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FIGHTING EXTREME POVERTY  
IN BRAZIL: THE INFLUENCE  
OF CITIZENS' ACTION  
ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES

by

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Research programme on:  
Good Governance and Poverty Alleviation

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## RÉSUMÉ

Le Brésil est marqué par une grande inégalité dans la répartition des revenus et de la richesse et par une tradition d'aliénation et de passivité des pauvres — notamment durant la période de dictature politique. Ce document montre pourtant comment une société civile dynamique, portée par des préoccupations éthiques, a réussi depuis 1993 à pousser les pouvoirs publics démocratiquement élus, aux différents niveaux, ainsi que les entreprises du secteur public à entreprendre des actions qui réduisent directement la pauvreté d'une manière ou d'une autre, et ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives pour un certain nombre de pauvres.

Même si l'étendue et l'impact de ces programmes restent limités au regard des 32 millions de personnes vivant dans l'extrême pauvreté que compte le pays (en 1990), et même si l'on manque de données pour évaluer le phénomène dans son ensemble, cette approche mérite de retenir l'intérêt. Elle représente en effet une expérience à grande échelle de renouvellement des pratiques politiques, fondé sur un dialogue entre les administrations et des comités de citoyens visant à définir en commun les priorités, la mise en œuvre des actions et leur contrôle. Sur le plan politique, le principal acquis est la reconnaissance par l'ensemble de la société de la nécessité de lutter contre l'extrême pauvreté. Sur le plan pratique, toutefois, les programmes publics de « Solidarité communautaire » sont écrasés par la lourde responsabilité de résoudre un problème de pauvreté dont les racines sont profondes et qui dépasse de très loin les moyens que le gouvernement fédéral est prêt à lui consacrer. Il sera nécessaire d'adopter une stratégie plus globale qui s'attaque aux causes structurelles des inégalités au Brésil. Une telle stratégie pourrait tirer parti de cette expérience en ce qui concerne la capacité du processus démocratique à mobiliser les énergies au sein de la société.

## SUMMARY

Against the background of Brazil's highly unequal distribution of income and wealth, and its history of alienation and passivity of the poor, in particular during the years of political authoritarianism, this paper shows how an active civil society, driven by ethical concerns, has, since 1993, nudged democratic government at different levels as well as enterprises of the public sector into undertakings which alleviate poverty directly in various ways and open up new perspectives for a number of the poor.

While the reach and impact of these programmes is still rather limited in the face of the country's 32 million "extremely poor" (1990), and data are lacking for a comprehensive evaluation, the approach followed deserves attention as a large-scale experiment which introduces new political practices, based on dialogue between administrations and committees of citizens about priorities as well as implementation and monitoring of activities. In political terms, the main achievement is the acknowledgement of the need to fight extreme poverty by society at large. In practical terms, however, the government programmes of "Community Solidarity" are overburdened by the responsibility to solve the deep-rooted poverty problem which is far beyond the means the federal government is willing to commit. A broader strategy to tackle the structural roots of inequalities in Brazil will be necessary and may be facilitated by the lessons which can be learned from this experiment with regard to the potential of the democratic process to harness energies across society.

## PREFACE

Reducing poverty is not just a matter of economic development, in particular in countries with highly unequal patterns of income and wealth distribution, such as Brazil. It is also a matter of good governance with concern for the participation of the entire population in the development process for reasons of social justice and long-term development prospects. This approach calls for a responsive state which acts in partnership with a variety of social and economic actors. The sharing of information through dialogue — which may be controversial at times — can lead to more effective and efficient policies generally and, in particular, those aimed at poverty reduction.

This study describes how enhanced accountability combined with institutional innovation within a democratic framework can change the dynamics of social policies. The author presents this process from an insider's perspective, yet at the same time, with a remarkable perception of the larger issues as well as obstacles and achievements. Although this analysis of extreme poverty and citizens' action in an upper-middle income country is country specific, it should nevertheless be of great value for many other countries, whether rich or poor, as it provides insights into the socio-political processes which are relevant in the broader context of defining a new role for the state.

This paper, produced as part of the Development Centre's research programme on Good Governance and Poverty Reduction can also be seen as a contribution to the wider interest in partnership approaches for poverty reduction which call for building national ownership of policies with a view to their sustainability.

Jean Bonvin  
President  
OECD Development Centre  
November 1998

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1993, combating hunger and extreme poverty has become an explicit priority for the federal government, first with President Itamar Franco and afterwards with his successor Fernando Cardoso. To a large extent, the attention given to the problem of the extremely poor in Brazil has resulted from a campaign led by a political movement called Citizens' Action Against Hunger and Poverty and for Life. The Citizens' Action, henceforth referred to as CA, proposed that extreme poverty should not be seen as an economic problem only, but, mainly, as a deprivation of citizenship rights of those unable to provide for their own survival and that of their families. For CA, deprivation should not be construed as resulting from an inborn incapacity of these persons to contribute to the welfare of the Brazilian society, but as a consequence of structural characteristics of our social system that generate inequality and exclude large numbers of people from the minimum benefits of civilisation.

A national campaign against hunger was initiated, to open the debate on the causes of hunger and deprivation and on the means to change this situation. The main feature of the campaign which has been transformed into a permanent struggle against poverty, was to emphasise the need for civil society not only to pressure the government into action but also to find its own ways to fight hunger and deprivation through a variety of new partnerships.

At the same time as the CA was beginning its mass mobilisation against hunger, the "Hunger Map" was prepared on request of the federal government (Peliano, 1993) to serve as a basis for its policies to fight extreme poverty<sup>1</sup>. According to the "Hunger Map" there were about 32 million people in Brazil living under the extreme poverty line. Details of the *Map* were amply used in national campaigns to mobilise the population, and extensively publicised in the media and through grassroots organisations. The number *32 million* became a kind of slogan to mobilise the population. Perhaps more importantly, the study enabled a detailed portrait of the extremely poor to be drawn up, town by town. It served to identify the towns in the worst condition, making it easier to formulate emergency plans and to ask for immediate action by the authorities.

The *Map* shows that the poor are spread throughout the country, about half of them living in urban areas (including small towns). A large number of the urban poor live in the Northeast of Brazil (7.2 million). About 4.5 million live in metropolitan areas, Rio de Janeiro being the metropolitan area with the largest incidence of poverty (1.2 million people). The Northeast is also the region where one finds the largest number of rural poor (10.1 million). As a result, about 55 per cent of all the poor live in the Northeast which accounts for only 29 per cent of the total Brazilian population. Table 1 below shows the regional distribution of extreme poverty.

**Table 1. Extreme Poverty – Regional Distribution**  
1990 percentages

Region	Share of total population	Share of total number of extremely poor	Share of extremely poor over region's population
North*	5.9	2.2	13.9
Northeast	28.5	54.6	40.9
Southeast	43.5	25.2	12.4
South	15.1	12.9	18.1
Centrewest	6.8	5.2	16.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21.9</b>

\* Rural population excluded.

Source: Hunger Map.

A range of experiences with partnerships has been developed since 1993, when CA was launched. In this paper, these experiences will be presented and discussed. Their results are still hard to evaluate, since most programmes are still ongoing and the information about them is scattered and unsystematic. We will pay particular attention to the change in government policies and practices resulting from the call by CA to form partnerships. The paper consists of five sections. In the first, we present an introductory overview of poverty and inequality in Brazil. Next, we trace the origins of the Citizens' Action movement and what it represents as part of the politics of poverty reduction. Sections three and four are devoted to presenting the main forms of partnership developed between CA and government at the federal and municipal level as well as with public enterprises. The fifth and last section presents a tentative evaluation of the programmes developed so far to combat poverty. An appendix containing concise descriptions of some projects developed with the participation of the Citizens' Action closes the paper.

## I. POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL: AN INTRODUCTORY REVIEW

A number of recent studies describe in some detail which groups bear the main burden of extreme poverty and deprivation in Brazil. Of particular interest are three studies: a report on social development in Brazil, prepared by the federal government for the 1995 Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen; *An Assessment of the Poverty Situation in Brazil*, World Bank, 1995; and the *Human Development Report 1996*, a joint effort of UNDP and the Brazilian federal government's Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA). All three of them basically rely on the same sources of data. They all show not only how poverty is distributed among social groups and geographical regions, adding new data on living conditions, but also to what extent it is the result of sharp and deep-rooted inequalities in wealth and income distribution rather than the inevitably bad condition of those living in a poor country as such.

The portrait drawn above from the data on incomes is confirmed by information directly related to health conditions. Thus, infant mortality, for example, even after having been reduced from 65.8 per thousand children born alive in 1980 to 51.6 per thousand in 1990 for the whole country, is still much higher in the Northeast, 88.2 per thousand, than in the South, 26.7 per thousand (Lampreia, 1995). Similarly, looking at the regional distribution of incomes and life expectancy, the poorest group in the Northeast (51.5 years) differs dramatically from the richest group in the South (75 years).

Not surprisingly, living conditions of those living in absolute poverty are worsened by the insufficient or non-existent supply of public services such as sanitation, running water or health care. Although running water was accessible in 1995 to 76.2 per cent of the population, only 16.4 per cent of the rural population actually received it, in contrast with 90.4 per cent of those living in urban areas. The impact of these deficiencies on infant mortality is very significant: "... among the households earning per capita incomes up to half the minimum wage but having access to adequate supplies of running water and sanitation facilities, infant mortality was 51.6 per thousand of children born alive; in the group of households without access to these facilities, the rate rose to 107.9 per thousand." (Lampreia, 1995, p. 13)

Poverty is also a racial and a gender problem. While 18.3 per cent of the men employed earn up to one minimum wage and 8.8 per cent earn more than ten minimum wages, the comparable rates for women are 27.7 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively (IBGE, 1995). Discrimination in earnings is very clear, especially if one considers that, on average, women have been better schooled than men in recent years. As to ethnic discrimination, the same survey shows that black men earn on average 63 per cent of the earnings of white men, while *mulattos* fare a little better (68 per cent). The lowest position in the earnings scale is occupied by black women, earning about 68 per cent of white women's incomes.

The extent of absolute poverty in Brazil cannot be explained by the poverty of the country itself (Brazil is with \$3 640 GNP per capita in 1995 among the upper-middle-income countries, *World Development Report 1997*) but by the deep inequalities that characterise its distribution of income and wealth.



In a sample of 55 nations, Brazil has shown the highest degree of income concentration: while for 36 of these 55 countries, average incomes for the richest 10 per cent of the population were about 10 times greater than those of the poorest 40 per cent, the corresponding number for Brazil was almost thirty times greater (PNUD/IPEA, 1996, p. 17). Table 2, below, shows the increasing inequality in Brazil over 1960-90.

Table 2. **Income Distribution**

Year	Richest 20 per cent	Poorest 50 per cent
1960	54	18
1970	62	15
1980	63	14
1990	65	12

Source: PNUD/IPEA, 1996; Paes de Barros et alli, 1995.

To give another perspective of inequality: while 2.2 per cent of those employed earned more than twenty minimum wages, 22.1 per cent earned up to one minimum wage and another 20.4 per cent earned between one and two minimum wages<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, the Brazilian society is characterised by deep inequalities rather than by general poverty. The explanation for the degree of income concentration in Brazil is complex, involving many arguments. Among them is the lack of a common bond between social groups which would allow those at the highest income levels to see the rest of society as parts of a whole. In fact, the highest income groups benefit greatly from the cheap personal services provided by workers labouring sometimes under quasi-servile conditions (such as is the case with in-house maids). Elementary citizenship rights are regularly denied to these groups of workers.

Deeply regressive taxation systems and the very poor provision of public services to low-income groups make these inequalities still more acute. A very deficient system of public elementary and lower secondary schools, bankrupt health care services, etc., tend to perpetuate the lack of capabilities of those living in the lowest income ranges to obtain more productive jobs and to improve their situation.

Another fundamental explanation of the degree of income concentration in the Brazilian society is the concentration of wealth. Wealth is particularly concentrated in rural areas, in the form of land property, with consequences that spread much beyond those areas. Land property concentration is not only a factor of impoverishment of rural areas, but may be one of the most important elements generating urban poverty as well. A large proportion of the urban poor and extremely poor are migrants or children of migrants who were expelled from rural areas by the lack of chances to work or because of overexploitation of the rural workforce by landlords. About 30 million rural people have migrated to towns in the last three decades. The concentration of these migrants in the largest towns not only depresses urban wages but also creates pressures on the supply of public services and deteriorates their quality. To stop migration to the cities by preventing the rural population from being expelled from rural areas has become the main argument in favour of agrarian reform in Brazil.

Data on land property concentration are abundant. Census data for 1985 show that 0.9 per cent of landowners control 35.8 per cent of usable agricultural land in the country. The largest 2.8 per cent of landowners own 56.7 per cent of available land, while the

89.1 per cent of small landowners control only 23.4 per cent of the total usable area. The largest landowners hold land for portfolio reasons rather than as a productive asset. As a result, only 26.3 per cent of the available land is actually used. Large tracts of productive land are kept idle or are used extensively as pastures. A progressive system of property taxes was devised in the mid-sixties to stimulate landowners to either cultivate the land or to sell it, but it was never implemented. Since then, repeated attempts to impose fiscal penalties on landowners have always been defeated by the inability or unwillingness of successive governments to mobilise political support in favour of any form of agrarian reform. Another law providing for progressive taxation has just been enacted. Whether or not it will be implemented is still to be seen.

Despite the low degree of land utilisation, however, the problem of hunger in Brazil is not due to a food supply deficiency<sup>3</sup>. Nor is it entirely due to structural forms of unemployment in the cities *per se*. In fact, most households show a low proportion of unemployed individuals. The proportion of working women has reached 40.4 per cent of the labour force (IBGE/PNAD, 1995). Child labour is also frequent, the more so the lower the household income. 20.5 per cent of children aged 10 to 14 work, representing 4.7 per cent of the labour force even though the federal constitution outlaws child labour. Adolescents aged 15 to 17 represented 6.4 per cent of the labour force in 1995. Although households headed by women have a greater probability of living in poverty, the majority of the poor households are in fact headed by men, working at least 40 hours a week, and having incomes supplemented by the labour of the wife and, frequently, the children. Low incomes, earned in low-quality jobs, not necessarily unemployment, is at the root of urban poverty.

Low earnings, low-quality jobs, lack of skills of workers, low productivity and precarious labour relations are mutually reinforcing factors in the determination of urban poverty levels. Open unemployment is relatively low (an average of 5.5 per cent for 1996, according to IBGE). However, 48 per cent of the workers do not have the benefits of formal labour contracts (74 per cent of rural workers are in that situation). Consequently, these workers are not protected by labour laws, do not have access to welfare benefits, are subject to completely lax work safety regulations, etc., besides earning low wages.

A vicious circle is thus established. Lacking skills, poor workers earn very low wages, which forces other members of the family to look for jobs. Children join the labour force prematurely, without the opportunity of going to school and improving their qualification. The competition of children and teenagers for low-skill jobs depresses even more the wages of parents, forcing still other members of households to work. An unskilled labour force is unable to perform more productive jobs that could improve its situation. This is aggravated by the lack or insufficiency of educational opportunities available to these segments of the population. Professional training is very limited and basic education still scarce in some parts of the country and of very low quality, with underpaid and frequently underskilled teachers and badly designed syllabuses. Student absenteeism is very high and a large number of children simply abandon school before completing grade school. As a result, among the 69.6 million people working in Brazil in 1995, there were 12.7 million people with only 1 to 3 years of schooling, and 10.8 million had no schooling whatsoever (IBGE/PNAD, 1995).

## II. THE POLITICS OF POVERTY REDUCTION

### Historical Background

Poverty is certainly not a recent problem in Brazil. Practically every federal administration in power in the last decades has devised and announced some plan to combat poverty. Nevertheless, important changes have been taking place in the way poverty, its causes, its pervasiveness and the most efficient ways to eradicate it are perceived in this country.

Extreme poverty was perceived for a long time mainly as a regional problem. During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a widespread view of the existence of “two Brazils”: a modern, dynamic, industrial Brazil, in the South and, particularly, the Southeast of the country, with income levels and problems characteristic of developed regions; and an agricultural, almost feudal, stagnant and very poor Brazil in the Northeast. Visions of starving populations moving through the “sertão” (the arid region in the interior of the Northeast region), castigated by repeated droughts that destroyed the families’ means of subsistence, were used to illustrate the contrast between these areas and the rapidly-developing South. For right-leaning intellectuals, industrialisation and modernisation was the only way out of poverty for that region. Left-leaning intellectuals did not differ too much from this view: a bourgeois revolution was necessary, promoting an agrarian reform that would eliminate the feudal powers that benefited from the misery of their servants and allow the development of manufacturing in the backward areas.

Poverty in the South and Southeast, on the other hand, was perceived as a relatively minor problem that could be dealt with perhaps through the usual means of trade union demands.

In the late 1960s, perceptions changed, but not enough to make the eradication of extreme poverty a more urgent national issue. The traditional “dualist” approach of the two Brazils was gradually abandoned in favour of the view that poverty was the other side of the dynamism and development of the South. F. Oliveira (1972) argued that the development patterns adopted in Brazil during the rapid growth years in the late 1960s and early 1970s actually required that a large fraction of the Brazilian society be excluded from its benefits. Income concentration due to low wages, and therefore poverty, was said to be a necessary result of patterns of development relying on exports and on the diffusion of consumption standards similar to those of industrial countries.

The military regime installed in 1964 was seen to guarantee this *status quo*. Repressing trade unions and political opposition in general, violating all sorts of civil and human rights, the government was seen as the means to prevent those excluded from the gains of growth from demanding a change in the situation. At the same time, rapid growth in the cities and the conversion of large agricultural areas to less labour-intensive export crops created both the pull and push stimuli accelerating the migration into the towns (see above).

The authoritarian political regime of the 1970s did not offer much space for any serious debate on the issue of poverty. For right-wingers, poverty was at most a temporary problem. Income concentration was thought to be a necessary evil. It was argued that concentration

was required to allow “the cake to grow” before it could be distributed. Left-leaning researchers, in contrast, concentrated their criticisms mainly on the wage policies adopted by the military government, seen as the main culprit of income concentration<sup>4</sup>. In the late 1970s, in a somewhat more relaxed political atmosphere, the trade union movement was revived in some areas of the most industrialised state of the country, São Paulo, and again raising wages was seen as the way to overcome income concentration. In those years, left-wing thought was either revolutionary, proposing the overthrow of the military regime and the introduction of radical socialist policies, or unionist, relying on the struggle for higher wages and benefits, concentrated in the areas heavily populated by industrial wage-earners. The improvement of the living conditions of the urban poor, characterised by low skills and no formal labour contracts, was not a central concern of these movements.

The situation did not change immediately with the transition to civilian governments in the mid-1980s. By then, the national problem was to fight inflation that had been accelerating since the beginning of the decade. In the early 1990s, unemployment became much more visible, inflation was rapidly impoverishing even those who kept their jobs, and poverty became also more visible. During President Itamar Franco’s administration, beginning in 1993, mass mobilisation against hunger contributed to make of poverty, at last, a political issue. It was in this context that the Citizens’ Action emerged.

## **Origins of the Citizens’ Action**

In order to understand properly the nature and the role of CA, one has to keep in mind that it emerged against a background still strongly dominated by the sequels of 21 years of military regime installed in 1964. Democracy was restored in 1985 in a context of economic and social crisis, when demands were being made by various social groups to redress imbalances accumulated during the military regime. Social movements had been recovering their voice gradually and slowly since 1974, when General Medici’s term as president had ended, finishing a 5-year period of unprecedented repression, violation of human and civil rights and suppression of all political liberties. Trade unions, followed by students and newly-formed political parties, re-emerged to take the lead of the process of change. New actors also joined the ranks in the fight for restoring democracy and for defining political institutions allowing a greater degree of popular participation: non-governmental organisations, grassroots groups, neighbourhood associations, etc.

The CA was created in 1993 when civilian government was already consolidated, with political liberties restored, but with the new regime recovering from its first serious crisis. It emerged as the apex of a process of increasing social participation and citizenship-building in the country. The CA was one of the products of the confluence of several social movements previously in action, such as those for housing for the poor, fighting against the increasing cost of living, the movement in favour of agrarian reform, and, in particular, the large social front in favour of restoring free elections for the Presidency of the Republic and the creation of an Assembly to write a new constitution.

The immediate origin of CA was the movement for the impeachment of President Collor de Mello. It was, to a large extent, a successor to the Movement for Ethics in Politics (MEP) that took the lead of the movement against the president. MEP was formed by about 900 civil society organisations, including unions, NGOs, professional associations, entrepreneurial associations, political parties, church groups, etc. The traditional self-perception of the Brazilian people, as apathetic, powerless and conformist, was shaken

when large numbers of people adhered to MEP, taking part in public demonstrations or displaying in other ways their discontent with political corruption, like hanging in their windows black sheets to symbolise mourning on the day the president had asked the population to hang the national flag to show support for him.

In December 1992, President Collor de Mello resigned to avoid being prosecuted in an impeachment suit. The immediate result of the mass mobilisation was a feeling of power in civil society organisations which lead them to redirect their energies to other fronts, in the struggle to consolidate democratic practices and institutions, to promote ethics in politics and to increase the participation of citizens in the political process.

Among the institutions taking part in MEP, a consensus emerged that the biggest threat to democracy was the existence of a large number of Brazilian citizens living in extreme poverty, unable even to feed themselves. The foremost ethical demand of the moment was therefore to fight against hunger and the social exclusion of a large share of the nation's population. The incompatibility between democracy and extreme poverty was the founding principle for the creation of the Citizens' Action Against Hunger, Poverty and for Life. Herbert de Souza (known in Brazil by his nickname, Betinho) became its most prominent leader.

Under the slogan, *Hunger can't wait*, individuals, institutions and organisations were called upon to create committees of CA to take immediate action against hunger and extreme poverty. The idea was that the committees would devise actions to combat hunger in their community or neighbourhood, to keep awake the feeling of personal indignation against the existence of extreme poverty and of solidarity with those living in such conditions.

In parallel with the call for solidarity, CA also tried to arouse consciousness of the structural causes of poverty and of the need to reorient the patterns of economic development and to change institutions as the way to eradicate hunger definitely. Thus, CA suggested a dual strategy: direct action by civil society against the immediate manifestation of extreme poverty; and pressuring government at all levels to adopt policies to eradicate poverty and hunger, to improve working conditions, and to search for more inclusive patterns of development.

The response of civil society to the call of CA was beyond the most optimistic expectations. The largest mass movement seen in Brazil for many decades was born when people all over the country formed committees in public and private enterprises, in neighbourhoods, schools, churches, clubs, professional groups, etc. In some cities, municipal committees were created gathering individuals from many walks of life, employers and employees, preachers from different religious traditions and denominations, political activists from different parties, etc. The diversity of the individuals taking part, a large number of whom without any kind of public experience, was perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this movement. The second most important feature of the movement was its decentralised nature, devoid of bureaucratic structures of control. General principles were laid down for the formation of committees, namely solidarity, autonomy of initiative, development of partnership relationships and accountability to the community to which they belong. CA is a network of communities, rather than a power structure.

Due to its decentralised nature, it is almost impossible to quantify the results of the movement, be it in terms of people benefiting from its actions or in terms of agents involved. Available records, however, for the beginning of 1994 report the existence of at least 5 000 committees in the country<sup>5</sup>. In December 1993, when the campaign against hunger

was in its apex, a survey made by IBOPE reported that 95 per cent of the population supported CA or the campaign against hunger, 69 per cent considered themselves to be reasonably informed about its activities, 40 per cent of these (about 30 million people) had already contributed to the campaign in some fashion and 3 million actually belonged to a committee. A similar survey was made by IBOPE in 1994 and by Datafolha in September 1995, with surprisingly similar results, given that by then there was much less publicity given by the media to the activities of CA than in 1993 and 1994.

In 1994, after the success of the mobilisation against hunger a new demand was put forward by CA: the right to work; and "*Food Against Hunger, Work Against Misery*" became the new slogan. The new challenge to the committees, individuals and communities was to devise and to stimulate the creation of jobs, besides pressuring governments to implement employment policies. In 1995, an additional target was defined: democratisation of the access to land, both urban and rural<sup>6</sup>.

Since the beginning of the campaign against hunger, many committees went beyond the mere collection and distribution of food, devising and implementing projects to generate jobs and income. Some of them were directly connected to food production, like the creation of community vegetable gardens, animal husbandry (chicken, she-goat), etc., on public land or land ceded by farmers. Food production was usually directed toward more nutritious and cheaper staples. Some of these projects, besides supplying food for poor communities, allow the training of rural workers in more advanced production techniques, generating income from marketable surpluses<sup>7</sup>. Other experiences include the creation of co-operatives to produce commodities or to sell services. These experiences were made widely known by the press, which served to stimulate new initiatives<sup>8</sup>.

### **Innovative Aspects of the Citizens' Action as a Mass Movement**

CA does not have a hierarchy nor a bureaucratic structure. It works through some focal points that emerged in a rather spontaneous fashion. Some of these are NGOs, like IBASE, created and presided by Herbert de Souza, until his death in 1997; others are committees or fora in state capitals. They serve as co-ordinating centres for the articulation of actions or the planning of campaigns designed to reach wider audiences.

One of the objectives of CA has been to awaken awareness that poverty is not a "natural condition". The Brazilian society ran the risk of getting used to, and indifferent to the destiny of the poor. By promoting direct contact between the poor and the individuals participating in the committees, CA has been able to "humanise" the poor and to contribute to the revival of solidarity feelings. This may be the deeper and most durable effect of CA: a change not only in the political culture but also in the ethical attitudes of a significant portion of the Brazilian society. Poverty and unemployment are shown today in the public opinion surveys as the main problems of the country while violence was the highest concern until a few years ago. Violence has not diminished, but social perceptions have changed. The successive campaigns led by CA have contributed to this change of climate and to the introduction of concepts like citizenship and human rights in everyday language.

CA has deeply marked our recent history because it has enabled us to overcome the feeling of powerlessness in relation to the social apartheid that has come to be established in Brazil. The movement has gone that far in the mobilisation of Brazilian society because it gives concrete meaning to abstract claims for human rights and for ethics in politics and

at the same time it opens a space of participation in a country long accustomed to alienation and passivity in years of political authoritarianism and high income concentration (see also Carvalho, 1994).

A basic principle for the operation of CA is the promotion of partnerships between different social groups including those that have been traditionally excluded from social and political decision-making processes. As pointed out by O'Donnel, "... the poor are politically weak. Their permanent struggle for survival is not conducive, excepting very specific (and usually short-lived) situations and some remarkable individuals, to their organisation and mobilisation. (...) Because poverty entails that the poor are poor in many resources, not only economic, they are unlikely to organise autonomously and, specially, to sustain collective actions appropriate for overcoming their condition." (O'Donnel, 1996, p. 3)

This is particularly true of the most miserable communities. O'Donnel also says that the participation of middle classes could be a powerful factor in coalitions to fight poverty in Latin America. This kind of participation has been a hallmark of CA campaigns, bringing together segments of the middle classes to help organise the afflicted communities to move on with their own forces. The contact between these groups and the members of the poor communities goes beyond purely training matters, to deal with problems like hygiene, health, supply of public services and ethics and citizenship rights. This is an educational experience for the poor as well as for the volunteers coming from the middle classes who learn to see the poor as citizens endowed with rights rather than luckless individuals who are the object of pity. It is a political act of solidarity, not an exercise of charity. It should lead to the understanding that democracy is the universalisation of some basic rights, and therefore that it cannot survive in an environment of exclusion and inhuman living conditions. An important aspect of the view promoted by CA is that instead of waiting for the state to solve all the problems, one should take the initiative of proposing solutions while pressuring government into action.

### **III. THE CA AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST POVERTY**

Since CA does not have a formal structure, retaining its original character as a movement, it cannot participate as such in any governmental body. Its influence, however, is strongly felt through the actions of individuals and organisations identified with CA and through the public campaigns that are organised by the movement. Both Presidents Itamar Franco and Fernando Cardoso have sponsored the elaboration of plans to fight poverty and sought the endorsement and participation of CA. In both cases, along with the concept defended by CA that the fight against poverty is a duty of citizenry, the strategies adopted included the definition of a forum where civil society could share the responsibilities of choosing and evaluating the means to reach the desired goal. CA's influence is felt at the federal level mainly through the acceptance of the view that poverty is not only a social problem, but is also, in the deepest sense, a political problem, touching directly the question of political rights. Citizenship requires that minimum living conditions be assured to all: it is nothing without solidarity between the individuals living in a given society. CA's view that fighting against poverty is a democratic duty has been fully accepted and acknowledged as a principle by both administrations.

In what follows, we present first the council created by President Franco, CONSEA, and then President Cardoso's Community Solidarity Program.

#### **The National Council for Food Security (CONSEA)**

In the beginning of 1993, leaders of the Workers' Party (PT) proposed to President Itamar Franco the creation of a National Council for Food Security, directly subordinated to the presidency, to co-ordinate strategies to fight hunger and extreme poverty. CONSEA was inaugurated in May 1993 as an advisory council to the president, bringing together nine ministers of state and twenty one representatives of civil society, chosen by Mr. Franco from a list prepared by the organisations taking part in MEP. Among the members of CONSEA were artists, businessmen, unionists, NGO members, journalists, presidents of universities, etc. Belonging to different religious, political and ideological groups, the participants of CONSEA opened an innovative arena for the definition of new forms of partnership between the state and civil society to implement a Government Plan to Combat Hunger and Misery, allowing both the society at large and the communities involved to participate and to monitor its development. Social policies were given an unprecedented degree of transparency. On the other hand, CONSEA allowed the federal government to appeal to highly skilled professionals to help broaden the reach of these programmes.

The main lines of work of CONSEA were<sup>9</sup>:

- 1) The Food Distribution Program (PRODEA) created for emergency food distribution. Its initial focus was the Northeast region, hit by a severe draught. After this first experience, some parameters of action were changed, improving the distribution system to save transportation costs, increase the amount of food delivered to each family (from 15 to 25 kilograms), increase also the number of towns serviced (from 706 to 1162). Local processing of grains was introduced to minimise losses and to generate



local jobs, and systems of control to prevent corruption were implemented, including the involvement of local citizens in the process to oversee it. With these features, the efficiency of the system improved. This programme was certainly one of the best achievements of CONSEA. Particularly important was the legal requirement of the creation of a council in each town benefiting from the programme, including representatives of various sectors of civil society (including politicians opposing local governments) to monitor the programme and prevent the formation of privileged constituencies in the distribution of food. In addition, the army was called upon to help monitor the deliveries.

- 2) The resurrection of the National Program of School Meals was another successful initiative taken under the aegis of CONSEA. Among its innovative aspects, the programme included measures to decentralise the purchase of food, thus allowing an improvement in the quality, quantity and variety of the items supplied as well as a reduction in costs<sup>10</sup>. Ten million children are estimated to have benefited from the programme, even though the provision of meals in schools was not made all year long. A by-product of the programme was the stimulus it gave to the local production of greens and other items to supply schools, thus creating local jobs.
- 3) The milk distribution programme for pregnant women and for young children was also changed to create monitoring mechanisms involving the participation of community members and local public health posts. About one million women and children are estimated to have benefited from the programme.
- 4) CONSEA also played a decisive role in reactivating land redistribution for agrarian reform purposes. Former President de Mello had discontinued agrarian reform initiatives by the federal government. Under his successor, about 100 000 families received agricultural land.

Despite all these achievements, results remained limited when measured against the extent of extreme poverty and the needs of the poor population. Very little progress was made on several fronts, such as, for instance, the creation of jobs. In addition, the council had to face serious problems of lack of resources, not only to implement policies but also for its own functioning. An enormous effort of individuals acting within CA and in NGOs was necessary to allow the council to operate. In addition, the government apparatus itself was weak and inefficient when it existed at all, which was not always the case. On the other hand, the motivation, the political will and the feeling of solidarity of many civil servants and managers of public institutions allowed the successes that can be observed despite these shortcomings. Of strategic importance were the committees formed by civil servants for CA. The main obstacle was the lack of co-ordination between policies to combat extreme poverty and the overall economic policy, dominated by concerns with price stabilisation, despite the president's repeated statements that combating hunger was his first priority.

CONSEA was active during a very special moment of our recent history when, due to the particular circumstances under which president Franco came to power, the voicing of social demands made it possible for civil society movements and the government to co-operate. CONSEA was terminated when president Fernando H. Cardoso was inaugurated in January 1995. A new programme was initiated in its stead, inspired by CONSEA, the *Community Solidarity* (CS).

## Community Solidarity

CS was created in February 1995 with the aim of co-ordinating different branches of government fighting against hunger, extreme poverty, and social exclusion, and of increasing their efficiency. At the same time, the programme aims to decentralise government actions and to promote participation and partnership relationships with civil society. CS does not include all social policies implemented by the government but focuses on the most vulnerable groups and on areas of high concentration of extreme poverty. As it was put in an official document:

“This is a dynamic program in which the Federal Government applies a new form of management of a set of priority actions, executed by many ministries, without centralising decisions, overlapping initiatives and wasting resources — practices that always resulted in inefficiencies, losses, discontinuities and favouring of special interests.” (Presidencia da Republica, 1997, p. 1)

CS has an advisory council, chaired by the President’s Chief of Staff, constituted by ten ministers of state and twenty one private individuals chosen by the President, with a similar profile to that of CONSEA. It is currently headed by the first lady, a respected anthropologist, known for her studies about social movements. The council is supposed to debate the various aspects of the poverty question, to make proposals and to evaluate the priorities and programmes of the federal government in the social domain. According to another official document, “the basic function of the Council of the CS is to induce ideas, to promote partnerships, to mobilise energies and resources in favour of social development. Its role is to elaborate and to try new forms, models and patterns of relationship and collaboration between public and private agents to face poverty and social exclusion, facilitating and attracting initiatives to be implemented by these agents, without directly executing programs and projects.” (Ministry of Foreign Relations of Brazil, 1997, p. 8)

Unlike CONSEA, CS also has an executive secretariat, in charge of passing the council’s recommendations to the ministers of state and of defining with them the strategies required to implement their plans with respect to the programmes included in the CS.

So far, after two years of operation, the council has been implementing pioneer projects which, after testing and evaluation, are supposed to be extended to other areas. These initiatives are being developed drawing on private resources (mostly donated by businesses), in partnerships with civil society organisations, searching to stimulate decentralisation and participation of the communities. Among the projects being developed, the Program for Improvement of Professional Skills trains youngsters of poor communities in the metropolitan regions, and is supporting with financial resources mostly initiatives already proposed or applied by NGOs, community associations or unions. A diversified set of activities is covered by the programme, ranging from courses in computing skills to handicrafts for the “samba schools”, among other less orthodox types of work that respond, in any case, to local demands for labour. Another noticeable initiative is the co-ordination of support from private businesses towards a programme aimed at reducing illiteracy among youngsters aged 15 to 17 in the poorest regions<sup>11</sup>.

The priorities defined by CS are as follows:

- i) to improve health and nutrition standards, giving priority to the fight against infant mortality, and child and mother malnutrition, by improving the supply of school meals and the emergency distribution of food to poor families;
- ii) to improve housing conditions and to build sanitation facilities;
- iii) to create jobs and generate income through measures of support to small and micro businesses, supporting training programmes, especially those directed at youngsters;
- iv) to improve living conditions in rural areas, giving land to landless workers and supporting family agriculture<sup>12</sup>;
- v) to support the development of elementary schools, to stimulate the creation of daycare centres and pre-schools, to protect children and teenagers living in risk situations.

In 1996 and 1997, CS was working in 1 111 towns, selected according to indices of poverty incidence, with particular attention given to infant mortality indices<sup>13</sup>. In these areas, poverty was attacked in an integrated way, covering many fronts simultaneously, in joint initiatives of government, civil society organisations and business. Unfortunately, the scarcity of resources has limited the extent to which these experiences have been expanded to other areas. Scarcity of resources is also responsible for the partial character of some of the programmes mentioned above. However, some programmes have been successful. For instance, the continuation of the school meals programme, extended to a larger fraction of the year (from 100 to 160 days), and covering a school population of 33 million, did reach the whole universe of potential beneficiaries. Further extensions of the programme, to increase the number of days per year, were not feasible given budget limitations. A second successful initiative was PRODEA, the food distribution programme. It reached 1 094 towns, native Brazilian communities and landless workers living in temporary settlements in 1996. Through this programme, 7.5 million “food baskets” were given to about 1.5 million families<sup>14</sup>. The Health Community Agents Program increased the number of agents from 28 000 in 1994 to 44 400 in 1996, serving 6.7 million households<sup>15</sup>. The efficacy of this kind of programme is shown by the reduction of infant mortality that in some areas decreased by 40 per cent in one year.

Table 3. Infant Mortality Rates – Selected Areas

States*	Infant Mortality Rates**		Change (%)
	1994	1995	
Rio Grande do Norte	103	59	43
Sergipe	117	84	28
Alagoas	183	113	38
Ceara	110	62	44
Piaui	70	47	33
Maranhão	77	51	34
Paraíba	112	48	57
Bahia	103	41	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>

\* Areas benefiting from the Community Health Agents Program.

\*\* Deaths per thousand children born alive.

Source: Comunidade Solidaria (1997).

Starting from May 1996, the CS council defined additional lines of action, of which two are particularly important:

- i)* incentives for political dialogue to reach a consensus between public and private agents to define a minimum set of priorities, measures and instruments to develop social programmes;
- ii)* "Removal of legal obstacles and facilitation of management procedures for the co-ordination of political solutions and the presentation of technical alternatives to overcome current legal and administrative barriers that detain, delay or reduce the efficacy of social actions..." (Comunidade Solidária, 1997)<sup>16</sup>.

As with CONSEA, many of the programmes supported by CS require local councils to be formed to monitor the activities. Although new forms of political manipulation may thus emerge, these councils represent, nevertheless, an important step forward in the direction of more efficient and democratic forms of governance in contrast to the often corrupt ways of the past<sup>17</sup>.

The co-operation with the federal government in CONSEA and CS has had mixed results so far. The councils have been receptive to the suggestions proposed by social organisations linked to CA. The federal government, in addition, has shown flexibility in altering programmes as a result of these suggestions, in adopting new ideas emerging from local experiments, and in investigating possible charges of political manipulation or corruption in some towns. Being directly subordinated to the presidency allows the councils to appeal to the president himself when appropriate, besides giving resonance to their policies. This can be a factor of fragility, though, if in the future the president becomes less sensitive to these matters, given that these councils have a purely advisory role. More permanently, community monitoring of the implementation of programmes has been a big step forward towards more transparent and democratic, and hopefully more efficient, political practices. The limitations to the council's activities seem to have derived in part from their voluntary membership, volunteers being sometimes unable to dedicate as much time as needed to devise proper solutions to the problems at hand.

The concrete results of these programmes are hard to measure, except in specific cases (for example the action of the health agents that effectively caused an important reduction in infant mortality). In most cases, it is still very difficult to separate the effects of initiatives like CS from other causes of improvement of living conditions, particularly the interruption of the high inflation process or the extension of welfare benefits to larger shares of the population.

Some problems, however, are indisputable. The whole process of policy implementation has been exceedingly slow. In addition, the programmes adopted have their impact limited by budget restrictions, low efficiency of the government machine, and laws and rules that create obstacles to more agile intervention. Very recently, the president of the CS, Dr. Ruth Cardoso stated that resistance by the government's team of economists and by state bureaucrats were the main factors explaining the less than satisfactory results obtained so far<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, decisions that involve legal changes meet particularly serious difficulties.

## **IV. CA, STATE-OWNED FIRMS AND INSTITUTIONS, AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS**

Two main forms of partnership have been established between CA and governmental institutions other than the federal administration. On the one hand, in a rather spontaneous way, employees in state-owned firms often took the initiative of constituting CA committees in their workplaces to implement specific projects to donate food, to create jobs and generate income. Under President Franco, the state companies themselves were eventually directed to create a Committee of Public Enterprises to Fight Hunger (COEP) to co-ordinate initiatives against poverty in their areas of operation. On the other hand, municipal governments have joined local CA committees to develop projects to fight hunger and to create jobs. CA's influence at this level is more concretely felt. Some of these committees emerged to implement a specific project and disbanded after the task was completed. Others are more permanent, developing continuing activities related to job and income generation. As observed above, these committees have been responsible for some of the most original and far-reaching ideas arising in the campaign against hunger.

### **The COEP: Public Enterprise in Support of Anti-poverty Campaign**

Public enterprise employees have been at the front-line of the campaign against hunger since its beginning. Their activities received strong political support when President Itamar Franco declared that the fight against hunger and extreme poverty was a priority of his administration. In May 1993, COEP was launched at a meeting of chairmen or directors of the 33 largest public firms. At this meeting, Herbert de Souza stated CA's fundamental principles, inviting the firms to join it with their experience, material and intellectual resources to work in partnership with the communities to overcome extreme poverty and hunger. Much like CA itself, COEP is concerned with poverty in the country as a whole, but it is devoid of a bureaucratic structure or of a hierarchy. Currently, similar committees are being created at state level to facilitate the actual implementation of plans in a co-ordinated fashion. Six of these state committees are already operational.

COEP is organised in such a way as to preserve the independence of each entity to execute its own programme autonomously, according to its nature and operational strategies. COEP is a forum where firms can exchange experiences, co-ordinate their actions, exploring partnership possibilities among themselves and with other government organisms and CA, and advertise the initiatives being implemented. The goal of COEP is thus to develop and to evaluate lines of action for public firms, in isolation or through joint ventures, to act against extreme poverty. To devise socially useful recycling of materials that are wasted by the firms, using surplus stocks of goods to support productive projects, and to stimulate employees to participate in the campaign by joining or creating "citizenship committees" were among the very promising initiatives.

To evaluate the scope of potential benefits from actions of federally-owned corporations in the fight against poverty, one has to note that they operate in fields that include oil extraction and refinery, electric power generation and distribution, telecommunications, banking, etc., besides universities and research institutions. In particular, federal banks

and, to a lesser extent, universities, have branches or facilities spread throughout the country, which makes it easier to extend the reach of programmes to wide areas. Banco do Brasil employees alone organised about 2000 committees in the bank's branches, while the Federal Savings Bank (Caixa Economica Federal) employees created about 1700<sup>19</sup>. These two particular networks of committees played an essential role in making the campaign against hunger rapidly known throughout the country, through their direct actions and the stimulus to the emergence of other CA committees in their geographical areas. Both institutions' employees are usually better educated than the population they serve, particularly in the smaller towns, and they have better access to information sources, including periodicals prepared by the institutions themselves. In addition, and particularly in the case of Banco do Brasil, there is also a solid tradition of trade union activism that has fed into the employees' disposition to participate in socially-oriented endeavours like CA.

Other institutions' participation was also important. In fact, better schooling and activist traditions are common to most public corporations whose technicians have devised many original and highly efficient means of improving living conditions in their field of expertise.

Most of the committees created by employees began by collecting and distributing food. Besides stimulating the general public to donate food, they contributed themselves to the campaign, donating a percentage of their salaries to a fund administered by committees of employees, which purchased food and organised its distribution. These activities rapidly evolved, however, to more elaborate schemes like helping to finance existing daycare centres and community schools or to create new ones, working in adult education programmes or professional training, supporting the organisation of production co-operatives, supplying health care, financing and organising community vegetable gardens or even organising agricultural activities on a larger scale in public lands, or areas ceded by private citizens. Financial resources for these activities came mostly from collections made by and among employees and from the public corporations themselves as well as donations by the general public.

Due to the decentralised nature both of CA and COEP, it is difficult to evaluate precisely these activities. Unfortunately, CA has been stronger in the generation of enthusiasm than in data collection. This is due to its nature as a movement that does not deal with financial resources in a centralised fashion and has no donors to report to<sup>20</sup>. Its role is precisely to generate and sustain the political *momentum* that has led to the unprecedented dimension of political support for poverty-combating policies adopted since the early years of the decade. Experiences are publicised to stimulate emulation, but there is still not enough data to assess the results of national campaigns.

In some cases, at least, there is little question as to the efficiency of the initiatives adopted. In the COEP context, many projects have consisted in the utilisation of resources otherwise kept idle or wasted. In these cases, since the opportunity cost of those resources was zero, the benefits represented a net social gain. Among these, there were some very simple ideas like, for instance, garbage recycling. Firms have donated paper, foam, etc., left over from production processes, to be reprocessed in recycling plants financed by CA committees. Firms also donated office equipment and furniture being replaced by newer items to community schools and daycare centres. Used electronic equipment has been donated to be used in computer skills schools in poor communities, usually operated with volunteer labour.

Some projects, however, stand out as particularly original and efficient<sup>21</sup>.

Brazil's state-owned oil extraction and refinery company, Petrobrás, has used the technology it developed to drill wells in search of oil to search for water in the dry Northeastern parts of the country. In the past, when a water well was found by Petrobrás, it was closed and abandoned. Knowing the location of these wells, Petrobrás reopened them and gave the local communities the right to use the water, without any cost to the community. Furnas Electric Power Company, the main power supplier in the country, has allowed the use of its land to grow food, the use of its water reservoirs for the creation of fish farms and the use of the mud in the security areas around the reservoirs for brick production by community co-operatives. Even private tracts of land, usually owned by large firms, have been ceded for food production. In some areas, these projects are supported by EMBRAPA, a federal government research institution dedicated to improving agricultural techniques. Technicians from EMBRAPA orient, on a volunteer basis, the cultivation of these lands, allowing them to reach high levels of productivity and quality.

In a more urban setting, federal universities have developed projects benefiting poor communities, transmitting technical knowledge helping them to produce better and less expensive food, and offering courses in all kinds of subjects. The Graduate Program in Engineering (COPPE) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro has created a "nest" for co-operatives, supplying technical support to initiatives taken by the communities themselves. The Federal University of Santa Catarina supported a project to allow a very poor fishing community to grow oysters.

Other examples include the federally-owned national telecommunications corporation, EMBRATEL, which supplies satellite time for training of health workers throughout the country. They also include the support given by FIOCRUZ, a research institution dealing with public health, to the organisation of a co-operative of workers recruited in the neighbouring slums to perform menial jobs, in replacement of a firm that supplied the same services paying very low wages.

All these actions were made possible, first of all, by the willingness of employees of those institutions to work for free. In many cases, they could count on resources supplied by private citizens, organised or not in committees. Of course, efforts by the target-community are an essential input for this kind of process. For example, in a food cultivation project, a public firm cedes the land, neighbouring farmers lend agricultural equipment, local traders supply fuel, many people contribute to finance the purchase of seeds and other inputs, and the mayorship signs a contract to purchase the output for school meals. Of course, the target community provides the labour force and earns income.

There are, nevertheless, many difficulties in the way of generalising such practices. Public corporations are subject to rigid regulations as to the use of their resources. Such rules exist to prevent corruption and misuse of public resources but they were created at a time when initiatives such as the ones we described were unknown. For example, donations of "unusable" material in favour of philanthropic institutions could only be made after the legal department of EMBRATEL prepared a study of the problem and distributed it to the other corporations. There are also legal difficulties preventing the targeting of hiring or purchasing policies of public institutions to the co-operatives created in poor communities. Changing these regulations sometimes requires changing long-established laws created to deal with very diverse situations. On the other hand, any change must be carefully designed to prevent corruption. Another difficulty relates to the threats these programmes represent to populist or downright corrupt politicians, since such programmes reroute resources outside the regular circuits of influence, empowering the communities

to depend less on favours from those politicians. Of course, the weakening of those forms of political power is in itself an important goal sought by CA, but it understandably generates opposition from people under threat and it is not entirely clear whether or not the counterpressures will ultimately succeed in reducing the commitment of the federal government to fight poverty. To prevent this from happening is an important target of CA as a political movement.

Given not only the weight of the projects developed by public firms and groups of employees but also the visibility of their commitment, a more serious threat to sustained activity by the CA committees comes from the privatisation process underway in Brazil. Banco do Brasil, for instance, which is not up for privatisation yet, but is trying to behave like a private bank, has significantly reduced its support for the campaign. More importantly, programmes to reduce payroll and threats of massive firing of employees have had a visible impact on the commitment of bank workers to the committees. Even though many of the institutions taking part in COEP will conceivably remain public entities, such as the universities and the research centres, practically all the others are possible targets of the privatisation process.

### **Projects by Municipal Governments**

In the wake of the mobilisation led by CA, many municipal governments took the initiative, or were pressured by public opinion into acting, to face the poverty problem in their areas. A 1995 survey by IBASE covering all the 4 974 municipal administrations then in existence in Brazil, produced 644 replies. Among them, 251 reported to be working with CA committees. Most commonly mentioned were the creation of community vegetable gardens, and other forms of cultivation of agricultural products, projects of professional training, support to production groups and the distribution of food.

It is, in principle, much easier to establish partnerships with local governments than with federal or state administrations. Firstly, the physical proximity between the citizens and government officials facilitate the communication between them. Secondly, direct everyday observation of problems may sensitise governments more to the community problems, making it easier to respond to demands and to devise solutions. A better knowledge of the needs and available resources may also result in a more human scale of observation. In particular, active participation by poor communities is much easier at local level.

Many municipal CA committees made partnership a reality by including elements from the local administrations. Where COEP projects existed, committees were often created by the initiative of employees of the public corporation involved, particularly in the case of the public banks (Banco do Brasil, Federal Savings Bank, Bank of North-eastern Brazil). The presence of these elements also contributed to making municipal governments more sensitive to the campaign, since it increased the probability of having access to badly-needed resources.

At the moment, there is no way of having a complete picture of actions at the municipal level, since many local projects are simply left unreported. Some initiatives, however, deserve mention. In Rio Branco (capital of Acre state, in the Northern part of the country), the mayorship in partnership with the local CA committee developed a whole array of projects ranging from the organisation of vegetable gardens to provide fresh food to the



town, and to the sale of tool kits for poor workers. These kits include the tools necessary to perform a given type of work, like cooking, carpentry, locksmithing, etc. People who were unemployed or who had very low-paid jobs because they did not own any tools could benefit from this initiative and had their incomes increased. Programmes to help “street children” were also devised. The mayorship also hired construction workers co-operatives, organised by the local committee, to build houses to relocate families living in risky areas<sup>22</sup>.

In Belo Horizonte (capital of Minas Gerais state), the mayorship and local CA committees have co-operated very closely in many projects, such as giving hygiene courses in needy communities and courses aimed at minimising food waste. Construction of day-care centres and low-income housing were other results of this co-operation, always undertaken with the direct and active participation of the target community.

At the municipal level, some problems similar to those already identified in the preceding sections are also met. However, they are more promptly solved here, either because there are not as many layers of political power involved, or because the direct discussion with the individuals concerned is easier, or because those who ultimately decide are closer to the population and are therefore more sensitive to their demands. But there are some important difficulties too. The most serious problem is certainly that the areas most in need of help are also those where the population is less organised and information is more scarce. These populations are more subject to political manipulation by populist or authoritarian-paternalist politicians whose grip on local power is practically unshakeable from within<sup>23</sup>.

It is at the local levels of government, anyway, that the most important changes are taking place as regards the political process in general and attitudes with respect to poverty in particular. Actions to combat extreme poverty have been multi-faceted, seeking multiple objectives such as improving nutrition, education, housing, working conditions, etc. More important, perhaps, than these programmes *per se* have been the new political practices they stimulate, represented by the dialogue between administrations and committees of citizens to set priorities and to monitor activities.

## V. FIGHTING POVERTY: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS

Since 1993, fighting hunger and extreme poverty has been a priority of the federal government, and its central strategic tenet has become the call upon civil society to cooperate with the state in helping to define, implement and monitor anti-poverty policies. These two features are, perhaps, the main achievement of the Citizens' Action Against Hunger and Poverty and for Life, a political mass movement aimed at rooting democracy more deeply in Brazilian society and spreading the consciousness of citizenship rights and duties. Few political movements in Brazilian history may claim to have touched so deeply the perception that our society has of itself. The dimension of this achievement is obviously difficult to quantify but it can hardly be exaggerated in a country that was for so long accustomed to witnessing deep social and economic inequalities, to the point of actually depriving a large share of its population of basic citizen rights.

In political terms, the acknowledgement of the need to fight extreme poverty by society at large may be seen as the main political conquest of CA. It can be argued, however, that from the point of view of governance methods, the most durable and ultimately the most important contribution resulting from CA's calls for partnerships is probably the involvement of members of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of policies. The creation of local councils to manage the resources allocated to each area by the federal government through the programmes set by CONSEA and, later, by CS, decisively contributes not only to the awakening of a participatory conscience in a population that was traditionally kept out of the political process but also to an increase of the rationality, efficiency and transparency of the use of resources to fight poverty. This reduces the possibility of corruption, political manipulation and the favouring of illegitimate interests that were rampant in many areas (and still are where, for any reason, change has yet to take place).

An evaluation of the concrete initiatives implemented by all levels of government is much more difficult. Information is very deficient on the efficacy of the policies adopted in terms of their final objectives. The aggregate information generated by the federal government comes not from policy evaluation but from budget execution. Specific programmes have been studied in some detail, either on the initiative of research institutions or by order of government institutions. However, there has been no concrete attempt to create a method to gather information about the efficacy of the programmes that could allow their assessment and eventual corrective action. This difficulty is even greater for local initiatives by municipal governments or committees of employees in public enterprises. If a *direct* evaluation of anti-poverty programmes pursued by all levels of government is hard to achieve, even an *indirect* assessment, examining the evolution of poverty indices, faces some obstacles. The Brazilian economy has been going through a deep process of change in this decade making it difficult to isolate the factors influencing change and to quantify their respective effects. The most important of these changes, with respect to poverty indices, has been the stabilisation plan of 1994 that has reduced inflation to annual rates of about 10 per cent. The drastic reduction of the inflation tax changed considerably the incidence and profile of poverty in the country<sup>24</sup>.

On the other hand, the need to control fiscal deficits has always been an obstacle to the allocation of resources to fight poverty. Budgetary constraints and delays in making resources available as well as in managing them efficiently remain a major problem for

CS, even if it is recognised that the situation has improved somewhat in the last three years<sup>25</sup>. The virtual bankruptcy of the state during the high inflation years has deeply reduced the capacity of government to provide public goods such as health care, education, public safety, etc. The poverty situation in the 1990s is a result of many variables, among which the explicit adoption of anti-poverty strategies is only one.

An original feature of the CS strategy is the *focusing principle*, by which the federal government utilises instruments defined in different social programmes simultaneously in a given number of selected target areas. These were municipalities excluded from the standard channels of federal government support. They are amongst the poorest towns in the country, without political clout with state and federal governments, and with inefficient local administrations. CS tries to change this situation by focusing the investment of resources of several federal government organisms in these areas. Despite some problems of execution, this has proved to be a more rational use of scarce resources<sup>26</sup>.

The main shortcoming of CS so far has been its limited reach. Unfortunately, data about these communities are very sketchy. According to CS officials' own estimates, only about 2 million families live in the 1 111 small municipalities selected for the two-year period 1996/97 among those with the highest incidence of poverty to receive CS support. Only a fraction of these families actually qualifies for CS help<sup>27</sup>. The latter are the target of programmes to combat malnutrition as well as programmes in health care, education, sanitation, professional training, subsidised credit, etc. For budgetary reasons, however, not all of those programmes reached all the 1 111 municipalities<sup>28</sup>. The most wide-reaching programmes were PRODEA (food distribution), school meals distribution and the immunisation programme. Important programmes such as the one fighting malnutrition of mothers and young children only reached 44 per cent of the selected areas, while the one creating health care community agents reached 40 per cent of them. The housing programme was implemented in only 24 per cent of the 1 111 towns, and sanitation was provided for only 22 per cent of them<sup>29</sup>.

The same criticism could be directed at other initiatives. For example, a project developed by CS with civil society organisations to offer training to teenagers and young adults from poor communities was very carefully planned and well-adapted to local needs. However, slightly over one thousand youngsters were trained in 1996, which hardly dents the youth unemployment problem in Brazil.

Of course, the programmes developed by CS are only a fraction of those directly supported by CA and by many other civil society organisations all over the country, as described in the preceding sections. Nevertheless, those initiatives should not be seen as solutions in themselves. Rather, they are mostly local experiments aimed at defining alternatives for ulterior implementation by the federal government, that has (or is expected to have) the means to reach the whole country. The problem with CS is that it is too small to have a decisive impact countrywide. It is undeniable that the creation of CONSEA first, and of CS afterwards, were important steps in redefining an efficient strategy against extreme poverty. But the strategy is still being implemented in an experimental fashion, favouring a small number of selected areas, which allows policies and methods to be tested before being applied on a larger scale.

In addition, there is some evidence that, given the budgetary difficulties mentioned above, CS programmes are *replacing* more global social policies, rather than *complementing* them. As it should be clear now, CS initiatives are emergency steps to attack situations of *extreme* poverty. They should be conceived as a particular set of

policies within a broad strategy to reduce inequalities in Brazil. CS programmes are being overburdened by the responsibility to solve the deep-rooted poverty problem which is far beyond the means the federal government is willing to commit.

Social policies, in particular the free provision by the state of educational services, sanitation, health care, etc., have often been criticised for their lack of strategic vision, co-ordination and continuity. They have also been characterised as inefficient, costly and misdirected. A recent study (Banco Mundial, 1996) showed that, although about 15 per cent of the Brazilian GDP has been dedicated to “social expenditures”, the higher income groups have benefited from a larger proportion of them than the lowest income groups<sup>30</sup>.

Finally, one cannot help noticing that even CS projects and better planned social policies may not be sufficient by themselves to reduce inequalities and eradicate poverty, since they barely touch the structural roots of the problem, such as wealth concentration, particularly in rural areas. Agrarian reform programmes, including not only land redistribution but also the provision of credit and technical assistance to small family producers, proceed very slowly, despite the repeated conflicts between landless workers and landowners. At the same time, despite the consensus around the idea that a radical improvement of basic education is a pre-condition for the upgrading of the professional skills of urban workers, efforts by the federal government have also been relatively timid, hampered by a short-termist view dominated by concerns with budgetary deficits. Of course, fiscal deficit reduction is important, but the federal government has been timid in its attempts to set priorities for the use of resources, preferring to pursue linear cuts in expenditures that minimise the opposition of special interests hooked on other types of expenditure, as, for instance, those exposed by the World Bank study mentioned above.

One should not derive from all this, however, excessively pessimistic conclusions. If the actual commitment of resources to the fight against poverty has not adequately matched the discourse, it is undeniable that the political perception of the problem has changed in favour of the view that poverty is not a natural scourge of the Brazilian society. In fact, the timidity that characterised government action against poverty until now is largely explained by a conflict between the long-term goal to eradicate the problem and the short-term need to consolidate price stabilisation by removing pressures coming from fiscal deficits. As recently observed by *The Economist*, however, “the end of inflation has made Brazilians less tolerant of their country’s social problems and more impatient for change” (05/17/1997). In fact, the stabilisation itself caused a significant once-for-all reduction in the numbers of poor in the six main metropolitan regions (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Impact of the Stabilization Plan on the Poverty Situation:  
Six Metropolitan Areas in Brazil**

	Poor Population/Total Population	Poor population (thousands)
July 1994	38.22	14 782.90
July 1995	28.24	11 062.00
December 1995	27.34	10 774.70
January 1996	28.75	11 327.20

*Note:* The Stabilization Plan was adopted in July 1994.

*Source:* Rocha (1996).

The stabilisation plan allowed 3.7 million people to cross the poverty line in those areas in its first twelve months. It was made possible by the end to the inflationary corrosion of their money balances obtained with the new currency. Higher income groups defended their financial wealth by keeping indexed assets. The poor had no alternative besides holding on to a continuously depreciating currency. In addition, one should notice that improvement was not uniform among the poor. For those who remained under the poverty line, average per capita income in July 1995 was actually lower than before, at only 39 per cent of the poverty line<sup>31</sup>.

Controlling inflation has had other important effects. Freed from the pressing concerns of dealing everyday with monthly inflation rates that reached more than 40 per cent on the eve of the stabilisation plan, the Brazilian population can now pay attention to other serious problems of their society. Furthermore, the control of inflation which was repeatedly attempted since the early 1980s gave the population confidence that even difficult and deep-rooted problems can be solved. This is the source of the reduced tolerance to social problems mentioned above and to the hamletian hesitations that seem to assault so often the federal government. Last, but not least, forcing the resignation of President Collor de Mello showed that public impatience can find other outlets than powerless grumbling against the government and destroyed the perception of an alleged inborn incompetence of Brazilians to solve their own problems. Even the election of a new president benefiting from the intellectual respect of foreign statesmen has contributed to increase the self-esteem of Brazilians that makes them demand prompt solutions for the poverty canker that most vividly illustrates how far we still are from being a “developed” country.

In this very complex picture, CA has chosen to stimulate partnerships between civil society and government institutions as a means not only of empowering civil society itself to reach for its goals (something very important for a society long used to dependence on the state to solve paternalistically all its problems) but also of pressuring governments not to bow to special interests any longer. After the restoration of democracy, the state is to be seen neither as an enemy nor as an all-providing father. CA's strategy is aimed at promoting the capacity of civil society to self-organise both to develop its sense of community and to exercise its citizenship rights in influencing and monitoring the activities of government. Its main instruments have been the launching of political campaigns in favour of solutions to structural problems, such as landownership concentration, raising the conscience of these problems and pressuring governments into action, and the formation of local CA committees to follow closely the projects adopted by governments and to implement their own.

The first of these instruments, i.e. campaigns to raise debates and pressure all levels of government, particularly the federal government, into action, has been at least partially efficient. The creation of CONSEA first, and CS later, largely responded to political demands, the responsibility for which are at least partially CA's. If the federal administrations have been at least forced to acknowledge the seriousness of the poverty problem and into creating those councils, one has to admit that this solution is still far from what is needed for a more efficient action. The councils have been important to allow the discussion of new ideas and policy instruments. But the information they receive (and make public) is very deficient and incomplete, making it difficult to assess more precisely the programmes' results.

In addition, it has proved to be harder than expected to convince all branches of government to adhere to these programmes. Economists in government resist the demands for resources these projects represent. Many of the political groups represented in

government resist the reduction in their grip over their constituencies if communities organise themselves and learn how to defend their interests. As a result, the president of the CS programme herself, the first lady, Dr. Ruth Cardoso, complained that while the support she has received from entrepreneurs has been surprisingly effective, it is the government bureaucracy that has been responsible for the shortcomings of the programme. Be it as it may, even if it is moving more slowly than is generally perceived as necessary, the CS programme is moving on.

At the local level, however, activity has been more intense, either with projects sponsored by CS or not. The lack of systematic information about these experiences precludes any rigorous analysis of their overall results. Nevertheless, even on the basis of scattered evidence, it is possible to state that some important changes have already been achieved in governance methods. The increasing participation of local communities in the implementation of policies has raised the transparency not only of the political process but also of the allocation of public resources. As a consequence, the possibility of corruption and misuse of those resources has diminished. Decentralisation of decisions as to local governments' acquisitions of goods and services has always been feared as a source of corruption. Centralisation, on the other hand, as it was practised in the not so distant past, has not eliminated corruption but has added to it inefficiency and waste. Decentralisation of decisions with community supervision seems to cut the gordian knot. The most significant illustration of the superiority of this method is found in the school meals programme: food is currently purchased at local markets, reducing the waste of perishable items, adapting the menus to the tastes of local children, increasing the use of fresh produce, and reducing costs of transportation, besides opening opportunities for local producers and allowing the population to monitor the prices paid. It is an important victory both for democracy and for efficiency in the use of public resources to make the participation of community members in monitoring committees a condition for the access to public resources for these programmes.

## NOTES

1. The original source for practically all data on poverty and income distribution reported here is the Brazilian Central Statistical Office, IBGE, which conducts periodical surveys on the living conditions of households and censuses. Data contained in the *Hunger Map* were extracted from the annual household survey of 1990, PNAD.
2. The legal minimum wage, valid for the whole country, was \$112 in April 1997.
3. Brazil is one the world's largest grain producers. Domestic production of food is greater than what would be required to meet calorie and protein needs set by FAO for the entire population.
4. An important collection of papers by progressive economists criticising the "cake theory" defended by government economists was published (in Portuguese) in 1975. See Tolipan and Tinelli (1975).
5. Currently, we estimate that about 3000 committees are active. In fact, public opinion polling institutions, such as IBOPE and Datafolha, report that some of the committees are not organised in a permanent fashion. These are created to implement specific projects. The total number of committees, however, seems to be rather stable.
6. The intention was to mobilise both the rural and urban population. For decades, the need for an agrarian reform has been argued with limited success in attracting the attention of urban groups. Democratisation of the access to land in general increased the audience, making clear the relationship between progress of democracy and the concentration of land holding.
7. These projects rely on the voluntary adhesion of professional researchers from universities and research institutions.
8. The role of the media, especially of professional journalists and professionals in publicity and the arts who give voluntary time to the campaign, has been crucial in promoting CA goals. It is important to point out that these professionals have worked not only in the advertisement of initiatives but also in their inception.
9. See also Carvalho (1996).
10. In the preceding system, the purchase of food was centralised by the federal government in Brasilia.
11. In the North and Northeast regions, there is a high rate of illiteracy among teenagers, ranging from 50 per cent to 83 per cent in Pauini, a town in Amazonas state. However, in 1997, the programme was reaching only 9 000 students in the whole Northern and Northeastern areas (*Gazeta Mercantil*, 21/04/1997).
12. This programme is currently being implemented by the Ministry for Agriculture. It entails the supply of credit and technical assistance, as well as the building of public works in rural areas to integrate agricultural family production into the marketplace.
13. The number of towns is not, in fact, the same in those two years because some of them were subdivided during the period, increasing the number of towns nominally covered by the programme.
14. The baskets contain about 30 kilograms of food items. Their composition, however, has been the object of criticism because of the poor diversity of their contents. This happens because the federal government is actually distributing the stocks of agricultural products it has accumulated as a result of policies to regulate agricultural production.
15. This programme actually covers many more towns than those listed as targets of CS action.

16. An example of these legal difficulties is the denial of access to benefits distributed by the federal government to those municipalities with non-performing debts owed to it. Since the poorest towns are also, in all likelihood, unable to pay their debts, this would mean that those most in need of help would be barred from getting it. A Provisional Measure (a legislative instrument initiated by the Executive) was thus decreed, suspending that condition for the towns receiving CS support. The share of towns that have their access denied fell from 50 per cent to 3 per cent as a result of this change.
17. An additional difficulty is that since priority has been given to implement programmes in the poorest communities, in some cases there are no CA committees or other grassroots organisations that can participate and monitor the programmes.
18. *Gazeta Mercantil*, April 21st, 1997.
19. Banco do Brasil is a commercial bank mostly owned by the federal government. It should not be confused with Banco Central do Brasil, the monetary authority. Banco do Brasil (established in 1808) has traditionally served as an instrument to integrate into the federal union regions that otherwise would have few points of contact with the rest of the country. It has also been very important in agricultural credit. For these reasons, there are branches of Banco do Brasil in practically every city or small community in this country.
20. In fact, some of the state and local CA committees, as the Rio de Janeiro State Committee, are formally organised.
21. In the appendix, some of these projects are presented in more detail.
22. The head of the mayorship changed in 1996 and has since discontinued its participation in the project, which is now being developed solely by the CA committee.
23. To promote efficient strategies in these areas will require federal government programmes. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what is behind the definition of the 1 111 areas of action by the CS programme.
24. I will return to this point later.
25. In 1996, the federal government budget provided for R\$1.8 billion (in that year one real was worth about one US dollar) to support CS programmes, of which 83 per cent was actually used. For 1997, R\$3 billion (about US\$2.7 billion) have been budgeted, which is still well below needs, and it remains to be seen how much of it will actually be made available.
26. The most frequent difficulty is the co-ordination of actions by the various federal ministries, that have their own spending mechanisms and management techniques. In addition, given the overall budgetary problems described above, the actual transfer of resources to each ministry is frequently dependent on the political strength of the person who happens to be the head of a ministry. Finally, one should also mention the possible opposition to these programmes by state governors and local politicians who see them as an encroachment on their traditional areas of control.
27. CS also gives some limited support to families in poverty pockets of each of the 27 state capitals.
28. Although it is possible to know the towns covered by each programme, there is no global assessment of how many towns could actually access the whole help package.
29. The source for these data is *Comunidade Solidária* (1997).
30. While only 15 per cent of social investments benefit the 20 per cent poorest population, 21 per cent provide free services for the richest 20 per cent. See *Banco Mundial* (1996).
31. Rocha (1996). It has been pointed out that among the poor there is a group whose situation places them very close to the poverty line, above or below it, depending on the overall conditions of the economy. The same situation seems to have occurred in Chile, where stabilisation caused a fraction of the poor to cross poverty lines, leaving behind those characterised by the incapacity to benefit from a better state of the economy. To overcome this hard-core poverty, special assistance is required along the same lines as have been discussed in this paper.



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## APPENDIX

### THREE CASES OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CA COMMITTEES AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

#### Case 1: Partnership with Belo Horizonte Municipal Government

Belo Horizonte is the capital of Minas Gerais State, with a population of about 2 million people, among whom about 60 000 are living in extreme poverty. In 1993, when the municipal government began working with CA committees in the areas of housing, health care and nutrition, it estimated that 25 per cent of the children under 5 were malnourished.

The Municipal Secretariat for Supplies, in charge of overseeing the provision of goods in the markets of that city, devised a comprehensive policy, covering the whole production/distribution cycle, and stimulating direct participation of the local communities.

Many projects were directed at the poor showing nutrition deficiencies. They included not only food distribution but also an educational programme to help them in setting up purchase and consumption cooperatives to obtain better quality and lower prices for food. A particularly important project, implemented in 1997, benefited 10 000 pregnant and lactating women, as well as young children, through the distribution of milk and enriched flour (a mix of wheat, rice, manioc leaves, egg shells and seeds), a highly nourishing, low-cost product. A by-product of this project has been the increase of milk production by breast-feeding women, increasing the donations to community maternal milk banks. The women are also taught to use food more efficiently and to produce greens either individually, in their backyards, or collectively, in community vegetable gardens. Seeds are donated to start cultivation.

CA committees participated in the definition of the programme as well as in its implementation, starting with the collection and distribution of milk to children in advanced stages of malnutrition. Since 1996, milk has been supplied by the Community Solidarity Program and by the municipal government. CA committees are still active, however, organising groups of mothers to produce *arrayolo* rugs, a handicraft product typical of this area, for income generation. The committees have also supported municipal efforts to maintain 147 community daycare centres run by mothers' groups and benefiting about 10 000 children, through special events and campaigns to collect food and to improve child care. In some of these centres, bakeries were created to produce a kind of enriched bread, with the financial and organisational support of CA committees and technical assistance given by technicians from the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

Another ongoing project, involving the municipal government, CA committees and other civil society organisations, concerns the seven Centres for Food Production, employing 33 families. These centres are small plants producing enriched flour and other food items, at low costs, using products that are seasonally cheaper. The employees in these centres are the mothers of malnourished children and teenagers. Most of what is produced is bought by the municipal government for daycare centres, schools and health care centres.

## **Case 2: The Co-operative of Manguinhos: Combining Socio-economic Up-lifting and Efficiency**

FIOCRUZ, a medical research institution of the federal government in Rio de Janeiro City, (associated with the Committee of Public Entities Against Hunger, COEP), occupies a large tract of land in a very poor area of the city surrounded by *favelas*. In November 1994, FIOCRUZ decided to stimulate the creation of a co-operative of slum dwellers to perform cleaning and maintenance chores in its facilities. This initiative was intended not only to offer jobs to people living in the surrounding communities, but also to help them improve their living conditions by increasing their education and professional training. The co-operative was created with 50 members and by 1997 grew to 840 members coming from six neighbouring slums. Its creation and consolidation was also supported by Banco do Brasil and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, through its “hatchery of co-operatives” programme (the latter two institutions also being associated with COEP).

The co-operative began by collecting garbage in FIOCRUZ campus and later performed all cleaning, maintenance and gardening jobs on the campus as well as in other facilities. This upgrading required a progressive increase in the skills of workers, achieved by successive training programmes. The co-operative currently offers its members literacy courses as well as professional and leadership training.

The cleaning and maintenance services now provided by the co-operative used to be supplied by private firms. The change of supplier enabled FIOCRUZ to save 20 per cent of maintenance costs while offering currently-employed workers wages that were, on average, 2.8 times higher than those paid to employees of the private suppliers. In addition, the co-operative grants its members such benefits as paid holidays, paid weekends, Christmas bonuses and access to welfare. These are benefits offered to every worker who has a regular labour contract, but private firms selling services like cleaning and maintenance hire their workers as temporary labourers, thus denying them these benefits.

The co-operative has become an important element in the social life of the slums it covers, developing cultural and educational projects, such as musical education, the teaching of *capoeira* (a traditional Brazilian mixture of dance and martial arts brought by African slaves), adult education, environment conservation, etc.

## **Case 3: Partnership with EMBRAPA**

In the area of food production, CA committees formed by workers of the Brazilian Enterprise for Agricultural Research, EMBRAPA, have been responsible for a great number of projects developed in association with communities, municipal governments, other government institutions and civil society organisations.

The first project developed by EMBRAPA technicians was based on the initiative of a researcher who, in his words, felt ashamed when he saw children collecting food donations for a CA committee in his city, Goiania, capital of Goias State, in the Brazilian hinterland. He decided to help by devising ways of increasing rice and bean production, the staple of Brazilian food. Breaking the resistance of EMBRAPA's bureaucracy, he was able to convince its managers to cede a tract of idle land owned by the institution to grow rice and beans. He had the support of a group of Goiania citizens, other technicians from EMBRAPA and

workers from the local branches of Banco do Brasil. He was also helped by small local entrepreneurs who lent agricultural machinery and donated fuel and other inputs. In their first crop, the group that was working in the project harvested 62 tons of grain, which were distributed to 6 000 needy people. This received wide press coverage, working as an example to be followed in other areas. EMBRAPA itself was moved by this result to cede other areas to similar initiatives. Other public enterprises and even private farmers lent idle tracts of land to new production projects.

A CA committee was formed of workers of EMBRAPA. Since July 1996, it has also been operating with native Brazilian communities in the area of Guarapuava, Parana State (in the Southern region). About 9 000 people live in these communities in deep poverty and malnutrition. The committee is giving them technical assistance to cultivate 500 hectares with rice and 100 hectares with corn. EMBRAPA's soy-bean specialists are also working with native Brazilians to teach them to cultivate and prepare soy beans for consumption, and particularly the preparation of soy bean milk which, with its high protein content, is highly effective in fighting malnutrition. EMBRAPA itself is involved in this project which is also supported by the Ministry for Welfare through the supply of seeds and fertilizers.

In Teresina, capital of Piaui State, in the Northeast of the country, EMBRAPA has ceded 8 hectares of land for a CA committee project to produce food. The committee is formed by workers of EMBRAPA and dwellers of the Buenos Aires neighbourhood. In the latter area, the project has involved 50 families of unemployed people and produced 16 tons of corn and 4 tons of beans a year. EMBRAPA has also given permission to these families to extract from its land *babaçu* coconuts oil production, as well as leaves and roots to produce homemade medicines. Finally, they can also collect cashew fruits which they sell or process into sweets for sale. All these products were previously left unused by EMBRAPA. In 1997, Teresina's municipal government, stimulated by the success of the programme, began to support it by supplying inputs and providing irrigation. The target is to reach 300 hectares. The project is particularly adapted to absorbing newly-arrived unemployed migrants from rural areas who have some knowledge of agriculture but not the skills required for urban activities.