carolina Mendonça Pereira, Carlos Augusto da Silva Júnior, Edna dos Santos Andrade (Kota Lembarecimbe), Gabriel do Amaral Batista, Gustavo Oliveira Fonseca, Herison Pedro Mateus de Souza, Hugo Chaves Monteiro, Isabela de Fátima do Lago Vieira, Janáina Ferreira do Nascimento, Jean Caldivino Mendes (Jean de Oxalá), Jessica Marcele Gonçalves Alves, Lorena Portela Soares, Luana Gabriela Catarino (Makota Dandakamuxi), Luis Carlos Fontes De Alencar Filho, Marcos Guilherme Da Costa Reis (Adéolá Marcos de Oxum), Paula Monte Coutinho De Souza, Philyp Rodrigues (Bàbá Phil), Renata Aguiar Rodrigues, Sarah Esli De Lima Souza, Silvana da Silva Santana De Almeida, Thallyson Rocha, Thayna Brasdil, 2007; Soares Silva (Thay de Obá), Vladimir Pereira Seixas, and the audiovisual production company Couro de Rato RJ. This effort created a narrative in which access to information is less academic, making it more accessible and didactic, while being deeply rooted in the ancestral legacy and subjectivity of POTMA.

Since the conclusion of the research project, FONSANPOTMA has expanded its actions and political alliances, affirming SISPOTMA as a foundational axis in the struggle for cognitive, environmental, and food justice. Its participation in institutional spaces such as the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) and the National Council of Traditional Peoples and Communities (CNPCT) has been strategic for incorporating the demands of the POTMA into public policies. Moreover, partnerships with FIOCRUZ, the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA), the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Fight against Hunger (MDS), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Racial Equality have enabled new projects focused on food sovereignty, participatory research, and political education. Also noteworthy are the alliances with networks such as the National Agroecology Articulation (ANA), the Network of Traditional Peoples and Communities of Brazil and international dialogues in defense

of Mother Earth, which connect the POTMA to broader global struggles for climate justice and the recognition of traditional food systems as essential to planetary survival.

Every step of this journey was built collectively, grounded in memories, lived experiences, and legacies inscribed in each body-territory that forms the FONSANPOTMA. These are the people – traditional authorities, leaders, researchers, women, youth, council members, elders, and masters – who uphold the African and Afro-diasporic civilizational principles through their daily practices.

What we systematize here is only part of a greater body of knowledge, one that is continuously re-created in the soil of the UTTs, in community and ancestral kitchens, in rituals, markets, farms, networks of care, and at the crossroads of struggle.

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Notes

1. We use the word *matrix* instead of descendants, because many Brazilians are descendants of African-origin heritage, but only the POTMA remain the maintainers of the principles of the original African peoples.
2. Defined by Santos (2018) as “destruction of an immense variety of knowledge that prevailed mainly on the other side of the abyssal line, in the colonial societies and sociability” (p. 36).
3. In the IBGE censuses, religions of the African matrix are grouped into the categories Umbanda and Candomblé (which also include other Afro-Brazilian traditions).
4. The concept of Sankofa (*Sanko* = to return; *fa* = to seek, to bring) originates from a traditional proverb among the Akan-speaking peoples of West Africa, in Ghana, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. In Akan, “*se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki*” can be translated as “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you have forgotten.” (For more, see Leite, 2021)
5. Águas Lindas (GO), Paranoá (DF), Planaltina (DF), Belo Horizonte (MG), Contagem (MG), Mateus Leme (MG), Ananindeua (PA), Belém (PA), Duque de Caxias (RJ), Itaboraí (RJ), Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Ceará-Mirim (RN), Natal (RN), Porto Alegre (RS), Viamão (RS), and Pelotas (RS).
6. In Portuguese: *ninguém larga a mão de ninguém*.
7. UTTs (*Traditional Territorial Units of African Matrix*) encompass ritual places such as “terreiros,” “roças,” Ilê, Nzo, Àbàsà, and Egb é, among other denominations (Silva Neto, 2019).
8. <https://mapadeconflitos.ensp.fiocruz.br>
9. <http://www.couroderato.com.br>
10. Cognitive justice means creating global equality among different ways of thinking. Historically, colonial systems have silenced and dismissed the knowledge of marginalized communities. To fix this, we need an “ecology of knowledges”—a system where traditional, local, and academic ideas all have equal value. By embracing these diverse perspectives, we can build a fairer, more complete understanding of the world that helps liberate oppressed people (Santos, 2006).
11. For more on FONSANPOTMA see @fonsanpotma <https://www.instagram.com/fonsanpotma/>

Chapter 8 - Food as Communication in the Formation of the Buen Vivir in an Indigenous Village in the Brazilian Northeast

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1. Introduction

How are food and communication related? According to Martino (2002), the word communication comes from the Latin *communicatio*. During the Middle Ages, cenobitic monks called *communicatio* the act of “taking the evening meal in common” (Martino, 2002, p. 13). The importance of the evening meal was not the act of “eating”, but of doing so “together with others”, promoting an encounter between those who remained isolated in their cells during the day. By breaking the isolation through eating together, the monks communicated, nourishing themselves not only with food, but also with the knowledge and senses that were exchanged in that space of flavours. Many other authors have pointed out the value of food as more than nourishment for the body, feeding also imagination and cultures (Barthes, 2008; Fischler, 1988).

In this chapter, we examine how food has played a central communication role in the development of the Indigenous village Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba (CVJ) in Brazil. The CVJ village has a unique history. It emerged in 2005 as an experiment proposed by the leadership of groups from two different ethnic backgrounds, Pankararu and Pataxó. The leaders of those two groups decided to buy land in the municipality of Araçuaí, in the Jequitinhonha River Valley, where they would settle (initially as five families) and build a new community (Barbosa, 2025; Rocha & Liberato, 2013). Buying land was a bold (and controversial) decision, but essential in establishing a territory on which to construct the leaders' vision for the community. The land and the food produced there became essential for that construction.

Food and, more specifically, the fight for food security, has been central to the village's development and its very identity. Food has served to communicate the village values between individuals, generations, and to the world. The village members' practices around food, their views on territory, their decisions on what to produce and how to produce it, all led them to Buen Vivir (Good Living).

This chapter reflects on these values and their significance. It starts by providing an overall background of the context of Indigenous groups in Brazil, some recent gains and persistent struggles. The chapter then describes the methodology used in the PhD research (Liberato, 2018) that inspired this piece: the long-term relationship between the authors and members of the village Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba (CVJ), as well as the use of participatory video. Reflections on key values embraced by members of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village are discussed, involving Commensality, Reciprocity and Solidarity, Permaculture, and Buen Vivir, followed by final considerations. This chapter aims to be a contribution to the overall goal of understanding the process of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village in (re)constructing knowledge deemed ancestral, and articulating strategies for survival and dialogue with the national society, based on the educational, communicational, and Buen Vivir domains (Liberato, 2018).

2. Brazilian Indigenous Context

In recent decades, various communities that self-identify as traditional have claimed the right to preserve their ways of

life, cultural practices, and ways of thinking in the face of a globalized society. They organized and postulated their right to citizenship as a process of deconstructing exclusion .

According to the Brazilian census, in 2022, there were 1,693,535 Indigenous people in the country, comprising 0.83% of the total population. Although this number represents only a fraction of the six million Indigenous people who inhabited the country in the 16th century (Grupioni, 2006), over the last few decades, there has been significant growth.

In 1991, when the first statistical survey in the current model was conducted, the total Indigenous population was only 294,000 people; while in 2010 this number grew to 896,900 (IBGE, 2010). This growth has been attributed to an increased cultural awareness and improved survey methods, which now include previously inaccessible villages (Biller & Maisonnave, 2023).

The Brazilian Indigenous population is divided into 391 ethnic groups, speaking 295 languages and living in villages and cities scattered throughout the national territory (IBGE, 2024).

Although most Indigenous people in Brazil now live in urban areas, corresponding to 53.97% or 914,746 people, many live in rural areas, corresponding to 780,090 people, or 46.03% of the total indigenous population in the country (IBGE, 2024). From those, 44% live in the North, and 31% live in the Northeast region of Brazil (IBGE, 2024). These regions have the country's lowest Human Development Index (HDI) scores, lowest per capita incomes, and the highest poverty rates (Rodrigues & Silva, 2023).

The increased Indigenous presence in Brazil has been called an ethnogenesis or re-ethnicization. In this process, "Indigenous peoples who—due to political, economic, and religious pressures, or because they were stripped of their lands and stigmatized for their traditional customs—were forced to hide and deny their tribal identities as a survival strategy (thereby easing the hardships of prejudice and discrimination), are now reclaiming and recreating their Indigenous traditions" (Baniwa, 2006, p.28).

This growth did not necessarily result in the realization of the rights guaranteed in the 1988 Federal Constitution, which were won after a series of demands by Indigenous peoples and their allies. According to the constitution, "the social organization, customs, languages, beliefs, and traditions of Indigenous peoples are recognized, as well as their original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy" (Brasil, 1988, article 231). Furthermore, "Indigenous peoples, their communities, and organizations have legal standing to sue in defence of their rights and interests" (Brasil, 1988, article 232).

This legislation reflected Brazil's need to align itself with the global stage, where many nation-states—faced with struggles for human and social rights—affirmed the possibility for peoples to maintain their sociocultural practices through new legal and conceptual parameters. Following this path, in 2007, the country, along with 144 other nations, approved the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), which reflects the demands of Indigenous groups across the globe.

However, even though this range of official documents legally recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples, three points remain crucial for ethnic groups to be able to "reclaim and recreate their traditions": 1) the demarcation of lands; 2) public health and education policies that align with what the groups consider appropriate for themselves; and 3) a place of distinction within the formation of the national society (Baniwa, 2006).

Despite being mentioned in the Constitution of 1988 (Brasil, 1988), the demarcation of Indigenous lands was only regulated in 1996 (Brasil, 1996). It involved nine complex stages permeated with bureaucratic intricacies. Depending on their specificities, lands were classified as traditionally occupied, Indigenous reserves, domain lands, or restricted lands (FUNAI, 2017). The course of demarcation required a series of documents and studies that moved through different levels within the specific timeframes of Brazilian public administration. Consequently, the national political landscape directly affected and continues to affect these processes.

Anthropologist Maria Rosário de Carvalho, who has conducted significant research and possesses extensive experience in this field, states that today:

"there is an attempt—not a subtle one, but a public one—allied with agribusiness entrepreneurs and conservative sectors of Congress [...] to undermine Indigenous rights [...]. There is a powerful plot aimed first at delegitimizing Indigenous claims, especially regarding land, while also attacking ethnologists to project an image that they act unscrupulously by

preparing what they call fraudulent reports. ‘Inventing identities’, as they claim” (Carvalho, cited in Bento et al., 2016, p. 146).

The stagnation of the demarcation of Indigenous lands was associated with armed conflicts between Indigenous people and large-scale landowners (latifundiários). In Mato Grosso do Sul, the Guarani-Kaiowá, hemmed in at the Dourados Reserve by soy and sugarcane monocultures, faced a homicide rate 400% higher than that of the state’s non-Indigenous population. Furthermore, the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office (Brasil, 2018) warned that this area has the highest suicide rate in the country—the majority committed by youth between the ages of 15 and 29—recording 89.92 per one thousand deaths compared to a national average calculated in 2015 at 9.6. The states of Bahia, Pará, Paraná, Maranhão, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina also show high levels of violence against Indigenous people.

The violation of land rights generated various other forms of violence. For instance, the Guarani-Kaiowá of Mato Grosso do Sul were deprived of cultivating medicinal plants and food for their own consumption. Children within this ethnic group were dying from malnutrition and permanent exposure to pesticides, which were sprayed by aircraft over the monoculture projects surrounding the reserve. This directly compromised the health and education of the group, especially children (Franceschini, 2016).

Regarding access to education, the availability of Elementary and Middle schools for Indigenous children was 3.72 applicants per vacancy, while the average in the country was 1.23. This competition for spots was even more intense in High School. Leaders pointed out that community schools have inadequate physical structures and assessment methods that were ill-suited for teaching in villages. Thus, the school as a space for building societal relationships based on interculturality and political autonomy has been a primary demand of Indigenous communities (Brasil, 2007).

In search of formal education, hundreds of young people migrate to cities to attend High School. Distant from their families, they face high-risk situations. This often includes compromising their Food and Nutritional Security (FNS), defined as “the realization of everyone’s right to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting dietary practices that respect cultural diversity and are socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable” (CONSEA, 2004, p. 04).

As of 2022, there were approximately 70,000 Indigenous students enrolled in higher education institutions in Brazil, 29% enrolled in public universities and 71% in private institutions. This represents a significant increase from 11,400 in 2009, largely driven by the implementation of affirmative action policies and quotas (Loureiro, Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2024). The 2022 census further indicated that 56.1% of Brazil’s 1.69 million Indigenous people are under 30 years old, pointing toward a high potential for further growth in university enrolment (Agencia Brasil, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

However, despite higher enrolment, Indigenous students face high dropout rates, with only about 12% graduating between 2007 and 2017. Retention is often hindered by financial difficulties and a lack of specific support policies (Schmidt, 2025) and food insecurity (Bastos, 2014). In late 2025, the Brazilian government announced the creation of the first Federal University for Indigenous peoples (Unind) to further boost access and provide tailored education to strengthen traditional identities and knowledge (Loureiro, Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2024).

Indigenous students are also affected by a stigma still widely prevalent in the country, which perpetuates prejudice against the ethnic and cultural diversity of these peoples—viewed as “generic Indians” (Ribeiro, 1982) who supposedly indulge in laziness (Dantas, 1991). It is evident that, even with their rights recognized by legislation, Indigenous peoples experience discriminatory violations like those faced by various minority groups in the country seeking social consideration.

3. The Emergence of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba Village

In this context, the village of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba brought together practices in the fields of education, food and nutritional security, and communication that made it unique in Brazil. It represented the first case in the country’s history where two distinct ethnic groups, the Pankararu and the Pataxó, joined together in the Jequitinhonha Valley

to purchase 68 hectares of land. Their goal was to build a project that responded to the ways of life the community considers most appropriate for themselves.

Migrants, the five families who established this village, departed from Fazenda Guarani (MG)—a former prison established in the 1960s by the military regime to incarcerate individuals from various ethnic groups who, according to the authorities of the time, had committed criminal acts or were causing problems for the wardship policy then in vogue (Liberato, 2009). The group decided to leave Fazenda Guarani in 2003, as their leaders report, following an act of arson that devastated crops and water springs, and led to the suicide of a nearly 90-year-old cacique (chief), who was considered very important. Upon attempting to restart their lives in Araçuaí, they found themselves threatened by the cold reality of poverty and marginalization, living as Indigenous migrants housed on the outskirts of the municipality.

Determined to seek new ways to survive—since, according to testimonials, the Araçuaí population looked upon them with suspicion, and the children suffered under the teaching methods of local public school teachers—they decided: “not to wait in line for a decision from official government agencies, but to take out a loan from the Bank of Brazil (National Land Credit Program) and purchase our own land, incurring an initial debt to be paid over twenty years with income derived from the sale of traditional handicrafts” (TO’Ê PANKARARU, as cited by Liberato, 2018).

Although they received harsh criticism, including from other Indigenous people in the region, the group stood their ground. They believed that purchasing the land was a conscious exercise of their ethnic identity, necessary to achieve the means of guaranteeing the survival of their people, their sovereignty, and the (re)creation of their ancestral practices. Within the cultural horizon of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba, it is not possible to “be Indigenous” without a territory where material, cultural, and spiritual reproduction can take place (Rocha & Liberato, 2013).

The name of the village brings together elements linked to Pankararu religiosity (Cinta Vermelha or “Red Belt”) and Pataxó struggles, as the jundiba tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) sheltered the family of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba pajé (spiritual leader), Domingos Pataxó, within its giant canopy during a historic massacre. The village’s claims reflect a series of specificities that align with those of other Brazilian ethnic groups.

4. Research and Methodological Considerations

The longstanding relationship between the authors and members of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village started in 2005, when Araçuaí was included as one of three sites for the project Building Capacity for Food Security in Brazil, led by Cecilia Rocha—then director of the Centre for Studies in Food Security (CSFS), Ryerson University, Canada. In June 2006, the authors participated in the encounter Indigenous Youth: Exploring Identities through Food Security (Liberato, 2007), which invited members of the Pankararu and Pataxó peoples of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba, as well as Canadian First Nations Peoples, to collectively participate in several activities in and around Toronto. These included a Powwow, festive activities welcoming the arrival of summer, visits to the Six Nations reserve, the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, and various social organizations, as well as a two-day meeting with university researchers and Canadian activists to discuss the relationship between identity and food.

In one of these activities at Trinity Bellwoods Park, Daniel, an Ojibwe man, caught the attention of Cacique To’ê Pankararu because he was serving strawberry juice. The two began a dialogue strongly marked by gestures, as they did not speak the same language (one spoke Portuguese, the other spoke English), and the symbolism of the food brought a complex communication system to the encounter (Liberato & Rocha, 2012). The Canadian explained to the Brazilian through gestures the meaning of the strawberry, a sacred fruit for his people because it “teaches forgiveness, peace, is heart-shaped, and brings sweetness to the soul” (Liberato, 2007).

At the university meetings, Ytxay Pataxó presented the Village’s permaculture project, which was based on subsistence agriculture and ancestral knowledge, aiming to benefit life in all its forms, since wherever permaculture is practiced, it becomes a “safe place for all beings” (Mollison, 1990, p. 69).

Observing how sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) were at the core of Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba’s construction, Liberato (2009) sought to understand the initiatives of the Indigenous peoples of this village in their search

for community FNS from a communicational and cultural perspective. That research project started with the 2009 documentary *Food Security and Indigenous Culture in Brazil* (34 min). Based on her initial findings, Liberato concluded that the village was establishing itself as a project of regional resistance and cultural emancipation. Despite suffering the negative impacts of colonization and so-called “development” projects (such as mining and logging in their region), the community was designed around reconstructing land, rebuilding culture, and strengthening life. Ultimately, food and nutrition security and food sovereignty played a vital role in this transformative process.

Liberato continued and expanded her research with the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba on her doctoral dissertation (2018), which inquired about the role of food in expressing the identity of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba group, indicating the political, social, and cultural importance of preserving traditional methods of cultivating, preparing, and consuming food.

4.1 Why Participatory Video Methodology?

PV (Participatory Video) is a methodology widely used in academic spaces in Canada since the 1980s and 1990s to study Indigenous and traditional communities. It seeks to foster a space for the protagonists to narrate their agendas of struggle to other subjects (Milne, Mitchell, & De Lange, 2012). It also presupposes minimal interference from the researcher and the equipment. Created in the late 1960s because of the need to listen to the social challenges experienced by fishing communities in Newfoundland, participatory video was important for recording the construction of the social scene and, above all, the lessons learned and agendas of struggle of the subjects involved.

Participatory video constituted an exact path for data construction for the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village research for three basic reasons: Orality, an integral part of the audiovisual record, was constitutive of the learning method considered appropriate by the village under study. Second, the filmed scenes offered a possibility for analysis that was more coherent with the perspectives of the subjects of the actions. Third, it enabled the researcher to choose her interpretation by inserting herself in the space where the narratives were enunciated and observing the routine of the research subjects.

Through this type of production, the village members could give visibility to their social agendas before public agencies and their network of allies. They could also build bridges with diverse communities, while strengthening their presence in political spaces and social forums (Shaw, 2012), as the video travels via the internet and on formats such as DVDs and hard drives.



Figure 1. Technical visit to the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village, 2012. Photo by the authors.

The construction of a field diary was important for taking notes during the interviews when the camera was on the tripod. The linking of the construction of narratives, knowledge, and practices of the different interviewees, face-to-face with the camera, assisted the researcher in composing the analysis, as community narratives intertwined. The camera framing helped the researcher scan panoramas and observe the details of the scenes. She grouped five blocks of files with video footage and photographs, which were represented in the community by words such as: territory, education, buen vivir (good living), food, medicinal plants, and communication.

In their participatory productions, the village leadership organized the production schedule based on the community's time and chose the locations for filming. During the interviews, the researcher did not formulate questions directly. Instead, the following opening keys for the sequences were used: What is your story? What is your greatest challenge? Where in that challenge do you currently find yourself? What is your greatest dream? What would you like to add? As themes related to the analytical categories of the researchers' thesis emerged in the interviews, she inserted questions to explore aspects that would guide the study. After recording, the clips entered the audio transcription phase, taking an average of two hours to type out each recorded hour.

Next, the material was assembled on a timeline using Final Cut software. At this editing stage, the collaboration between the researcher and the community took place through the evaluation of rough cuts (copiões) uploaded with password protection to a YouTube channel. Through this digital platform, the community watched the videos and sent their comments.

The participatory videos originated positive audiovisual products, as they became a way of returning the research to the community. The first of them was recorded during the month of December (2014) and edited in January 2015, and is called "A Mão do Pajé" [The Shaman's Hand] (Liberato 2015, 15 min.). This video recorded the meeting of leaders and shamans held in the village, in which regional Indigenous groups, educational institutions, and students participated to debate the theme "Water and Climate Change". The second videographic work was Okhá Kahab, recorded in April 2015 and edited in the months of May and June of the same year, but finalized in 2016. The documentary deals with the cultivation of medicinal plants in the village and aims to record the process of reclaiming ancestral knowledge related to Indigenous medicine, making it visible both to the members of the village and to the surrounding communities.

Although the documentaries were important components for the construction of the researcher's thesis, they did

not present the full analytical results. The footage allowed for the emergence of visual narratives necessary for comprehending the constructions of spaces, gestures, affects, expressions, tensions, contradictions, and even pedagogical silences. All of these elements were substantial for understanding the semantics and temporality of the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village.

5. Key Principles and Values

5.1 Commensality, Reciprocity and Solidarity

Despite the differences in their origins, the Pankararu and Pataxó founding groups of the CVJ village developed ways to unite the two cultures through practices related to food. Traditional foods in the distinct cultures of the two ethnic groups were central in the design of the community project.

From the beginning, the new village created opportunities and spaces that would allow for cultural exchanges between the two ethnic groups through food. The Pankararu would introduce the Pataxó to a delicious dish of succulent boa constrictor barbecue or some fried caterpillars. Originating from the coast, the Pataxó presented the Pankararu their specialty of fresh fish smoked (roasted) inside banana leaves. The foods that were important to each ethnic group also influenced decisions about which fruit trees would be planted to revitalize the degraded soil on which they were constructing their future (Liberato, 2018).

Seeking to escape the condition of living in cycles of poverty and needing help from outsiders, the CVJ members developed mechanisms of reciprocity and solidarity. These appear in the forms of collective food assistance, or *mangute* (in the Pataxó language). Families visiting each other are always welcomed with coffee, tea, and *beiju* (a manioc flatbread). In these encounters, they may also receive portions of fruits, vegetables, flour, fish, eggs, or free-range chicken to take home. These encounters are also important for sharing seeds and seedlings, as well as knowledge on how to plant and take care of them (Barbosa, 2025).

5.2 Permaculture and Agroecology

By articulating its own ways of accessing land, the village chose to develop work that prioritized soil restoration in Northern Minas Gerais—an area highly degraded by livestock projects and mineral extraction—by drawing on the practices of permaculture and agroecology. They gained access to these technologies through cultural exchanges, technical agronomy courses, and undergraduate university programs attended by their leaders. They affirm that they saw in these methods similarities with the practices of their “elders” (grandparents, parents, uncles, godparents, *caciques*, and *pajés*) (Liberato, 2009).

Food gives new meaning to the almost uninterrupted relationship of the community with nature, causing the perpetuation of a bond, of a sociability between them (Candido, 2003). Soon after purchasing the land in 2005, the Indigenous group chose to build an agricultural system based on permaculture, a “sustainable model of agriculture” (Mollison, 1990, p. 69) and learn about methods of agroecology. Agroecology is understood as a practice that involves technological innovation resulting from both popular and academic knowledge. Strongly influenced in Latin America by the so-called Epistemologies of the South, agroecology must be cultivated “through a process of decolonizing the cultural bias we inherited from European thought [...] and through a broader process of decolonizing the mind [...], questioning paradigms of progress, development, and competitiveness” (Toledo, 2016, p. 44).

The leaders of the CVJ village saw permaculture and agroecology as reinvention of traditional Indigenous knowledge and their agricultural system. It reminded them of how their ancestors produced food (Liberato, 2018). Permaculture

and agroecology allowed the village to link their cultural past, revering nature, with their future, preserving nature for their children. The leaders were confident and proud that they are building a life in which future generations can have sustainability, based on the knowledge that has been accumulated over centuries (Pankararu, 2004).

The territory, now expressed by a permaculture mandala, includes the foods that provide the minimum for life in a semi-arid region. The fruit trees of coconut, papaya, orange, tangerine, umbu, mangaba, jaboticaba, guava, pomegranate, and others frame the village's social space. The banana grove, which occupies a privileged area alongside the cassava, corn, and cowpea plantations, represents the foods that constitute traditional Indigenous recipes of the Pankararu and Pataxó peoples. There is also a large herbarium cultivated by the village, which exudes an aroma of medicinal plants such as rosemary, lavender, and mint (Liberato, 2018).

5.3 Buen Vivir

In 2012, the CVJ village “discovered” the Buen Vivir (Good Living). In the Buen Vivir, the CVJ leaders saw the philosophy that expressed their view of the world and the practices they have been following in building their community. The Buen Vivir gave coherence to how they wanted to live, and it provided a framework for continuing to construct the future.

A legacy of the Andean peoples, Buen Vivir results from ancestral knowledge, ways of life, and practices centred on the coherence between “what is said and what is done”, and on a democratic construction cemented by the effort to strengthen Human Rights and the Rights of Nature (Acosta, 2016, p. 14). According to Choquehuanca (2009), a specialist in Andean worldview, Buen Vivir prioritizes life and the rights of nature; it respects differences and values communication, reciprocity, and consensus. Buen Vivir is about an Indigenous view of the world, reaching out for “living well” and not necessarily “living better” (see also Baniwa, 2013 and Munduruku, 2012).

According to Acosta: “One cannot confuse the concepts of Good Living with that of ‘living better’, which implies a limited path to progress. Living better incites us to a permanent competition with our fellow human beings to produce more and more, in a process of endless material accumulation ... Let us remember that, so that some may ‘live better’, millions of people have had and have to ‘live badly’... Good Living signals an ethic of sufficiency for the entire community, and not only for the individual” (Acosta, 2016, p. 90).

The concept of Buen Vivir emphasizes the strengthening of community and solidarity relations, common spaces, and the most diverse forms of collective living, respecting diversity and nature. It recognizes the diversity of peoples and their structures. It harmonizes the needs of the population with the conservation of life, biological diversity, and the balance of all life systems (Alcantara & Sampaio, 2017). The construction of Buen Vivir does not advocate radicalism or a return to the past. Much less does it deny modern knowledge, which can even contribute to its construction. Buen Vivir is based on a conception of civic coexistence among human beings, which demands a profoundly innovative diplomatic management to gain allies willing to defend a harmonious relationship with Nature, a proper noun, which has the right to exist (Acosta, 2016; Leff, 2016; Tortosa-Martínez et al., 2014).

“Knowing how to eat” is also one of the principles of Buen Vivir (Choquehuanca, 2009). It connects to the agrarian rites, marked by the practices of Indigenous elders, forging an expression of their position in the contemporary world. Following this principle, the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba people do not seek the clock of rapid production, but rather that which respects the best time to plant and harvest without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, supporting their choice of agroecology methods.

The pursuit of Buen Vivir has also been established in the CVJ territory through the social projects that the community carries out, which are favourable spaces for dialogue with other Indigenous groups in the region, governmental and non-governmental organizations, social movements, and national and international educational institutions. The CVJ village pursues a constant exchange of knowledge and experiences related to topics linked to ecological issues, traditional foods, medicinal plants, and religious rituals, considered by the individuals of the village to be important knowledge for their culture and spirituality.



Figure 2. The Buen Vivir for the Cinta Vermelha-Jundiba village, 2012. Photo by the authors.

Ytxay Pataxó, one of the founding leaders of the village, stated in 2012 that the group's intention was “to plant a pedagogy of something great, through agriculture that would support food and nutrition security and Buen Vivir in the region” (Ytxay Pataxó, as cited in Liberato, 2018). Weaving together Buen Vivir through agrarian rites, reforestation, herbarium, their own forms of teaching and learning, as well as through social projects, the group has been inserting itself ethnically, ecologically, and politically in the Jequitinhonha Valley region.

6. Closing Notes

The journey of the CVJ in these past 20 years has not been a smooth one. On the contrary, the village has encountered many setbacks in the attempt to build a territory according to the Buen Vivir principles. Nevertheless, those principles have been their guidance to overcome barriers and get back to their own path. By creating spaces for transformation, the CVJ families worked from a dialogical perspective, engaging “in the constant transformation of reality, in an encounter of men and women mediated by the world, transforming it and themselves” (Freire, 1982, p. 43). The cultivation of food played an important role in this process, as it served as a bridge for the group to build reciprocities, knowledge, and re-signify practices.

Working with the CVJ village since 2005, researchers at the Centre for Studies in Food Security, Canada, witnessed that the community developed, and its members became leaders in the Indigenous Movement in Brazil. Many of their children pursued education in permaculture and agroecological methods, pedagogy, and environmental studies – continuing to contribute to the construction of Buen Vivir in their territory. Buen Vivir is the philosophy which most closely expresses their practices and desires for the future. It approaches their view of the world.

At the time we are writing, the community remains united in its struggle for “justice, memory and its future” (Cultural Survival, 2025). Recently, the CVJ organized the occupation of Fazenda Cristal, a 560-hectare area, in order to prevent

its sale for lithium mining. The families argue that this action forms part of a decades-long struggle for territorial expansion, which includes:

- The establishment of a working group in 2012
- The completion, in 2015, of a technical report supporting the creation of the CVJ Indigenous Reserve
- The approval of parliamentary funding for land acquisition.

According to the Brazilian anthropologist Edson Krenak (2023), the historical and geographical processes of colonization in the Jequitinhonha Valley, combined with ongoing conflicts involving the mining industry and agribusiness, have significantly delayed Indigenous land demarcation. Between 1970 and 1999, 541 mining titles were registered in the region. This number increased nearly tenfold to 5,068 titles between 2000 and 2018, with mining operations now occupying approximately 37,000 square kilometres. Beginning in 2018, Krenak argues, the Brazilian government suspended Indigenous land demarcation processes while granting additional mining licenses, intensifying extractive activity in the CVJ region.

Even the symbolic dimension of the territory has been targeted. According to the collective Jequitinhonha Peoples, there have been proposals to rename the region “Lithium Valley,” replacing its historical name. “They are trying to rename the area and erase our memory,” a community leader stated. Mining companies promote the concept of “green lithium,” claiming environmentally and socially responsible extraction practices; however, according to Krenak, these claims are not supported by local realities (Krenak, 2023).

Against this backdrop, CVJ’s defense of territorial expansion constitutes not only a legal demand but an ontological claim. The envisioned “Space for the Pluriuniversity,” grounded in the pedagogy of alternance, signals a project of epistemic re-centering. Rather than reproducing monocultural academic forms, the Pluriuniversity seeks to cultivate relational knowledge systems in which humans, land, and non-human beings are co-participants. This initiative reframes education as territorial praxis—an infrastructure for sustaining Buen Vivir beyond the immediate present.

The CVJ’s experience further demonstrates that community communication cannot be reduced to media production or participatory messaging alone. Rather, it operates as a bridge for the group and its re-existence: a sustained and embodied process through which the community narrates itself into being while cultivating food, medicinal plants, and the seeds used in its jewellery production. These practices are not ancillary economic activities but communicative acts that materialize memory, reciprocity, and territorial belonging. Through such relational labour, the community simultaneously organizes, educates, and defends its territory against the ongoing pressures of historical erasure.

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Chapter 9 - Lifewritings on Food Security and Sovereignty: Trajectories of Anti-Racist Activism and Resistance

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I. Introduction

“Our lifewriting brings the experience, the lived reality of our condition as Brazilian people of African origin—a hyphenated nationality—through which I position and express myself to affirm my African roots, to celebrate my ancestry, and to connect with African peoples, as well as with the African diaspora” (Evaristo, 2020).

The concept of lifewriting (*escrevivência*), developed by Brazilian Black writer Conceição Evaristo, inspires this chapter, which presents fragments of six trajectories of anti-racist activism and resistance, as well as commitment to food security and sovereignty in Brazil. These narratives blend personal and collective experiences with global and local events and contexts.

According to Evaristo (2020), lifewritings aim to bring writing as close as possible to oral speech (p. 37). Thus, the accounts presented here are either personal writings or fragments of transcribed conversations expressing lived experiences in the fight against racism and for social justice. What all these lifewritings bring to light are affirmations of experiences in food security or sovereignty that “go beyond mere contemplative action, becoming a deep discomfort with the state of things” (Evaristo, 2020: p.34).

Four of the co-authors of this chapter have included their *Orunkó*, the sacred name bestowed upon an individual during their initiation into *Candomblé*. *Candomblé* is an Afro-Brazilian religion that connects practitioners with deities called *orixás*, *voduns*, and *inquices*, representing natural forces and human experiences. It emphasizes harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds, belief in reincarnation, and the vital energy *axé*, nurtured through rituals. These ceremonies, led by religious leaders in *terreiros*¹, involve dance, chants, and offerings, celebrating key events and welcoming new members (Campos, 2025). Thus, sacred names signify their spiritual identity and reflect their bond with the *Orixá* (Fortaleza, 2025).

Born out of the resistance of enslaved Africans, Afro-Brazilian religions, such as *Canbomblé* and *Umbanda*, have in the past and continue to have a vital role in the preservation and celebration of Afro-Brazilian lives, culture and heritage, including cuisine and food security. Members of Afro-Brazilian religions in Brazil claim their identity beyond religion, as Traditional People of African Matrix (POTMA).

In Brazilian law, Traditional Peoples and Communities, are defined “as culturally distinct groups that recognize themselves as such, possessing their own forms of social organization, occupying and using territory and natural resources as a condition for their cultural, social, religious, ancestral, and economic reproduction, utilizing knowledge, innovations, and practices generated and transmitted through traditions” (Brasil, 2007 as cited by Almeida, 2019, p.35).

The cultural centrality of food within the POTMA and the daily practice of food distribution in *terreiros* have prompted leadership to seek institutional support. They mobilized the Brazilian government to implement public policies to address food insecurity among both practitioners and the vulnerable populations in their immediate vicinities (Brasil,

2011). POTMA members then created FONSANPOTMA, the National Forum for Food and Nutrition Security of the People of African Matrix in 2011 (Almeida, 2019).

Although initially concerned with the criminalization of sacred animal slaughter in *terreiros* in Rio Grande do Sul state, FONSANPOTMA became a national organization dedicated to preserving and restoring the cultural, social, and territorial values of African-descended traditions. Centred on the goal of food sovereignty, the forum works to combat food insecurity by protecting traditional food systems from modern destruction. A core principle of the organization is the right to self-identification as Traditional Peoples of African Matrix. While they respect various historical or imposed names, they emphasize that ancestral diversity serves as a vital unifying force for their communities² (Morais & Jayme, 2017).

We begin this chapter with the lifewritings of educator Janete Ribeiro and the *Caruru da Gratidão* (*Caruru of Gratitude*), an event of gathering, education, and celebration of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous culture within the Brazilian diaspora, centred around *caruru*, a sacred and traditional Afro-Brazilian dish. All the contributors in this chapter share a connection with the *Caruru da Gratidão*.

Gaio Jorge and the *Coletivo Criação* (Collective Creation) describe the inspiration and initiative of youth from the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro in the fight for life in their territory through programs such as *Saberes e Fazeres de Cria* (*Knowledge and Doings from the Territory's Child*), which promote food security, education, and sustainability.

*Omobirim*³ Veronica Corrêa's writing reflects on her path of activism and resistance from Guaratiba, Rio de Janeiro, highlighting the importance of youth occupying decision-making spaces and resisting structural racism. Veronica is also a coordinator of public policies for youth at FONSANPOTMA.

Next is the account of *Iyalorixá*⁴ Roberta from the *Instituto Águas do Amanhã* (Waters of Tomorrow Institute) based in Sepetiba, Rio de Janeiro, who discusses the significance of food and the role of *terreiro* kitchens in the ongoing struggle against hunger and food insecurity.

*Iya*⁵ Itanajara de Oxum⁶ speaks about her territorial and national journey as a member of POTMA in the context of Porto Alegre, a city in southern Brazil. She emphasizes the dynamic engagement with events such as the World Social Forum, the *Banquetaço*, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the floods in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 2024.

Finally, the lifewriting of *Olamide*⁷ Lessa interweaves a passion for education with the history of resistance of the POTMA through the creation of FONSANPOTMA and their ongoing fight for food security and sovereignty.

In presenting these lifewritings, we argue that the POTMA are not merely beneficiaries of public policies, but active agents in the development of truly sustainable solutions. These practices challenge the State's exclusionary structure and point toward a form of development that respects diversity, strengthens community bonds, and ensures a full life for future generations. To educate, to nourish, to preserve, and to resist—these are the pillars of sustainability rooted in ancestry and projected toward the future. That is why narratives like these are not just life stories, but seeds of transformation that help bring global commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, n.d) to life.

2. Janete Santos Ribeiro and the *Caruru da Gratidão*

2.1 Janete's Introduction

My name is Janete Santos Ribeiro. I'm a history teacher in the public education system at FAETEC – the Foundation for the Support of Technical Schools – where I work with elementary education and training of new teachers. I define myself as a woman of the triad: academia, education, and activism, being involved in projects that bring together these three elements.

For the past twenty-five years, my teaching practice has been centred on a transgressive approach to history. For example, since 2023 we have been doing a systematic reading of the book *A Colour Defect* (*Um Defeito de Cor*) by Ana

Maria Gonçalves (2006), which blends literature and history, and helps expand the racial literacy of young people. We are not born Black—we become Black, even though we are seen as Black. To confront the structural historical injustice of racism, we need to know who we are, where we come from, and what legacy we carry from our ancestors. So, through reading this classic book, we work on empowering youth from vulnerable communities.

In Brazil, the place of Black people is not traditionally a place of power. We are changing that through many struggles—and that's where my activism comes in. I believe that this activism needs to happen inside the classroom, with young people who are paid to study, to become professionals⁸. Because what often happens with our youth is that they study just enough to enter the job market. They study to work, not to gain knowledge that can transform them. The act of transgression is when they study to strengthen who they are and the communities they come from—in short, to be who they want to be, not what society imposes on them. This has shaped my life deeply, and it's through these lived experiences that I move into the field of education.

2.2 Antiracist Activism and Education

In education, I crossed paths with Professor Azoilda Loretto da Trindade, and I became involved with issues of self-esteem and mental health of Black women. In this context of Black women's health, I participate in two key initiatives. One of them is the annual *Rainhas Magas* (Wise Queens) gathering, which takes place on January 6th—a day of care and empowerment for Black women, so they can begin the year with confidence and self-worth. I also support a group of Black women university students who came from public schools, called *PodPretas* (Black Women Podcast). They engage in dialogue and give back in ways that empower other girls like themselves once were.

In my classroom, I never leave out the Afro-Indigenous perspective—it is always discussed through the lens of human rights and the enforcement of Article 6 of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 that establishes social rights (Brasil, 2010). My projects are deeply tied to this perspective of building networks—powerful networks within the school community that can act on many fronts. In this sense, I see myself as a woman who brings people together, someone who creates opportunities for shared knowledge. On top of that, every September, I'm actively involved with the *Caruru da Gratidão*.

2.3. *Caruru da Gratidão/ Caruru of Gratitude*

The *Caruru da Gratidão* takes place on September 27, a day dedicated to honoring *Ibeji*, the *orixá* connected to childhood in Afro-Brazilian based religions like Candomblé and Umbanda. *Ibeji* is symbolized by twin figures who embody joy and see the world with the wonder and innocence of children. Also known as “the child *orixá*,” this divinity represents the miracle of birth and the beginning of life. *Ibeji*'s energy is present in everything that marks a new beginning—such as a river's source, a seed sprouting, the spark of happiness, or a renewed zest for life—reflecting purity, innocence, and the sacred essence of fresh starts (Barbosa, 2023). Thus, the *Caruru da Gratidão* carries an emotional dimension but also serves as a space for connection and mobilization.

The first *Caruru* was organized in 2015 to raise funds for the palliative care of the professor Azoilda Loretto da Trindade⁹. Sadly, she didn't live to see it—it became her *gurufinho*¹⁰ – farewell offering. Two years later, the *Caruru* was transformed into an act of gratitude. It became a gesture among friends and admirers of Azoilda, meant to celebrate not only her memory but also the memory of other women who contributed to anti racist education and culture.



Figure 1. Poster of Caruru da Gratidão, 2025. Art by Lessa, 2025

Caruru is a sacred dish, officially recognized in the Recôncavo Baiano, a region of Bahia state known for its strong historical and cultural significance (Governo do Estado Bahia, n.d.). It's also connected to resistance against religious racism, as it is a food offering to the orixás, deities worshipped in *terreiros*, Afro-Brazilian religious temples, that refer to the gods of the Ketu nation and the Angola nation, where they are known as Inquice (Alves & Pinheiro, 2013). Specifically, the dish *caruru* is dedicated to the Ibejis (divine twins), which also ties it to Nigeria, the country with the highest twin birth rate in the world, the second being Brazil. This Rio-Bahia-Africa connection is central to the *Caruru*.

In Bahia, *caruru* is a traditional offering to children. It begins by serving seven children first, the Seven Boys¹¹. This tradition brings to light the importance of working in partnership with schools. As such, *Caruru da Gratidão* in Rio became a tool to strengthen the implementation of Law 10.639, which mandates the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools. In this sense, the *Caruru* has become the culmination of a broader school-based process—one that works through a range of topics to support not just anti-racist education, but also the affirmation of different identities within the school space, promoting respect for diversity.

The *Caruru da Gratidão* is a celebration intertwined with the complex history of racial and cultural mixing in Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro, the Ibejis are syncretized as Saints Cosme and Damião, and in Afro-Carioca religiosity, the tradition is to give sweets to children. In Bahia, the *caruru* is offered in gratitude for life, and the *Caruru da Gratidão* forms a powerful cultural bridge between Rio and Bahia—strengthening, here in Rio, a food tradition that has been under attack.

The *caruru* dish is often served with *acarajé*—a sacred bean fritter associated with Iansã, an orixá from the Yoruba pantheon. Some Christian Pentecostal churches, through their demonization of Black and Afro-Brazilian culture, have appropriated elements of these traditions. For instance, they've tried to rebrand *acarajé* as “Jesus fritters,” stripping away or attempting to erase its cultural and spiritual roots.

2.4. *The Caruru da Gratidão as Spiritual Reconnection*

The *Caruru da Gratidão* is an act of resistance against the erasure of Black Brazilian heritage. Rooted in the memory of Azoilda, we build the *Caruru* based on the Mandala of Afro-Brazilian Civilizational Values¹² (Trindade, 2005), which Azoilda developed and mapped. These values include orality, memory, communitarianism/cooperativism, religiosity, musicality, corporeality, playfulness, ancestry, circularity, and vital energy (*axé*). All of this is guided by the element of affection, which is a powerful, vital force. These values are guided by the concept of *axé*, a powerful vital energy and are not exclusive to Brazil; they are present throughout the African diaspora in the Americas.

These values are infused into the *Caruru* not only through the preparation of food, but also through the act of bringing people together. It's never just about the food—it's also about affection and gathering, calling people to connect through their bodies and their memories. Our bodies hold memory, and the *Caruru* allows this ancestral memory to surface through interactive activities and workshops. In this way, the *Caruru* becomes an act of reconnection.

2.5. *The Caruru da Gratidão Celebration*

The *Caruru da Gratidão* has been held every two years since 2018. The vision is for it to remain itinerant, with no fixed location, able to travel across different neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro. These are territories where Afro-Brazilian religions are practised, making the sacred preparation of this food deeply rooted in African traditions. The celebration nourishes not only the body but also the spirit and mind. Alongside the food, there are dance workshops, storytelling sessions, turban wrapping for Afro-aesthetic expression, and great care given to transforming the venue—be it a club, street, community centre, or museum—into a sacred space, a spiritual *terreiro*. Another important dimension of the *Caruru* is a six-hour-long program that supports local entrepreneurship and the solidarity economy. It promotes small local businesses, artisans, and cultural workers.

The event is entirely community-driven, built through donations and volunteerism. There are no sponsors or owners. It is a space of action, responsibility, and commitment from people and institutions aligned with its purpose: celebrating life. Not just human life, but also nature, in an ecological activity that brings together the material and spiritual worlds. We leave the Caruru filled with *axé*—energized and empowered to continue honouring and revitalizing our ancestral heritage. Because of this, it draws on a deeply Afro-Indigenous ancestral force and embodies a form of popular resistance—especially against religious racism. The Caruru affirms this power not only within schools but also within community spaces, uplifting and strengthening the community as a whole.

2.6. *Caruru, Terreiro, and Resistance*

We have territories of resistance. The *terreiro* is one of them. Much of what we know today about ancestry and Afro-Brazilian civilizational values—their materiality—was preserved in the *terreiros* (Afro-Brazilian religious spaces). Thus, when we fight for the preservation of these spaces of knowledge, we are defending our wisdom, even if we don't personally practise the religion. Terreiros have generated essential knowledge for survival.

Today, especially with the implementation of affirmative action policies, there is an emergence of a Black intellectual class—challenging academic norms and confronting the *epistemicide* once perpetuated by universities when they dismissed or erased other cultures, and denied others the agency to speak for themselves. In this meeting of forces, there is no turning back. We have made significant progress, and that progress is tied to this movement to reclaim our narrative.

Caruru is also about strengthening what we feel, about giving visibility to what lives in us. Our focus is on the joy of holding the celebration. Because otherwise, you end up a prisoner to a world that doesn't welcome you. As we are not focused on confrontation, Caruru becomes a celebration that attracts a wide range of ways of being in the world. It is a space for differences to meet, where we intentionally avoid sponsorship to preserve the autonomy of the event and keep it free from commodification.

As a work based in exchange, the words “abundance” and “prosperity” must be part of it because they are also deeply rooted in Afro and Indigenous cultures in Brazil. Collaboration creates abundance, and abundance brings sharing, and from sharing comes prosperity. A body, a spirit, and a mind that are well-nourished are far less likely to succumb to the oppressions imposed on them. That is what we believe in.

3. Gaio Jorge and the *Coletivo Criação*

3.1 *Gaio's Introduction*

My name is Gaio Jorge Araújo Baptista de Paiva. I am twenty-five years old, and I am a *cria*¹³ (child) of Guadalupe. This is a peripheral neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro that faces several challenges in meeting basic Human Development Index (HDI) standards and the right to the city, such as public safety, urban mobility, access to cultural goods, health, and education. I was born in the Muquição *favela* and, at the age of six, moved in with my mother to the main street in Guadalupe. Around the age of fifteen, I moved to Honório Gurgel, a neighbourhood in the city's North Zone. At that time, my family was able to benefit from a national public housing policy program under President Lula's government, through which they acquired a home via popular financing.

3.2 Education

In high school, I completed a Technical Course in Environmental Studies through SENAI (technical school), made possible by PRONATEC—the National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment, a Federal Government initiative that promoted access to professional and technological education during President Dilma Rousseff's administration. Later, I earned a degree in Food Engineering from CEFET, Valença Campus, in the interior of Rio de Janeiro state. While pursuing studies in Environment and Food, I became deeply interested in the intersection of these fields and their importance in finding solutions for human dignity. Before I knew it, the pursuit of knowledge had become a passion, and I continued engaging in courses on solid waste management, waste handling, hazardous waste disposal, fruit and vegetable technology, digital technology training, among others.

3.3 Ancestrality

I grew up in a matriarchal household, led by my maternal grandmother, mother, and aunts. My mother is a social activist who has taken part in many struggles and achievements; she and her peers—whom I call uncles and aunts—helped pave the way for people like me to carry on today. She is my greatest inspiration, the person from whom I have learned everything, my first example of someone dedicated to creating change. Over time, I came to understand that my mother is the way she is because she learned from my grandmother, who in turn learned from my great-grandmother, whom I never got to meet. I feel this ancestral inheritance. My aunts are also involved in transformative work, each with their own expertise and capabilities, engaged in cultural, social, recreational, and even religious activities. Raised by these constantly moving women, I was introduced to the culture of the periphery, but also to a wide range of possibilities beyond my immediate territory.

3.4 The Emergence of *Coletivo Criação* (Collective Creation)

The *Coletivo Criação* (Collective Creation) emerged from the sharp awareness of a group of young residents of Honório Gurgel, who already had notable backgrounds in other surrounding peripheral territories. At that time, none of us was even 20 years old. We were youth with strong community ties, who understood that we could operate more effectively in Honório Gurgel and neighbouring favelas than the State itself. Our friendship was born within the *Geração que Move* (Generation That Moves) project, part of the *Agência de Redes para a Juventude*¹⁴ (Youth Network Agency). Initially, the project had a welfare approach, aimed at distributing food baskets to peripheral populations during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to note that our collective emerged in the context of a global crisis during the pandemic.

We began by organizing food donation and basket preparation actions, but quickly expanded the work of *Geração que Move* far beyond expectations. If the initial goal was to distribute five meals, we delivered twenty. The impact of our work soon became visible, and we formed various partnerships with local businesses. It became clear that we could not limit ourselves to *Geração que Move*. We were a group, a collective, and in April 2020, the *Coletivo Criação* was officially born.

3.5 *Coletivo Criação*

The creation of *Coletivo Criação* was driven by a humanitarian emergency. In Honório Gurgel, many families lacked

even basic access to food. A symbolic image from that period was the line at a butcher shop in Rocha Miranda, where people waited to collect bones because they could not afford meat. The reality in the outskirts of Rio's North Zone was harsh: workers could not stop working during the pandemic, and by continuing their activities, they contracted the virus and lost loved ones. It was a brutal dilemma. How to survive under these conditions? Who could help? It should have been the responsibility of the State, but we realized that we had the tools, the connections, and the organization to act effectively. And we did so with excellence; our work from that time is still remembered today.

Since then, the Collective has not stopped. We have engaged in both relief actions, like distributing basic food baskets to 250 families for eight months in 2020, and cultural and solidarity initiatives, such as *Solidarity Christmas*, which served 150 children in 2020 and 2021, and *Solidarity Easter*. We also organized several editions of community soup kitchens for people living in street situations. We successfully applied for and received some grants, including from *Casa Fluminense*, a local Non-Government Organization (Casa Fluminense, 2025). The name *Coletivo Criação* carries three core meanings:

- *Cria* (Child of the Community) – Represents our identity as young people from Rio de Janeiro's peripheries, with territorial experience and deep knowledge of our community's needs.
- *Criação* (Creation) – Reflects our ability to develop creative solutions, even with limited resources, to generate real impact.
- *Inovação* (Innovation) – We combine territorial and technical knowledge, always infused with care and commitment, to think of effective solutions for the challenges we face.

Over time, we have solidified these solutions through new training, trips, and collaborations. That is how *Sabores e Saberes de Cria* was born.

3.6 *Sabores e Saberes de Cria (Flavours and Knowledge of the Cria)*

The *Sabores e Saberes de Cria* project began as a workshop, was later carried out as a course, and is now becoming consolidated as a full-fledged program. In practice, it is built on two fundamental pillars: the economic empowerment of people from marginalized communities and their technical training in food handling best practices. The goal is to qualify participants to work in restaurants and markets, equipping them with technical knowledge and offering an income-generating alternative through the production and sale of their own goods.

The first workshop was held in November 2024, when we offered a 10-hour course that included digital training on best practices in food production and handling, as well as instruction on personal hygiene, food hygiene, and an introduction to food microbiology. Additionally, we conducted a hands-on session in an industrial kitchen located in Rocha Miranda, where participants learned to prepare recipes using food sourced from street markets in Rio de Janeiro. By the end of the course, participants had gained the skills to prepare cookies, cakes, jams, and a variety of other recipes for products sold in these venues.

A key feature of the project is the adaptation of recipes to seasonal ingredients. For example, if the course is offered in November, we use fruits like pineapple and oranges. If it happens in July, we use strawberries and papaya. This ensures the course remains aligned with the availability of ingredients at the time. Over seventy people enrolled in the first workshop.

A crucial characteristic of the course is that participants were paid for their time, ensuring that everyone involved receives financial compensation for their dedication. Participation was selective, with priority given to Black women from the peripheries and LGBTQIA individuals. This decision was based on a clear understanding of social inequality. Black women, especially those living in *favelas* and peripheral neighbourhoods, are often the ones who suffer most from socio-economic hardships. We offered childcare spaces where participants could leave their children during the course, with supervised activities for the kids. This allowed women to focus on learning without additional stress. Our mission

is rooted in an anti-racist commitment that values the leadership of Black women, acknowledging the urgent need to expand opportunities and foster equity.

3.7 *Challenges*

Among the main challenges we face is the lack of financial resources. Our team is made up of young people from peripheral areas, many of whom face economic struggles, which makes funding essential to keeping the project alive. Another challenge lies in building trust with the local population. Many residents of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* and marginalized neighbourhoods are tired of broken promises and media exploitation. For example, when we distributed food baskets, many people refused to be photographed or have their images shared due to fear of having their vulnerabilities exploited. We handle this challenge with respect and understanding.

Our strong ties to the community allowed us to move freely through various *favelas*, as people trusted our work. Each action we take reinforces the belief that we are on the right path. We continue forward, firmly committed to contributing to a more just, dignified future with greater opportunities for our community.

4. **Verônica Corrêa, Youth Occupation in Decision-Making Spaces and the Fight Against Structural Racism**

4.1 *Veronica's Introduction*

My name is Verônica Corrêa. I am a young dark-skinned Black woman. I am 27 years old, originally from Duque de Caxias, but I have been living and working in the city of Rio de Janeiro for the past four years. Currently, I am the Coordinator of Public Policies for Youth at the National Forum for Food and Nutritional Security of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (FONSANPOTMA). I also hold the seat for traditional peoples and communities on the National Youth Council (CONJUVE) and serve as a Territorial Culture Agent, as part of the National Plan of Culture Committees (PNCC). In addition, I act as a link in the Web of Peoples for Agroecology (TEIA) in the state of Rio de Janeiro, strengthening connections between traditional knowledge, youth, culture, and agroecological practices in our territories.

4.2 *The Importance of Youth Occupation in Decision-Making Spaces and the Fight Against Structural Racism*

I consider it extremely important for young people to occupy spaces, whether in social participation councils, debate forums, or government projects like the PNCC – National Plan of Culture Committees. It is from these places that we can bring up specific youth-related issues, considering that youth have unique needs and particularities. When we talk about the youth of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (POTMA), many additional factors come into play. The challenges we face, such as racism, knock on our doors every day, disguising themselves under countless different names. However, we all know that, at its core, it is structural and systemic racism that abhors everything that comes from Africa.

I believe that simply existing as a Black woman born in the community is, in itself, a political act—especially being of African matrix and bisexual. That said, I would like to share a little about my political awakening. As I previously mentioned, I am an activist within organized civil society movements, and today I have enough clarity to affirm how

difficult it is to develop political awareness when, from childhood, we are taught that politics is not to be discussed. This process turns a fundamental concept into a taboo, although politics permeates every human being's life, not just in Brazil, but worldwide. Betinho¹⁵ once said that “the soul of hunger is political” (Stutz, 2021), and to this day, we suffer under governments that lack the will to change our devastating reality.

4.3 Political Awakening

My political awakening occurred during the pre-election period of 2018, when the rise of the far-right in Brazil began to gain media attention. Today, I recognize that this process began much earlier, lurking in the shadows. However, like most Brazilians, I only became aware of this so-called polarization at that time. It was a period of unease, as no one knew what would happen. I even feared a new military dictatorship—not only for my own life, but for the lives of those around me—since the system oppresses minorities, even if in veiled ways. As a result of the 2018 election, we faced a government that did not end with a military coup but caused countless setbacks, including historical ones for the country. Brazil, once a diplomatic reference and internationally recognized as an exceptional negotiator, became a global laughingstock. Worse yet, after years of progress, we shamefully returned to the hunger map (see also Rocha et al, 2026, in this volume). The first act of the ill-prepared right-wing government was to dismantle the National Food Security Council (CONSEA), which ceased to exist as a public policy between 2019 and 2022. Council members remained mobilized, striving to ensure the bare minimum within the chaos.

However, amid this completely regressive and disorganized government, we faced the scourge of the century: the COVID-19 pandemic, a disease that emerged unexpectedly and claimed the lives of over 700,000 Brazilians, marking a devastating chapter in our history. Many Brazilians lost their jobs, their loved ones, and had no choice but to start over.

It was in 2022 that my journey as an activist truly began. I joined FONSANPOTMA in May 2022, becoming part of the executive team in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro and taking on the coordination of youth policies. I confess that, at that time, I had little understanding of what that space was or what my role would be—I only wanted to contribute to the growth of my people. FONSANPOTMA is an organization dedicated to ensuring food security and sovereignty for traditional people of African matrix. We understand that we are a people who maintain the language, memory, and history of our ancestors, who were trafficked to Brazil. Today, after much struggle from those who came before me and those who continue to fight, we have achieved some victories, including the conceptual framework recognizing Traditional Peoples of African Matrix as a distinct community.

4.4 POTMA and Agroecology

From 2022 to the present, I have been engaged in various fronts. The first national event I had the pleasure of attending was the 12th Brazilian Congress on Agroecology (CBA), where I participated in a panel alongside fellow POTMA members, discussing food security and sovereignty from the youth's perspective. In my view, youth have the difficult mission of keeping an entire ancestral legacy alive while also reclaiming the ancestral technologies of traditional peoples, ensuring they are not lost. Shortly afterward, I had the honour of joining the 1st Delegation of Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCT) at the 4th National Youth Conference—an opportunity to unite forces with other young PCT leaders, transforming our differences into strengths. In January and February 2024, I participated in the 1st phase of the Training of Builders and Defenders of Territories program through a gastronomy course that explored food as an ancestral tool for economic, historical, and cultural empowerment. I had the pleasure of teaching some classes during this process. We designed the course curriculum based on circular knowledge-sharing, where everyone contributed their wisdom to the collective. By the end of this process, we had all become enriched. Those two months were filled with immense learning,

deep connections with ancestry and my peers. I made lifelong friends and cherished every experience I had at the *Terra à Vista Settlement*¹⁶.

It was through this experience that agroecology entered my life and found a special place in my heart. It was then that I realized how much we rely on and use ancestral technologies. And how colonizers have appropriated these technologies—presenting them to the world as “innovations” and reaping the benefits of knowledge created by the Indigenous and Black ancestors of this land. One example is the traditional thatched house, now rebranded as “bioconstruction,” with its origins erased and the knowledge holders—who have passed these skills down for generations—left unrecognized. It is against this tide of erasure that the People’s Network for Agroecology (TEIA) seeks to empower riverine communities, *quilombolas*¹⁷, family farmers, and others in the pursuit of a Black, Indigenous, and popular alliance.

4.5 *The Future is Ancestral*

Since then, I have carried all these experiences with me, understanding the importance of preserving ancestral customs, knowledge, and practices to build a sustainable future. The global climate outlook is bleak; scientific models are unequivocal in stating that there is no possibility of reversing the damage. However, we can stabilize the situation by making serious commitments to sustainability and advocating for fairer and more equitable global governance.

Therefore, we must unite our voices and actions, recognizing the strength that lies in our diversity and shared experiences. It is essential that everyone, that we, as a society, work together to ensure that the voices of traditional peoples are heard and respected, and that their practices and knowledge are valued. Only in this way can we cultivate a future where dignity and social justice prevail—not only for youth, but also for all generations to come.

5. Iyalorixá Roberta Costa de Yemonjá and the Instituto Águas do Amanhã (Waters of Tomorrow Institute)

5.1 *Iyalorixá Roberta’s Introduction*

My name is Iyalorixá Roberta de Yemonja, and I am the religious leader of *Ilê Alaketu Asé Awom Omi Yemonja* (House of the Waters of Yemonja), an African-based religious *terreiro* located in Sepetiba, in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. I am also part of the board of directors of the Forum of Solidarity Kitchens of the State of Rio de Janeiro¹⁸. Currently, I also serve as a council member of COMPLIR-Rio, the Municipal Council for the Promotion of Religious Freedom in Rio de Janeiro.

I come from a *terreiro* family: my great-grandmother was from a *terreiro*, my grandmother has a *terreiro*, and now I have mine. I was born with the understanding that what we had, we shared. Many times, entire families would arrive at the *terreiro* because the father had lost his job or the husband was abusive. The woman would take her children and go to the *terreiro*, and there, those children would be fed. When the mother went to work, the *terreiro* would bathe the children and send them to school. When a woman gave birth, she went to the *terreiro*.

Thus, I come from that lived experience of the *terreiro*, which I often say is a space of ancestral knowledge and practice that sustains our people. It is the knowledge of teaching another woman how to sew, how to braid hair, and how to do crafts with straw. This *terreiro* way of life is where I come from — and so, serving food is something I have done for as long as I can remember; my great-grandmother was already doing this.

5.2 Instituto Águas do Amanhã

The Instituto Águas do Amanhã is located in Nova Sepetiba, Santa Cruz¹⁹. During the pandemic, the *terreiros* in this community began to intensify their efforts to fight hunger, a mission that we have embraced since the mid-19th century. These *terreiros* always saw themselves as being on the front lines of public policy because they lacked outside support. Also, due to our peripheral location and precarious transportation network, people could not even move around. We are talking about a territory that lacks water and doesn't even have a public health clinic.

During the pandemic, there were moments when basic food baskets arrived, but the work of the *terreiro* kitchens was not just to deliver groceries. That was not enough; the women did not even have money to buy cooking gas. What they needed was a ready-made meal.

5.3 Participation in the National Program of Solidarity Kitchens

Today, the Instituto Águas do Amanhã is part of the Solidarity Kitchens Program of the Ministry of Social Development and Assistance, Family and the Fight Against Hunger (MDS, n.d.). We are connected to them through a two-year contract, until the end of 2026. The program pays, through a public call, R\$2.40 per meal distributed by each kitchen. It is not a lot, it does not cover all costs, but it is a form of aid. Most of the time, or nearly all the time, we put our own money in, from our salaries, from our personal resources.

We are one of the managing entities of the program, and the only managing organization rooted in African-based traditions. We work with thirteen other solidarity kitchens from *terreiros* and *quilombola* communities, including one located in Rocinha, the largest *favela* in Latin America. Since we are the umbrella organization, everything goes through us first, and then we distribute to the others.

We receive a good portion of the fruits, vegetables, and greens from the PAA (Food Acquisition Program²⁰). The rest comes from individual donations, which we call “donations by CPF” (using personal taxpayer IDs). We also use animal protein from our own *terreiro*, as part of our rituals. Many *terreiros* have productive backyards and ancestral gardens.

At the Institute, we serve around 75 to 80 families. While the national average is four kids per family in Brazil, our reality is different. Some families have as many as eleven children. We provide meals three times a week — on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays — totalling around 300 to 400 meals per day. Each meal box (*quentinha*) always includes an animal protein, rice, beans, and a vegetable salad. For example: rice with beans, *farofa*, collard greens sautéed with garlic, and a protein. Or pasta, beans, ground beef, and a salad. The salad can be made with vegetables or leafy greens like lettuce. When we receive a lot of vegetables, we prepare a big soup with protein and pasta.

I am the person who tastes the food first. I eat the meal before it is packed to check the flavour — because I want the food to be well-seasoned, with garlic, with taste.

5.4 Terreiro Food and the Importance of the Kitchen

Food is part of our culture. Everything in the *terreiro* involves food. Taking care of your spirit involves food. If you want to please Oyá²¹, you make *acarajé*²². If you want to please Iemanjá, you prepare *ebojá*, which is made from white corn kernels (hominy). You want to make a dessert? You make *ecó*, which is a sweet *acaçá*, a ritual food made from cooked white cornmeal, with coconut milk. And where does that coconut milk come from? From the backyard, where there is a coconut tree. The coconut falls, dries, gets crushed, and the dish is made on a banana leaf, also from the backyard.

I always say that the kitchen is a political space of resistance. The kitchen is the great womb, because it is from there

that food comes, and food must be prepared with the utmost care. Because it can nourish and sustain — but if not handled carefully, it can also harm.

The *terreiro* is a plural space. You will see men, women, gay people, transgender people, and lesbians. You will see Black, Brown, White people; married women, divorced women, single mothers — and all learn to respect each other. In the *terreiro*, you might find company presidents as well as street sweepers and domestic workers. You may have someone who holds a leadership position in the *terreiro* but is a domestic worker, and that Coca-Cola executive must bow their head to her. The *terreiro* has this mystical, plural space because oftentimes the person in the kitchen may not even know how to write, but she makes amazing food, while someone who speaks three languages cannot even chop an onion. That mysticism in the *terreiro* is vast. You enter a completely different organization.

5.5 *Solidarity Kitchen as a space for coexistence*

We think a lot that the solidarity kitchen is a welcoming place, not just to feed. Because when we feed ourselves, we welcome emotions, and the kitchen is also a space for the political and intellectual formation of these women. We use the opportunity of the presence of this group of women to set up workshops.

These families are not all from African matrices. There are Evangelical, Catholic, and Buddhist families who come to the *terreiro* to feed themselves. We do a workshop explaining to them how they can plant kale, lettuce, salsa; how to fertilize a land to have more banana, mango, orange trees. Because they can have that productive backyard in their own home.

We have women who have returned to study after the pandemic. We try to encourage them to take classes, go to workshops, and participate in lectures, conversation circles. All of this is offered from the kitchen where they get their meals. We have a group of volunteers who are social workers, nurses, doctors, and lawyers.

On the day of deliveries, we always have a lot of information for them, because we have women who do not know that they have the right to go to the health post to do a pap test. Thus, that is why I talk about political formation that is not a partisan political formation, but about rights and duties. We also have formative workshops on culinary, baking, and crafts. We always invite professionals from the areas of health, beauty, female empowerment, and social assistance to be able to talk about these rights. Many of the women we serve have lost their companions by death, and others are separated. We began to realize that many of these women began to seek an escape in alcoholic beverages. Once a week, we have a dance with a teacher. During that time, women develop the capacity to take care of their emotional state. They are always accompanied by a psychologist who enables a conversation circle. This is part of what we call the service of coexistence.

It is also important to talk about health, because there is no way not to connect food with health. Some mothers leave their houses around 4h30 in the morning; they do not have good conditions to take care of their children's food. The children end up eating any nonsense, such as cookies that are not nutritious. Today, we have children who are eleven, twelve years old, with high triglyceride rates, with high blood sugar, children being hospitalized because they are diabetic. This is all the result of bad feeding. It is a *nutricide*.

5.6 *Challenges and Future*

One of our challenges is to be able to maintain the quality of the food. First, food is very expensive in our territory. There is also the challenge related to the quality food that arrives in the Baixada Fluminense, in the West zone, in these peripheral zones. I call this *food racism*, because the quality is not the same as in other regions of the city.

Another challenge is that every day, a greater number of people show up looking for a meal. We try to first serve the

seventy-five registered families, but we cannot say no to someone who knocks on the door. We take the name, ID, and signature of the person to make a registration first, because we need to prove that.

The religions of the African matrix are the ones that suffer most from religious intolerance. This is another challenge. We are all in favour of everyone having their religious preferences, but some groups do not see this as a choice. They see this as having their religion being the only one and the best of all, which is absurd and dangerous. There is, in fact, no respect. I usually say that people say that the State is secular, but there is no such secularity.

Finally, the government today recognizes the Traditional Peoples of African Matrices, but we do not know the day of tomorrow. That is why the solidarity kitchen program needs to become a law, otherwise the next one that sits in the government chair ends the program.

6. *Iya Itanajara de Oxum* and the experience of Porto Alegre

6.1 *Itanajara's Introduction*

My name is Itanajara Dione Nascimento de Almeida, or *Iya Itanajara de Oxum*, as I am known. I am a member of the Cabinda Nation of the Bantu people. I work as the national coordinator of finances for FONSANPOTMA and as the executive coordinator for FONSANPOTMA in the city of Porto Alegre. I am also a member of the National Food Security Council, the Food Security Council for the State of Rio Grande do Sul, and the Municipal Council of the Black People of Porto Alegre. In addition, I am a delegate to the Conference of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix and the Community of *Terreiros*.

6.2 *World Social Forum and FONSANPOTMA*

I am part of FONSANPOTMA, which is an entity that organizes itself in a forum format to think about and guarantee the food security of people and traditional communities of the African matrix. We have integrated this forum into a political action during the World Social Forum – FSM in Porto Alegre.

From the perspective of the *terreiros*, work in food security is silent work that few hear, and do not realize that it comes from somewhere, like the work that ants do. On the other hand, people in situations of food insecurity and hunger have difficulty accessing spaces and territories of help. Often, it takes time for people with hunger to realize that they need help and that they have the right to help. This partially explains the invisibility of food security work done by the *terreiros*.

Terreiros, are also referred as UTTs²³ (Traditional Territorial Units). Food is routinely produced and distributed to children, collaborators or sympathizers in the *terreiros*. Many solidarity actions are carried out, especially in communities with a high index of vulnerability. *Terreiros* partner with other entities to search for food to distribute to those in a state of hunger or food insecurity.

During the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005, an internal coexistence space was created, called the People's Complex, where traditional foods from the *terreiros* were offered. The People's Complex was built in the format of a tent where we set up a food square to offer to the participating public of the World Social Forum traditional foods, produced by a group of traditional authorities of the POTMA. Our traditional foods have always been sacred, being part only of internal events of the *terreiros*. During the World Social Forum, this food was offered to people beyond the *terreiros*, and more people could appreciate what we know, and what we do. In this space, we also organized a solidarity economy market with products and services of the POTMA. The People's Complex not only had food, but also had a market with

crafts, people doing braids, etc. Anyway, it was all a culture being presented, and a lot of people were mobilized around service, food and market. People, outside of the tradition, began to know what we do.

6.3 *Banquetaço Action and the Pandemic*

In 2019, the dismantling of the National Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONSEA) was among the first actions of our newly elected president, causing general despair. All states that had a CONSEA (Council for Food and Nutrition Security) organized actions in response to this act, and demonstrations took place throughout Brazil called *Banquetaços*²⁴. Here in Porto Alegre, I was part of the *Banquetaço* that served traditional African-based food. We served more than 800 people in front of the Legislative Assembly of Porto Alegre, including ordinary people, homeless people, African immigrants, parliamentarians, councillors... a diverse public. It was a historic milestone where various organizations worked together to make it happen.

The following year, we were hit by the pandemic, and it was a lot of work. Initially, the pandemic affected the upper and middle classes more, who sent domestic workers and day labourers to their homes for fear of contamination. But in the communities, life continued as normal, bars and local services remained open. It took a while for Covid to reach the peripheries. For a while, there were two worlds: the middle-class neighbourhoods where everything was closed, and the communities, where it seemed like the pandemic wasn't happening.

Then the pandemic reached the peripheral areas, and we had to worry about people who, in addition to being isolated, lost their family members day after day. Hunger was implacable, and we went out again in search of food to cope with the countless bereaved families. The State Government had no action plan against hunger in the pandemic in these areas, and several organizations filed a lawsuit against the government of the State of Rio Grande do Sul to enable the arrival of food in the periphery. The third time we won the case, and only in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, 5,000 basic food baskets were distributed. We participated in the distribution of these baskets and in other mobilization actions with *Ação da Cidadania* (Action of Citizenship)²⁵. We also participated in actions to enable access to food, such as asking for food at traffic lights, walks and the act of embracing the public market. During the pandemic, the importance of the Houses of Tradition (*terreiros*/UTTs) in food security also became evident, as they were one of the only places where we could find animal protein.

6.4 *Mapping of Solidarity Kitchens*

In 2023, with the change of government²⁶ and the return of CONSEA, the federal government began to see the African-based solidarity kitchens as an instrument for food security. With the advice of government representatives, we realized the importance of recording our activities in reports to provide public transparency. We began to worry about putting more information about our kitchens on paper: What do they serve? What do they consume? What size? What are the needs of each one? We also began to systematically register the beneficiaries of the solidarity kitchens of the UTTs. With CONSEA, we had access to documents that guaranteed this process of systematization and recognition as an African-based solidarity kitchen²⁷.

6.5 Flood in Rio Grande do Sul

Between April and May 2024, the state of Rio Grande do Sul was devastated by storms and floods. It was considered "the worst climate tragedy in the history of Rio Grande do Sul" (CNN Brasil, 2024). "According to Civil Defense, 172 people were killed and over 629,000 were forced from their homes" in the state (G1 RS, 2024).

In 2024, while we were identifying our UTTs as solidarity kitchens and trying to get them officially recognized, once again, we had to mobilize to access food. The flood in Porto Alegre hit suddenly, forcing people out of their homes and into UTTs that welcomed them—but did not have enough food to provide for all the families. Another local mobilization

began so that the POTMA could receive supplies to support the families coming together at that moment to save lives. Many people lost everything—except their faith.

The floodwaters also invaded many shelters²⁸, and people were moved to larger *terreiros*, known as “welcoming *terreiros*”. A central food distribution hub was created in partnership with the Black Social Club. For 45 days, the welcoming *terreiros* served 27,000 people daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. People went there for everything: water, food, even clothing. Multiple partnerships were formed, including with the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC), whose students helped with registrations and data tracking. We also partnered with the Red Cross and many others. With *Ação da Cidadania*, we created several food distribution points in *terreiros* located in peripheral neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, ten days after the flood, we learned of incidents of religious intolerance, which highlights the complexity of the logistics involved in feeding our people.

6.6 Legitimization of Solidarity Kitchens

We have gathered a network of seventy-four solidarity kitchens in the state of Rio Grande do Sul registered with CONAB²⁹. Despite the difficulties, the efforts to legitimize the solidarity kitchens in Rio Grande do Sul continue. This is important because by registering UTTs as kitchens, they can access the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and thereby receive public policy to support their lives.

7. Olamidê Lessa and FONSANPOTMA

7.1 Lessa's Introduction

My traditional name is *Olamidê*³⁰. My legal name is Maria Aparecida da Silva Lessa. I am a woman perceived as white, which, in a racist society, places me in a position of privilege and demands great responsibility and commitment from me within the social movement of antiracist struggle and with my identity as “Traditional People of African Matrix” (SEPIR, 2013). I am an educator by training and hold education as a tool of struggle and transformation. In every path I have taken, education has always been at the forefront or has placed itself there.

My favorite childhood game was playing school, and when I had my daughter, it was also the school that we most often played and interacted through (that daughter is now an educator herself, and my youngest son is following the same path). I believe, however, that:

“No one becomes an educator on a certain Tuesday at four in the afternoon. No one is born an educator or destined to be one. We become educators, in practice and through reflection on that practice.” (Freire, 1991, p. 58). I quote Paulo Freire because I see my very existence grounded in education due to this deep urge to reflect and interact with the world around me, to live and feel collectively. A good educator is always open to learning—because education is an exchange. This view of education is what led me to leave the system, resigning from the Rio de Janeiro city government in 2010, and instead working directly with those who most needed my guidance.

From there, the tutoring and preparatory program “*Letra de Lessa*” was born, today known as “*Ori-entar*”³¹ *Prepara*”³². Over more than a decade of work, other projects emerged as well: the *Centro de Educação e Cultura Memórias Alimentam* (Center for Education and Culture “Memories Nourish”), the *Espaço de Educação, Ressignificação e Ensino* (ERÊ Space)³³ and *Cozinha Ancestral e Solidária Memórias Alimentam*³⁴ (Ancestral and Solidarity Kitchen “Memories Nourish”). This journey brought me closer to my students, their families, and the community where I taught and lived. It organically led me into the political struggles where I now find myself—sure that I have always been part of this fight, because when we educate with responsibility, we educate for social and political life, we educate to transform.

In this sense, I affirm: “I don’t write only because it gives me pleasure, but also because I feel politically committed, because I want to convince others—without deceiving them—that the dream or dreams I speak of, write about, and fight for are worth trying for” (Freire, 1994, p. 15–16). This personal account offers that possibility—it gives us a voice, treats us as subjects of the movement, and allows those who read it to understand that it is possible.

7.2 Being a Traditional People of African Matrix

At the same time the projects were being born, my pursuit of learning was nurtured through specializations in the areas of ethnic-racial education, African history, cooperativism, and communication. This search reconnected me with my ancestry, given that institutional racism experienced during the years of formal education does not teach an understanding of the formation of our society through the lens of people kidnapped from the African continent, nor the Indigenous peoples of our country. This recovery led me to the initiation and reconnection process with my existence in *Candomblé*³⁵ in 2015 and to the study and practices of *Jurema Sagrada*³⁶. This process allowed me to better understand the structure of my family and the memories left by my ancestors, since my family reflects miscegenation (Geledés, 2019) as a form of whitening Brazilian society. This was a cycle shift that merged with the invitation to participate in Rio de Janeiro, in the National Forum for Food and Nutritional Security of Traditional Peoples of African Matrix (FONSANPOTMA).

7.3 Legal Framework of the POTMA

The richness of the work in this forum lies in the struggle for ancestral legacy stemming from the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, while focusing on the peoples who made that crossing—not only through the lens of the forced diaspora, but to give voice beyond religious matters, with a focus on traditional territorial units (UTTs)³⁷, which “maintain ties with their surrounding communities, serving as spaces with enormous potential for promoting health, education, culture, and food security” (SEPIR, 2013). For this reason, FONSANPOTMA promotes the development of public policies through conceptual debate, reinforcing what is established in Decree 6040/2007, which instituted the National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities. FONSANPOTMA has been one of the main advocates in shaping the Conceptual Framework, followed by the Legal Framework of POTMA, officially presented since 2022 (Agência Câmara de Notícias, 2022). This is fundamental for the implementation of reparative policies to ensure food security and sovereignty for our people.

7.4 Territory and Resistance

For us, POTMA, territories are essential—they are where collective life happens and develops, considering our histories, worldviews, socioeconomic structures, and the political dynamics in which we are embedded. The institutional invisibility of traditional territories becomes apparent when we speak about the city of Rio de Janeiro. Known for its beautiful beaches and intense urbanization, who could imagine that within such a globally renowned place there exists a multitude of traditional peoples and communities, right? The territory where we have been resisting and writing our stories—fighting for traditional food and for the preservation of our practices, while also reclaiming silenced memories.

What we now know as the city of Rio de Janeiro was, during the era of slavery between the 16th and 19th centuries, one of the main receivers of enslaved Africans from various regions of the African continent. Its main entry point was the Valongo Wharf in the Port Zone, which has been recognized since 2017 as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Many

movements continue to fight for the recognition of the legacy of these ancestors. Despite progress, persecution and racism persist. In an urban center like Rio, the most symbolic challenges are territorial preservation and food insecurity.

How can we maintain our traditional food, ensure our food security and a system that guarantees our sovereignty? As POTMA, these questions are fundamental because we organize around the territory and have a strong connection with nature as culturally distinct peoples with their own civilizational values—preserving traditions, knowledge, and identities. To be a traditional people of African heritage is to live in territory and ancestral resistance.

7.5 *Traditional Food Systems and Sustainability*

Food is a central point for the POTMA. Every rite of passage involves food. Food is part of all our processes, including traditional slaughter, a practice that has been guaranteed by the Federal Supreme Court (STF, 2018). When we slaughter an animal, this is understood as an exchange, an act of gratitude. I eat and nourish the earth that nourishes me. This is circularity. It is this cycle, this lived experience, that we have. The being that is slaughtered will feed and ensure food security for an entire community.

Food goes beyond the act of eating—for our people, it is a system that respects nature and each of us. Our Traditional Territorial Units carry this knowledge deeply rooted. When we offer food to *Iemanjá* in the sea, we are affirming that the sea is important. When we offer to *Oxum*, we are saying that rivers and waterfalls are important. All our sacred beings' express elements of nature, and this makes us responsible and sustainable. What is now called climate justice has always been the foundation of who we are.

We, along with our Indigenous relatives, are the answer to a more balanced world when it comes to environmental and sustainable issues. That is why the pact built with our relatives needs to be renewed every day. A *caboclo* is not just a religious entity—it is ancestral wisdom, a lesson that hunting cannot mean waste but food security, which guarantees health and our cycles of existence. Preserving and educating people about the POTMA food system is about reconnecting and preparing our youth for sovereignty and food security.

7.6 *Education and the Re-signification of Teaching*

On this journey with FONSANPOTMA, I continue to strengthen my essence to uphold education as a foundation of my struggle and identity. Educating and Re-signifying Teaching is a space for popular education within the Center for Education “Memories Feed”, a space connected to the Ancestral Kitchen “Memories Feed.”

Its purpose is to put struggles into practice and ensure they reach the grassroots through a non-formal education network nourished by traditional knowledge and practices. It follows a decentralized, collective sociological and philosophical approach focused on traditional Afro-Brazilian communities, in dialogue with our Indigenous relatives and other traditional peoples and communities—strengthening us in the pursuit of climate justice through the teachings these communities preserve.

In this work, we proudly celebrate a beautiful tradition: the *Caruru of Gratitude*, a story described above in this chapter. Since 2018, with donations, we have cooked and donated meals, empowering our ancestral kitchens as spaces of memory and nourishment through this powerful and heartfelt collective initiative.

We also organize educational gatherings and festivals, such as *Ancestral Roots Gatherings*, *Nylewá Festival*, and the educational network training of the project “POTMA and Food Systems in Education”. Additionally, we participate in numerous partnerships, councils, and conferences. It is a termite-like effort—working persistently to hollow out the oppressive system so that, when it realizes it, it has already weakened and is ready to fall. Even though laws exist to support education rooted in African and Indigenous knowledge systems, colonial-era demonization processes—perpetuated by the state in the post-colonial period and fueled today by neo-Pentecostal

movements—continue to strengthen the racist and exclusionary structure of our society, especially within formal, public and private education, and political institutions.

As a woman of African matrix tradition and from a family structured by the power of grandmothers, mothers, aunts... I am aware that I am an individual being, but also *populated*. I do not walk alone—I am surrounded mainly by women and children. I walk alongside Black women and those seen as white as me, and I must name them because food security is tied to the feminine and to the power each one of us women hold to celebrate, love, create, gestate, and nourish³⁸.

8. Conclusion

The struggle for food security and sovereignty in Brazil is complex, and the life writings presented here offer us several reflections. One of them is about the value and strength of collectives, whether they are youth groups, communities, religious gatherings, or associations that form networks and social support systems, which are fundamental not only for food and nutrition security and sovereignty, but for life itself.

The second reflection is on the importance of the state as a partner, recognizing and addressing the great debt it owes to Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous populations in Brazil.

Finally, it is important to consider these lifewritings as powerful tools for visibility and social transformation. They not only preserve memories, practices, and ancestral knowledge, but also denounce historical silences and point to concrete paths for confronting inequalities. For example, Traditional Peoples of African Matrix build daily networks of care, sustainable food systems, and liberating educational processes, showing that it is possible — and urgent — to shape public policies from the territories and traditions that sustain life in its entirety.

Recognizing and strengthening these experiences also means fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, n.d), especially those aimed at eradicating poverty (by working in vulnerable communities, promoting social inclusion and dignity); ensuring food security (by valuing traditional and solidarity-based food systems as the foundation of food security); providing quality education (with a pedagogical practice that reinterprets formal education through ancestry and territory); achieving gender equality (by recognizing and strengthening the fundamental role of women in maintaining life and culture); reducing inequalities (by denouncing institutional racism and building alternatives of resistance and care); and promoting climate action (by practicing and educating for a balanced relationship with nature). There will not be just or sustainable development as long as the knowledge, rights, and territories of traditional peoples are neglected. As this journey teaches us, to educate, to nourish, and to resist are profoundly political acts that are essential to building a more dignified, diverse, and balanced world.

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Notes

1. Terreiros are the temples, sacred territories, also called houses, where Candomblé ceremonies are performed.
2. For more information about POTMA and FONSANPOTMA see also the chapter of Nogueira et al (2026) in this volume.
3. Omibirim means daughter in Yoruba. (Ase Dan Fe Ero, n.d)
4. The Iyalorixá is the religious, cultural, and social leadership of a Candomblé's *terreiro* that mediates communication between the community members and the Orixás (Santos, 2011).
5. Iya means mother in Yoruba. (Quadri-Adekambi, 2023)
6. Oxum, the divinity of fresh waters, is syncretized in Bahia with Our Lady of Candeias. Her archetype is that of women who, beneath a graceful and elegant appearance, conceal a powerful and vital inner will. (Memorial, 2009)
7. The prefix "ola" is associated with joy, dignity, and prosperity. In its literal translation, the name Olamide means "wealth has come." (TAG, 2018)
8. Referring to the Federal Cash Transfer Program *Pé-de Meia*, created in 2023 to combat secondary school evasion by financially rewarding students that finish their school years in public high schools. For more, see: ECLAC, 2023
9. Azoilda Loretto da Trindade (1957–2015) was a Black feminist intellectual and educator who dedicated herself to theories and practices in the field of anti-racist education (see Unicamp, 2023).
10. Gurufim or gurufinho: "the art of celebrating, singing, dancing, eating, and drinking to honor the deceased." (Nascimento, 2019, p.122)
11. "The celebration in Bahia, which has spread to other states, begins with the offering of dishes to seven boys who symbolize Cosme, Damião, Dou— a variation of Idowu in an African language [also known as Doum]—Alabá, Crispim, Crispiniano, and Talabi. It is also common to see, alongside the image representing the twins, a third figure called Dou or Idowu, a name given in African families to the child born after twins." (Indio do Brasil, 2023)
12. Afro-Brazilian civilizational values are principles and cultural practices that reflect the influence of African culture in shaping Brazilian identity and history. These values, which are plural and interconnected, include elements such as circularity, religiosity, corporeality, musicality, cooperativism, ancestry, memory, playfulness, vital energy (axé), and orality. For more see Trindade, 2005.
13. The expression "cria" in Rio de Janeiro refers to someone who grew up in a place and embodies its customs, speaks its dialect, uses

its slang, and carries the knowledge of that space.

14. The *Agência de Redes para a Juventude* is a social program developed by the non-governmental organization Avenida Brasil – Instituto de Criatividade Social. Avenida Brasil was founded in 2006 by artists and activists from peripheric territories of the city Rio de Janeiro and other cities. For more, see *Agência de Redes para a Juventude*, 2022.
15. The sociologist Herberts de Souza, known as Betinho, was a Brazilian Human rights and food activist that was exiled in Canada in the 1970s. For more on Betinho see *Projeto Betinho*, n.d. For more see Introduction, in this volume.
16. The Terra Vista is a settlement from the Brazilian Landless Movement. For information in English, see <https://springprize.org/shortlisted/assentamento-terra-vista/>
17. *Quilombola* communities are ethnic groups—predominantly composed of rural or urban Black populations—that self-identify based on specific relationships with the land, kinship, territory, ancestry, and their own cultural traditions and practices (MDA, 2025).
18. Solidarity kitchens are community-driven efforts that use social innovation to fight hunger by offering free meals to individuals experiencing food insecurity, economic hardship, or homelessness. The Regional Forums of Solidary Kitchens are initiatives that seek to enable spaces for decision-making, public debate, political coordination, and advocacy within public policies and programs—such as the recently launched Federal Solidarity Kitchens Program. This program was created to support the work of solidarity kitchens operating across Brazil, with backing from the National Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security under the Ministry of Social Development and Assistance, Family and the Fight Against Hunger (SESAN/MDS). Established by Law No. 14.628/2023 and regulated by Decree No. 11.937/2024, the Solidarity Kitchen Program is designed to provide resources for the preparation and distribution of free, high-quality meals, prioritizing individuals in vulnerable situations, including people experiencing homelessness and food and nutritional insecurity. (MDS, n.d.; Lobo, 2024).
19. Santa Cruz is a neighborhood in the West Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro, the furthest from the city center.
20. The National Food Acquisition Program (PAA) purchases food directly from family farmers without requiring a bidding process and distributes it to people facing food and nutritional insecurity. It also supplies the social assistance network, public facilities dedicated to food and nutrition security, and both public and charitable educational institutions. The program's goals are to support and strengthen family farming by fostering job creation, income generation, and local economic growth, while also improving food access and helping to combat food and nutritional insecurity. (Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 2024).
21. Also called *Iansã*, the *orixá* of winds, storms, and funerary rituals. (Vechi, 2025).
22. As previously mentioned by Janete, *acarajé* is a sacred bean's fritter.
23. UTTs can also be called *terreiros*. "Data from the 2010 Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) point out that, in Rio Grande do Sul, 157 thousand people considered themselves practitioners of *umbanda* or *candomblé* - the data from the 2022 Census related to religion have not yet been released. The State is ahead, including, of Bahia with 47 thousand, and of Rio de Janeiro with 141 thousand." (Netto, 2024)
24. See also Fagundes et al, 2026, in this volume.
25. For more on Action of Citizenship, see the chapter from Moraes & Rocha, 2026, in this volume.
26. President Lula da Silva, from the Workers Party (PT) was elected in 2022 and took office on January 1st, 2023.
27. The solidarity kitchens, run by civil society and financed with public resources, represent a social technology for combating food and nutritional insecurity. The Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and the Fight Against Hunger (MDS) coordinates the program within the framework of the National Food and Nutritional Security System (SISAN). Created in 2023, the Solidarity Kitchen Program in Brazil aims to provide free, high-quality meals to the population, especially those in situations of vulnerability and social risk in urban areas (Brasil, n/d).
28. "A survey conducted by NEGA/UFRGS and Uniafro estimated that 254 *terreiros* were completely destroyed; 176 were partially damaged; and 27 served as aid centers." (Ortega, 2024)
29. CONAB _ Companhia Nacional de Abastecimento /The National Supply Company (CONAB). According to Itanajara, by July 2025, the Rio Grande do Sul state has approximately 180 solidarity kitchens approved by the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), some of which are still waiting for the official call for proposals to be included in the Food Acquisition Program (PAA).
30. Traditional name received as recognition for the work and the journey dedicated to the antiracist struggle.
31. The name includes a hyphen to emphasize the word "ori," a Yoruba word meaning "head," which in Candomblé is written with a capital letter, "Orí," as it is associated with an Orixá that represents intelligence, consciousness, destiny, and the connection between a person and their life purpose.
32. A preparatory course for children, youth, and adults for entrance exams and public service exams, as well as pedagogical guidance to complement formal education.
33. In Umbanda and Candomblé, the *Erês* are entities that represent spiritual children—intermediaries between people and the Orixás. They are spirits of children who have either never incarnated or who have already lived. This part of the project focuses on early childhood education, bringing women to the center of the discussion, as they are the majority in both the formal and informal education of children.
34. The kitchen, now recognized by the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), functions as a social and educational space that preserves memory and values the food and nutritional culture of Traditional Peoples of African Descent through the ancestral legacy left by those who, even when enslaved and brought to Brazilian lands during the colonial period, managed to preserve and pass down their knowledge.
35. This is part of the culture of the Traditional Peoples of African Descent: Afro-Brazilian religiosity, born from the experiences of African peoples and their descendants, as a form of resistance and cultural preservation in the face of forced catechization during the colonial period—a tradition that, unsurprisingly, has been heavily persecuted and threatened.

36. Sacred Jurema is a Northeastern Brazilian religion of Indigenous origin, centered around the sacred Jurema plant and the ritual drink made from it. With strong ties to nature and regional historical figures, its oral tradition blends elements of Afro-Brazilian religions, Kardecist Spiritism, and Popular Catholicism.(Silva, 2019).
37. Traditional territorial units are geographic spaces where traditional communities live and share environmental resources, threats, and conflicts. They are places where communities can maintain their culture and customs.
38. I am grateful to Omobirin Verônica de Odé, Abiãs Vitória, Bruna, Rosângela, and Nathália, Ajoîê Alexia de Oyá, Ekedji Sandra Aleixo de Baru, Iyá Vera Panno, Ekedi Pâmela, Iyalorixá Iyá Nalva de Oxum, Iyá Vera de Oyá, Gayaku Jokolosy, Janete Santos, my carnal mother Sandra, my aunt Nádia, my daughter Thuany, and in memory of the most warrior women I have known—my grandmothers Belmira and Laura.

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