

The Brazilian Zero Hunger social programme implications in achieving sustainable development

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse the progress taken by Brazil towards the accomplishment of a sustainable development, mainly highlighting the success of the Zero Hunger social programme in achieving the elimination of starvation. As one of the essential pillars to the sustainable development, the State's social performance demands actions directed to the elimination of extreme poverty and hunger, establishing a basis for equitable growth. It is necessary to clarify the juridical and constitutional framework of Brazil, aiming to emphasise the Zero Hunger importance in achieving the Brazilian Republic's goals and reaching an international pattern on sustainable development. Also, it will be stressed that the international order influences Brazilian domestic law and is one of the main aspects for the Zero Hunger program development.

Keywords: *Brazil; Zero Hunger; Sustainable Development; Constitution*

Introduction

The debate on food security and nutrition emerged worldwide in the early 90s of the last century, mainly boosted by the World Food Summit in 1996. Brazil's complex social crisis by that time, especially in the sectors regarding the matter of hunger, reflected even more the imperative necessity to the implementation of policies capable to provide effectively the improvement of the social standards in the country.

In this sense, the Zero Hunger Program (ZHP) emerged in 2001 as a key policy of President Lula's government plan, put as a major priority among the social sector. The program appealed initially by studies developed by many technical and academic scholars, as well as by political operators, aiming to reach three main objectives, namely: a) assess the status of programmes to fight hunger in Brazil before the commitments made by the country in

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World Food Summit 1996; b) resume society mobilisation around the issue of food security and; c) engage the government on federal, state and municipal levels, as well as the NGOs and the civil society in a feasible proposal to combat hunger (Belik & Del Grossi, 2003: 09).

According to the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil (2012), the Zero Hunger Program is:

a strategy driven by the federal government to ensure the human right to adequate nourishment to people with limited access to food. This strategy is part of the promotion of food and nutritional security, seeking for social inclusion and for the achievement of the population's most vulnerable to hunger citizenship. (para. 01)

In addition, the programme is guided by the fulfilment of the fundamental right to food. This right, bounded by both Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Brazilian's Constitution of 1988, also treated the ZHP as a universal matter once it ought to encompass structuring actions that triggers the development and also provide self-sustainability of the local economies (Belik & Del Grossi, 2003: 10). According to IBGE (*Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics*), the Program intends to affect around 10 million families, which means an amount between 44 to 53 million people under starvation. The Government also appraises that the investments would comprise a total of 1,8 billion Reais, around 1.5 dollars, per year (Ministério Público do Estado da Bahia: 2, 8).

2. The Brazilian Constitution and the Zero Hunger Program

Initially, to understand the implications of the Brazilian Constitution and the promotion of the Zero Hunger Program, it is important to internationally highlight the establishment of the sustainable development model, analysing its effects on Brazil's domestic law.

In the 20th century, the intensification of industrial capitalism and the unlimited exploitation of the working class brought forth new concepts of development. The economic doctrine began to consider, then, that mass consumption should be linked to social policies, understanding that the economy was favoured by the existence of social rights. This view was prominently advocated by John Maynard Keynes (2006: 99-100) and was fundamental for the development of the Welfare State in the 20th century (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie [OIF], 2012: 23).

The inclusion of social aspects in the concept of development was an essential step towards the present understanding of sustainable development. Nevertheless, the law has also evolved to embrace this new trend, guaranteeing the so-called social rights, expressing the need of state intervention to implement various spheres of human life such as health, education, food, dignity and others (Dimoulis & Martins, 2008: 32-34).

From 1970s onwards, mankind acknowledges another key aspect to the development: nature. The huge industrial growth and environmental degradation led human beings to reflect on their role in the balance of the planet. It was understood that

natural resources are finite and that its unrestrained use threatens the perpetuation of the human species on the planet, because it exhausts and degrades the environment, essential means to our survival.

It has to be highlighted that nowadays the question of sustainable development is considered based on three pillars: economic, environmental and social. These three aspects are considered by governments and global society as a guarantee for structuring a development that takes into account the limitations of human beings and our responsibility to future generations (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie [OIF], 2012: 24).

The concept of sustainable development was outlined in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The conference had as its main results the Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA], 2006: 02). The Rio Declaration lists a number of requirements for the achievement of sustainable development, including poverty eradication (Principle 5), the elimination of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production (Principle 8) and the application of the precautionary principle (Principle 15) (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1992).

As a result of the international mobilisation for the sustainable development implementation, the Brazilian government established a series of internal programmes and legislation to implement the social, economic and environmental aspects of the concept. One of the main aspects

to be considered concerning the domestic legal system of Brazil is the adoption of a new Constitution in 1988. Outlined as the "Citizen Constitution", the new text brought the country to a new era of democracy and respect to the fundamental rights. It settled the basis for a sustainable development model and inspired the Zero Hunger Programme.

It is important to highlight that the Brazilian Constitution is defined as analytical or comprehensive, since it contains norms which go beyond the traditional core of constitutions, that is the state's structure and organisation (Mirkin-Guetzévitch, 1951: 17). The Brazilian Fundamental Law deals with many social aspects and also establishes the economic national framework and environmental protection measures, for example. The Constitution has one specific title for the economic order (Title VII – The Economic and Financial Order), where are stated the main principles and objectives of the economic activity. The next title (Title VIII – The Social Order) deals with the social aspects, such as health, social security, education, culture, sports, science and technology, family and others. Inserted in this last title, the Constitution establishes the right to an ecologically balanced environment (Article 225), considered as a fundamental human right.

When it comes to the right to food, the fundamental aspect of the Zero Hunger Programme, it is interesting to acknowledge that only in 2010 the Brazilian Congress approved a Constitutional Amendment (CA n.64) to change the Article 6 of the Constitution, to read as follows:

Article 6. Education, health, food, work, housing, leisure, security, social security, protection of motherhood and

childhood, and assistance to the destitute are social rights, as set forth by this Constitution.

The inclusion of the food as a social right endorses the state's commitment to implement the minimum conditions for human beings to develop themselves, mainly through public policies. The right to food has a *status positivus*, since it demands a positive intervention from the state on the individual's sphere, achieving the consolidation of the constitutional norm (Dimoulis & Martins, 2008: 67). In this sense, the state has the duty, according to the Brazilian law, to promote policies aiming the proper access to food, as a fundamental right (*positive faktische Handlungen*) (Alexy, 1996: 179-181).

The right to food was formally recognised by the General Assembly of the UN in 2010, but before that it is important to notice that the aspect of food was inserted in the consideration of other fundamental rights recognised by the Constitution, besides other international conventions and treaties that Brazil is a part of. In this aspect, it should be noticed that the Article 1 of the Constitution determines that the Brazilian state is founded on the respect to the dignity of the human person, which includes many essential aspects to the individuals' development, such as the proper access to food, for instance.

In this sense, we can notice that although the Brazilian Constitution imposed the state obligation to act in a way to guarantee proper access to food, essential aspect of the human dignity, only after the Zero Hunger Programme (2003) the government directed its concerns to this question. Moreover, the Brazilian Congress

approved the right to food amendment in 2010, a fact that shows the importance of the systematic analysis of the legal text, more than a literal interpretation.

Furthermore, as it will be showed, the international order played an important role regarding the establishment of the programme, mainly through the inclusion of sustainable development as one of the objectives to be accomplished by the new international actors, the developing countries.

3. The Zero Hunger Programme and the international order

In a deeper analysis, we reach the conclusion that the implementation of the Zero Hunger Programme is a consequence not solely from the Brazilian Federal Constitution. Indeed, the current Brazilian position in the international scenario reflects some of the international agreements concerning social and humanitarian development signed by the country. Nevertheless, Brazilian efforts towards a contemporary pattern of sustainable development are undeniable, as its leading role in the bloc of the developing countries continues to increase.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, has implied in solid reflections in the Brazilian constitutional order. Some of the principles fostered in the Federal Constitution are clear consequences of the Declaration. As a classic exemplification, the principle of the due process of law (in the Brazilian constitution, enshrined in article 5, LIV), was already previously stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article XVII, 2). Likewise, the

sustainable governance sought by the country is also irrefutable, as it has solid implications in Brazil's legal framework.

Moreover, a sustainable pattern of food access continues to be highlighted by new international tools. One of the most recent examples is the "The Future We Want" document, adopted in consensus at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Among its provisions, it emphasises the necessity to provide universal access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food (Article 108), and the relevance of the implementation of a global pattern of sustainable agriculture (Article 110). The document is only an example of the broader reception of the sustainable development patterns sought by contemporary legal tools, and the implementation of the Zero Hunger Programme is a solid exemplification of the Brazilian inclination towards the achievement of these standards.

As a matter of fact, the Zero Hunger Programme grew beyond its own initial boundaries, when first established by the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger, which later led the body to become the National Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition, tied to the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MSD), created in 2004. One of its main initiatives, the Family Grant Programme (*Programa Bolsa Família*, in Portuguese) reached and supported 12 million families considered as poor or extremely poor (families with monthly income below 82 US\$) by 2009, which means around 48 million people. Those prospects enabled the initiative later to reach the

status of Zero Hunger Strategy. Being so, its perspectives are gradually by the aforementioned Ministry and initiatives carried by the FAO (Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional, 2009: 29-30).

3.1 The Millennium Development Goals and the Zero Hunger Programme

Remarkably, the creation of the Zero Hunger Programme was also an effort to reach several international standards sought by Brazil and expressed through international conventions towards the eradication of starvation. One of the most notable of these patterns is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were agreed upon in the Millennium General Assembly of the United Nations in 2000, by all member states to be accomplished until 2015. Since the establishment of these perspectives, Brazil has reached notable advancements in some of the aimed goals. Regarding the Zero Hunger Programme, the fundamental MDG is goal 1, which concerns the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Indeed, the social programme was one of the main initiatives that turned possible for several Brazilians to quit the poverty line through a sensitive income distribution.

Collaterally, goals 4 (reduction of child mortality rates), 5 (improvement of maternal health) and 6 (the fighting of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria) have seen a considerable progress on the perspectives of the Zero Hunger, as the income redistribution turned possible broader investments in these sections of basic human needs.

3.2 The influence of international parameters and programmes in the implementation of the Zero Hunger Program

The main sustainable pillar fostered by the Zero Hunger Programme is the establishment of a pattern of food security. Being so, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) casts the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) definition as one of the most careful concepts attributed to food security.

In the conception adopted by the FAO (2003, para. 3), a main element concerns the food availability, crossing questions such as famine and food crisis. Moreover, the concept itself integrates the even more complex concept of human security, previously introduced by the Resolution 11274 of the United Nations General Assembly. Throughout this resolution, the UN recognised human security as an effort to identify the contemporary challenges to the survival and dignity of all the peoples.

Fostering a broader conception of human security, a pioneering initiative in Latin America was the Mexican programme *Oportunidades* (Opportunities), also known as PROGRESA, from 1997. The social purposes of the PROGRESA were directed to three major areas, namely health care assistance, education and food assessment (Belik & Del Grossi, 2003: 12).

Notwithstanding, one of the main challenges of implementation of previous social programmes in Mexico was the problem of corruption in the country. Even though this question has not being fully overcome yet, the PROGRESA is seen as a successful

initiative, as it reached the mark of 4.2 million households only in its first six years of implementation, having an evident emphasis on development of rural territories in order to minimise social disparities (Belik & Del Grossi, 2003: 12).

Bearing this viewpoint in mind, it is actually the Brazilian Zero Hunger Programme that earned the most positive perception of the international community. The main reason of the success of the programme could be attributed to the direct and indirect perspectives it used to tackle hunger and social disparities. Notwithstanding, the Programme was responsible for the creation of the so-called “popular restaurants”, food and nutrition units aiming the distribution of high nutritional value meals by accessible prices; the support to the development of small farmers and, even more directly, the financial aid distributed to poor households by initiatives such as the Family Grant Programme – which promoted sensitive impacts in the development of the Brazilian domestic economy and sensitively helped to reduce the imbalance in the income distribution rates of the country.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the Zero Hunger Programme is indeed an undeniable path to achieve the sustainable development and the equitable growth. Therefore, its efforts on eradicating hunger and, consequently, on developing the social sector together with the other two pillars – environmental and economic, have been not only successful, but also a great example for the international community.

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