

# Online FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES - BRAZIL

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ORGANIZATION: COMIDA DO AMANHÃ INSTITUTE

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## SUMMARY REPORT

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Proposals</b>	<b>3</b>
Proposal 1:	3
Proposal 2:	4
Proposal 3:	5
Proposal 4:	6
Proposal 5:	8
Proposal 6:	9
Proposal 7:	10
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>

## Executive Summary

On 24th June 2020 an online Food Systems Dialogues , organized by Comida do Amanhã Institute and curated by Mr. José Graziano da Silva was held. This FSDs event was held in the context of COVID-19 impacts on Brazilian Food Systems. 43 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems, ranging from smallholder farmers associations and traditional “quilombolas” community (former slaves descendants) to former Ministers of agriculture and social development; including scholars, NGOs on food security and on environmental protection, agri-business and social finance entrepreneurs, and representatives of a municipal government, the national Public Defender’s office, and the national school feeding programme agency.

The digital Dialogue Tables were asked to present one or more proposals for action to address a specific area of food systems in the context of COVID-19, with a focus on Brazil's post-pandemic scenario.

The discussion topics for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas:

- Access to healthy food, healthy food production resilience, and fair compensation for food producers, in the post-COVID scenario.
- Smart food safety protocols: food safety and workers safety in all food sectors in response to COVID, without discouraging fresh food consumption nor punishing artisan food processors.
- Food producers incomes and disruption of food chains due to COVID.
- Food systems resilience to future pandemics with maintenance of structural food policies like school feeding and food storage programs, and no interruption to food supply.
- The post-COVID food system and the way to meet the SDGs.
- Food systems disruptions due to COVID and the opportunity to raise both richer and poorer consumers' awareness on food origins, food supply chain from farm to fork, and the impacts these chains have on the whole food system.
- The efficiency of emergency measures, of structural and regular policies, and of public-private partnerships to fight hunger and food insecurity and obesity, in the post-COVID scenario.

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to that topic. Discussion topics were phrased as ambitious 'ideal future states' of food systems to be reached in a 3-years period.

The following is a summary of the tables' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

### **Proposal 1:**

#### **Discussion topic:**

**Access to healthy food, healthy food production resilience, and fair compensation for food producers, in the post-COVID scenario.**

*Although there is no single solution to food systems transformation, new models of food distribution and consumption are needed in order to make healthy food accessible to everyone and, at the same time, ensure fair compensation to food producers. These transformations are needed especially at the local level (supported by local governments and/or local organizations) with the aim to fight food deserts, shorten food chains, reduce food losses, as well as foster models of food production that: (i) enhance the power of collectivism & associationism, (ii) value sustainable agriculture in all its forms (agroecology, regenerative agriculture, crop rotation with holistic approach), and (iii) value the real role of women in food production.*

Cooperatives and all forms of organized associations among food producers are key actors (and must be stimulated by public policies) to guide producers on topics such as supply & demand data, production costs & baselines for fair compensations, purchasing & procurement agreements, and financial supervision. Associationism is also key to empower traditional communities ("caiçara", "quilombola", native peoples) and the networks these communities can build to access urban markets, and to connect food production with people in food vulnerability. Besides, if traditional communities are also considered as a source of food knowledge, having them empowered and

supported is essential to ensure sustainable and resilient food systems. The acknowledging of a forest-shore-city nexus is one important way to ally sustainable agriculture practices with healthy food provision. Markets are easier to access and food losses are easier to prevent when collective entities take the leadership and, for instance, help and support food producers to access street markets, or to arrange CSA-like arrangements (CSA = community supported agriculture), and make smart use of food surplus. In the long term approach, integrated organization and leadership are needed to make different food systems stakeholders integrate their frameworks of action and share systems transformation plans.

### **Proposal 2:**

#### **Discussion topic:**

**Food smart sanitary protocols: food safety and workers safety in all food sectors in response to COVID, without discouraging fresh food consumption nor punishing artisan food processors.**

*Local, state and federal food safety rules must be harmonized and better integrated for easier compliance. All food safety mechanisms should be designed with multiple stakeholders participation, connecting technical knowledge with practical experience of the forefront actors of each food chain sector, mainly SMEs. Such rules and guidelines should be disseminated through platforms for knowledge and content sharing that take into account the reality of each food sector. Financial support is key to the feasibility of sanitary protocols from farm to fork. Besides, food safety protocols and techniques should not dissociate the biological from the cultural aspects of food territorial diversity, nor become a source of standardization and homogenization of diets: food sovereignty should be, therefore, a guiding principle of food safety regulation. Catering industry could be part of the consumer educational process (on smart food safety) subtly showing the needs of strict but not excessive sanitary protocols, that will provide safety while keeping nutritious and fresh food on the plate.*

Strict food safety protocols for all sectors of the food chain, designed for other known pathogens, are already in place in Brazilian regulation, and coronavirus specific protocols would easily fit them. Rastreability and food analysis are actually the newer forms of food safety control that need to be better understood, disseminated, and taught, with facilitated financial and technical access. These protocols and techniques shall not weaken nor discourage the socio-biodiversity aspects of food, but be balanced, instead, with territorial and cultural diversity.

From the point of view of smallholder farmers, especially those producing on an agroecological basis, these actors are already on the verge of financial capacity, increasingly pushed to commodities cultivation for economic survival, not mentioning the lack of access to several

markets due to COVID closure measures. Therefore, keeping them growing non-commodities nutritious-real-food, even in times of pandemic, is - or should be - a multiple authorities' task force.

### **Proposal 3:**

#### **Discussion topic:**

#### **Food producers incomes and disruption of food chains due to COVID.**

*At the national level, a lot of existing policies (the national food procurement program and the national school feeding program , that are both directed to purchase family farmers production; the national policy for agroecology and organic production, including financial support and technical assistance; the national program for food safety inclusion and improvement; and state and national programs for fight rural poverty and ensure water resilience in the northeast of Brazil, including those with IFAD support) and former policy governance structures (the now extinct national food policy council) should be resumed or boosted to mitigate or even reverse the current trajectory of food systems disruption due to the weakening of smallholder farmers. Some governmental emergency actions should also be put in place, like a project of bill that would give special support for family farmers during the pandemic period, by measures of open credit and non-commodity production fostering (\* this bill was finally approved by Congress on July 5th); or the creation of mobile food warehouses and centers of food supply intended to family farmers production; and even the smart use of tax incentives both to smallholder farmers and to SMEs that purchase food from smallholder farmers. Besides, local food policies - still not so much developed and disseminated in Brazil, despite some very good examples - should play a bigger role in ensuring local food systems resilience and family farming support. Municipalities should pay more attention to local food strategies, due to the importance of supporting local food supply chains and healthy food access. Moreover, producer-to-consumer sales should be facilitated in order to shorten food supply chains of fresh & nutritious food (not losing control of food safety, though), and investments should be made in technology support to ensure smallholder farmers digital access and the use of mobile apps & softwares for local trade. At last, considering that family farmers are much more keen to animal farming in a non-confinement system, another important investment and/or policy incentive should be in free-ranging farming rather than in farm factories.*

There is an almost unanimous consensus that Brazilian government support for universal food security and family farming is in free fall. Budgets allocated to programs on these issues have been decreased very much during the past few years. COVID pandemic has only highlighted this downward trend and has exarcebated the negative impacts of structural policies dismantling, by adding the prognostic of a world economic recession, plus all sorts of logistic limitations put to

food distribution. Even if big farmers have also suffered the impacts of the pandemic, it's the smallholder farmers, small producers, and traditional peoples who endured the most. Thus it is an economic challenge that adds to a social one.

Apart from that, the importance of city-level policies, strategies and actions became more clearer, and a lot of measures could be taken at the local level to ensure that producers have access to markets at the same time that consumers - especially those in vulnerability - have access to healthy food. The closing of street markets, schools, and other chains of local food supply have impacted both food producers incomes and the quality of children and local households feeding.

#### **Proposal 4:**

##### **Discussion topic:**

**Food systems resilience to future pandemics with maintenance of structural food policies, like school feeding and food storage programs, and no interruption to food supply.**

*One of the best Brazilian policy achievements - the strategy of articulating school feeding with family farming through food procurement - must be reinforced to ensure food systems resilience. It is essential that those policies - internationally recognized - remain in place without losing budgets nor enforcement. The hegemonic model of Brazilian food systems shall be subject to deep measures to fight the roots of such unequal model and make possible the transition to a sustainable food system, built upon the local economy. Targets should be, from the supply side, (i) increasing agroecological & organic food production and (ii) providing family farming continuous support; and from the demand side: raising consumer's awareness, by information sharing and communications narratives that highlight the importance of (i) healthy food and of (ii) consumers as activists of change. To that end, it is also important to resume the policy governance model that went well for years: the National System for Food & Nutrition Security (SISAN), with the enforcement of its anchoring bill (LOSAN) and the reestablishment of the National Food Policy Council (CONSEA), not mentioning the lack of a truly active National Agency for Food & Nutrition Security (CAISAN), which is missing the deadline for designing the 3rd National Plan for Food & Nutrition Security. The (current) whole lack of dialogue between national government and civil society should be replaced by the resume of a multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary policy-making process at the national level, as well as the empowerment of food policy councils at the municipal level - acknowledging the role of civil society and non-government organizations as important advocacy players and actors of innovative arrangements to address food systems challenges. The strengthening of governance entities and the resume of structuring policies on food systems resilience demand real and considerable budgets, with funds flowing to - and execution happening at - the local level, especially where local communities need the most, like urban peripheries and slums, as well as indigenous and traditional communities villages.*

This group also stressed how the current Brazilian federal government is failing to support both universal food security and family farming, letting down the main federal policies that have existed and succeeded for more than 10 years. Were those policies and programs working on full power, communities in vulnerability wouldn't have been so badly impacted by the pandemic effects. Black people, native peoples, traditional communities, people living at the peripheries of big cities, and so on, are having their rights violated and facing tragic consequences that could have been prevented by efficient social policies. Once again it was considered the importance and the power of the National Program for School Feeding (PNAE), with its family farming food procurement integrated policy, as a structural policy that cannot lose budget or relevance. The schools closing, due to the COVID pandemic, became a big challenge to the enforceability of the program at the local level. (Although it is a national program, funded by the federal government, its implementation is mostly done by municipalities, since municipalities are in charge of public primary schools in Brazil). Even before COVID pandemic, the program was already under threat due to congressional movements to review its regulation, downgrading its importance and scope, in addition to the decrease of its real budget. With COVID, the main issue became how to keep students receiving the free nutritious meals they would be receiving at school, and at the same time keeping municipalities procuring local food from family farmers - to not disrupt the entire system. The challenge is still in place, since some cities are coping with the PNAE regulation and others are not. An important change in regulation was done in April to allow that food purchased for the schools could be directly delivered to the students' families. Therefore, strengthening a policy that connects free and universal school feeding (a food security measure) with nutrition security and family farming support is considered part of the strategy to ensure resilience to food systems in the long run, along with the National Food Procurement Program (PAA).

Another fundamental piece of this puzzle to the future of food systems resilience is the active role of civil society. Social movements and advocacy organizations have done a lot during this period, even with the closing of CONSEA. Civil society is working hard, not only to request but also to control government actions, both at the national and local levels. It is civil society job the consolidation and/or design of plans or proposals for government action, like the resume of the National Food Procurement Program (PAA), a guideline for school feeding during the pandemic period, and an emergency bill to support "farms, forests and water". Also, the convocation of a popular national conference on food & nutrition security and sovereignty - a popular mobilization process more than just an event - and the articulation among state and local food policy councils, among other stakeholders.

Many achievements - based on solidarity and sense of collectiveness - have been made in vulnerable urban territories, like supportive networks usually led by women, food donation campaigns and farm-to-slums connections. Although a new kind of consumer awareness is

beginning to get shape, resilience will come with structural not emergency transformation. As a matter of fact, big food industry is still winning, using the pandemic and so-called solidarity actions as a truly commercial capitalization and products advertising.

### **Proposal 5:**

#### **Discussion topic:**

#### **The post-COVID food system and the way to meet the SDGs.**

*Considering that the SDGs are political targets that need political choices to be met, public policies play a decisive role on the 2030 agenda, and the current sharp social inequality is probably the main challenge to be fought. Food insecure people - black people and people in the urban peripheries -, smallholder farmers, SMEs in the food chain, local food markets, food workers, delivery workers, etc are those in more vulnerability and in unequal status - thus in need of policy attention. Public policies must be SDG-oriented and shall focus on the long-term solutions, taking into account the causes, the roots of the ongoing system's failures, which are the same that caused the pandemic in the first place. To that end, agroecology and food sovereignty should be seen as guiding principles. Agricultural policies that include small credit, technical assistance and technological support programs are also essential to that goal. On the other hand, the agriculture sector must address the international pressures linked to environmental impacts, GHG emissions, indigenous people damages. Climate and social aspects of food systems shall be seen and fought together - there is no taking care of the environment without taking care of people. Hunger is a big obstacle to environment conservation - food insecurity and climate change must be focused together. Besides that, another focus of work to meet the SDGs is shortening the food chains, like some successful arrangements being made between family farmers networks and urban consumers. There should be more and more collaboration and dialogue among food systems actors from different sectors, mainly between policymakers and civil society, to make possible the design of more broad and bold public policies. Moreover, local authorities and municipal actions must enter these debates, and cities should assume their role of sustainable food systems drivers.*

There are only 10 years to meet the SDGs and too little has been done in that direction, in Brazil. COVID pandemic has only sharpened the deep roots of social inequality and market concentration that leads to food systems failures. And food is linked to all SDGs.

There is no acknowledgement of any strong action being taken or prepared by the federal government to attenuate the pandemic social-economical impacts. Brazil is seeing emergency and assistentialist programs and actions, rather than long-term structural ones. The inequalities of food systems are causing a kind of nutricide, since it is the vulnerable people (black people, urban



periphery's people), usually in severe to moderate food insecurity, that are suffering the most. Once again it was noted the disruption of school feeding and of family farmers access to markets. The group believes a greater focus should be put in food production, with a 360° approach to its challenges and possibilities, considering the need of producing food to feed the population and the possibility of shortening the food chains with family farmers networks distributing food directly to final consumers, as some good examples seen during the pandemic. On the other hand, delivery food habits increased during the pandemic has made food labour contracts more precarious and increased both the need of hygienic measures and the use of plastic packaging, probably increasing carbon footprint.

The SDGs are not embedded at Brazilian policies and legislations as they should, and much has to be made yet. It is noteworthy that the several zoonoses that cause epidemics and pandemics are rooted in the bad relationship between human beings and the environment. Resources are each time more scarce and Brazilian environmental agenda is outdated. As people get more and more urbanized, they miss the references of farms, fields and forests. That is why cooperation and partnerships are more indispensable than ever.

#### **Proposal 6:**

##### **Discussion topic:**

**Food systems disruptions due to COVID and the opportunity to raise both richer and poorer consumers' awareness on food origins, on the food supply chain from farm to fork, and on the impacts these chains have on the whole food system.**

*Not only food production models but also food consumption models need to be reviewed. Food & nutrition security policies must be reestablished and/or advanced; food to be wasted must be classified, qualified and redirected, if possible, to food insecure people; agroecology and agroforestry must be mainstreamed; and new multi-sector partnerships must be incentivized - like those in place at productive communities from Amazonia, where state inefficiency, both for fiscalization and production flow infrastructure support, is the rule. It is essential that consumers from all income levels be able to choose and access local nutritious food.*

Although food label regulation is hugely important to attend consumers' right to information, information policies must be designed and put in place to make information about healthy diets and the food systems challenges accessible to all consumers, including low-income families. Qualified information about food is not only a right but a necessity to improve standard diets. Information is needed in order to allow consumers to choose real nutritious food rather than commodities, and to truly cope with food waste reduction. On the other hand, smallholder family

farmers and productive communities shall have the opportunity to get access to the credit and infrastructure needed to allow them to develop themselves in a sustainable way. It is important to establish an economy of the forest and revalue its products.

### **Proposal 7:**

#### **Discussion topic:**

**The efficiency of emergency measures, of structural and regular policies, and of public-private partnerships to fight hunger and food insecurity and obesity, in the post-COVID scenario.**

*Regular and universal access to nutritious food depends on multidimensional factors, but most importantly: political leadership. Food insecurity and obesity are topics that must be continuously present in public policies design and monitoring. These are not temporary issues. Actions to fight malnutrition and keep its rates on track can never stop. Multi-level coordination and entities for social control are key to the efficiency of those policies. Efforts should be oriented both to nutrition education - to increase awareness about the importance of diets based on fresh food, greeneries and fruits - and also to citizenship education - citizens have to understand the importance of taking part in policy making processes, which will lead to value and incentive community leadership. Another necessary action: increasing dialogues between multiple governmental departments (inter-ministries meetings or workgroups) and among the different levels of government (federal government must dialogue with state and local governments). Intersectoral arrangements and dialogues are also key to the efficiency of food policies. Sustainable and healthy diets are directly connected to sustainable food production, which depends on family farming strengthening and incentives to cooperativism. Production of healthy food is also more labour intensive, so if more healthy food is demanded, more jobs/ income will be generated on farms and rural areas.*

All forms of malnutrition are rooted on poor and unhealthy diets. There should be more policies oriented to fight obesity and hunger/food insecurity, but their success depends on the participation of society in the policymaking process. Therefore, a more active citizenship - stimulated by school education - was seen by the group as a precondition to better food policies. Besides, considering that there has been a rising gap between federal government and local governments - even before the COVID pandemic - and local governments are getting more aware of their power, there seems to be a great room for local policies improvement. However, it was noted that coordination among cities is also necessary and desirable, including for fundraising reasons, since funds deployed by the federal government have been decreasing. Municipalities want to be heard in the national policy making process, and also play a bigger role in their sphere of government - the Brazilian federative model does not ensure coordination among the different

levels of governments, which leads to systems failures. On the other hand, considering that hunger and food insecurity have circumstances, data and causes that differ according to each region of the country, each territory will need particular aspects of policy intervention to orient their fight on hunger. Generalization of policy instruments will not be efficient. Local food policies must embed concepts of resilience and climate impact and keep focus on school feeding to promote healthy diets. At last, regarding the fight against hunger, it was considered the importance of focusing on rural areas: supporting non-agricultural rural enterprises and rural workers, and fostering the cooperative & associative culture among food producers.

## Conclusion

Although a diverse range of food actors participated at the event, an almost unanimous focus was put on public policies, government intervention and action, and the resume or reinforcement of previous national food policies that seemed to be more efficient.

The groups stressed (i) the importance of civil society participation in the policy making process and governance of food policies, (ii) that structural policies can not be forgotten by the current focus on the emergency ones, (iii) and also the value of intersectoral dialogues as a means for developing better policies and solutions to address the current food systems challenges.

As guiding principles of every proposal it is easy to observe the central role of: family farming, agroecology, traditional communities, and food sovereignty.

Another strong message resulting from the dialogues was the acknowledgment of local power and the relevance of local policies and local actions (like food chain shortening solutions) for food systems transformation. It's clear that cities have a bigger role to play in Brazil.