The Government of Brazil has been attaching great importance to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals—(MDGs). Three National Monitoring Reports [1–3] have been produced, based on detailed official data of these goals, as a partnership between the Brazilian Government and the agencies comprising the United Nations System in the country. The Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), both linked to the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, were responsible for the selection and analysis of the indicators used, coordination of the thematic groups and consolidation of the final text of the reports. In this article, particularly, we will focus on the 1st MDG.

MDG1—Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

The targets are to halve between 1990 and 2015 (1) the proportion of people who live on less than US$1 PPP (adjusted by purchasing power parity) a day and (2) the proportion of those who suffer from hunger.

Brazil has already fulfilled its commitment to this goal.

The Federal Government established the fight against hunger as a priority in the country. As a first step, in the opening of the 58th United Nations General Assembly in 2003, together with India and South Africa, Brazil helped to set up the Trust Fund for Hunger and Poverty Alleviation, within the scope of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aimed at replicating, on a global scale, successful social projects [1]. The priorities established by the Brazilian government—to mobilize resources and, thus, promote the resumption of economic growth with social inclusion are strictly in line with those of the World Summit.

In 1990, year of reference for the MDGs, 8.8% of Brazilians lived under the per capita income line established by the UN [1]. Therefore the target would be to reduce this percentage to 4.4% by year 2015. Ten years before the target date in the year 2005 the proportion living in poverty had reached 4.2% [3] (Fig. 1). The total population of the country is 186.3 millions. Therefore, the extremely poor can total 7.5 million people, according to the cut-off point adopted of US$1 PPP (www.ibge.gov.br/home/disseminacao/online/popclock/metpopcl.shtm).

Another parameter used in the target of reducing ‘extreme poverty’ is the participation of the poorest 20% in the national income or consumption. In 1995, the 20% belonging to the bottom of the social pyramid held 2.3% of the total income, and in 2005 this percentage increased to 2.9%. The 20% richest people held 64% of the total income of families in 1995, and 61% in 2005. While the annual rate of the 10% poorest increased by 9.2% from 2001 to 2005, the income of the 10% richest decreased by 0.4% in the same period [3]. The regional differences are evident when one analyses the proportion of the people living in ‘extreme poverty’. The percentage of people in this situation in 2005 was 9.5% in the Northeast against 2.0% in the Southeast (Fig. 2). It is important to emphasize that the annual decrease of ‘extreme poverty’ is going down faster in the Northeast than in the Southeast region (0.9% x 0.3%/year, respectively), and in rural than in urban areas (1.2% × 0.4%/year, respectively) [3]. Among other factors, the income transfer carried out by Social Security and Assistance programmes contributed to these results (urban and rural retirement, pensions, continued benefits to low income elderly people and poor people with disabilities), and Bolsa-Família (a family grant), part of the Fome Zero Programme.

Inequality in Brazil is also related to race, affecting blacks and mulattos more intensely. In 2005, the distribution of these groups within the poorest 10%, on the one hand, and within the wealthiest 1%, on the other, shows that 73.5% of the poorest were blacks or mulattos, while 88.4% of those in the most privileged class were white [3].

From 1995 to 2005, the main indicator for measuring income inequality, the Gini index, decreased from 0.599 to 0.566, but is still one of the highest in the world [1,3].

The prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age has been reduced by around 70% between 1975 and 1996. In 1975, the prevalence of child malnutrition (weight/age) was 18.4%, and in 1996, this percentage decreased to 5.7%. From 1999 to 2006 malnutrition in children under 1 year of age has dropped from 10.1% to 2.4%, and in children...
from 1 year to 2 years of age decreased from 19.8% to 4.8%, approaching the index of countries with better levels of development than that of Brazil [1,3] (Fig. 3). However, it has been observed that there are considerable differences in the prevalence of malnutrition among the country’s regions and by residence, whether urban or rural. The problem of malnutrition is worse in the North and Northeast regions and in rural areas.

Malnutrition, being the most severe expression of food deficiency, is the harshest sign that hunger continues to remain in Brazil, but it is not for lack of food, since the country produces more than what is needed to meet the food demands of its population. Data from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reveal that food availability in Brazil went from 2810 calories per person per day in 1990–92 to 3110 calories in 2002–04. In both cases, values exceed the recommended minimum of 1900 kcal/person/day [4].

As in some other countries in the world, Brazil has been through the nutrition transition process, as the prevalence of malnutrition is decreasing, and obesity is increasing. In 2006, the Food and Nutrition Surveillance System Network (SISVAN) has assessed the nutritional status of 1.5 million children who were beneficiaries of Bolsa-Família. The results showed that despite the high number of children with nutritional deficits—19.6%, considering the weight/age index, 7.9% of the children had obesity, the majority of those being in the Southeast region [http://sisvan.datasus.gov.br].

In order to face the lack of food security, since the 1990’s successive Brazilian governments have developed a set of policies that can be grouped around three main axes:
- agrarian development;
- proper conditions for participation in the labour market; and
- increased access to food.

Within agrarian development policies, one can highlight support to small scale farming, by means of the National Program for the Strengthening of Family Farming (PRONAF). In addition, land reform has been accelerated in recent years through the National Plan for Land Reform (PNRA), generating the inclusion of almost 1 million new producers in the universe of family farmers. In 2003, the Federal government launched the Food Purchase Program (PAA) that buys food from family farmers, in order to encourage them through adequate remuneration of production, besides contributing to maintaining minimum stocks of the food basket products. These two initiatives are extremely important, since Brazilian family farming is responsible for more than 30% of the country’s food production [1].

In the second axis namely policies for income generation, one should stress the actions carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Employment aiming to increase work and income prospects for the population of working age, such as unemployment benefit, credit within the Urban Program for Employment and Income Generation (PROGER), professional qualification through the National Plan for Professional Qualification (PLANFOR, PNQ).
With regard to third axis namely increased access to food it is also important to mention two food distribution programmes existing for decades in the country: namely the National Program for School Meals (PNAE) and the Workers’ Food Program (PAT). Then, in 2003, the Fome Zero Programme was implemented by the new Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger. The Programme’s objective is to fight hunger and poverty by combining access to basic social rights (health, education and social assistance) through transfer of financial benefits [3]. The Fome Zero expanded and enhanced a series of actions to guarantee the human right to food and to combat poverty, implementing several policies including direct income transfers to the poorest families by the Bolsa-Família, similar to other cash transfer programmes in Latin America [5]. In 2006, the Bolsa-Família programme benefited 11 million families (equivalent to a quarter of Brazilian’s population), transferring R$8.2 billion to those families (approximately US$4 billion in 2006). According to IBGE the programme reached the goal to assess almost 98% of the poor Brazilian families that have been officially registered, 50% of the families are in the Northeast region (the poorest region in Brazil), and 26% in the Southeast (the most populated region) [3].

As far as we know, Bolsa-Família is the largest anti-poverty programme in the world. For a relatively small investment (0.8% GDP) Brazil is getting good results.

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References