BELO HORIZONTE’s approach to food security

BELO HORIZONTE IS A PIONEER IN INTEGRATED URBAN POLICY TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY. THE CITY’S APPROACH HAS ENDURED FOR OVER 20 YEARS, WITH ITS CORE PRINCIPALS INTACT. ITS LONGEVITY IS DUE LARGELY TO INSTITUTIONALIZATION WITHIN CITY GOVERNMENT (IN A DEDICATED MUNICIPAL AGENCY KNOWN AS SMASAN), A DEDICATED CADRE OF CIVIL SERVANTS, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO FOOD AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL, LEADING TO SUPPORTIVE FEDERAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS.
In the early 1990s, Brazil was in the grip of economic crisis and food prices were rising beyond the means of many citizens. In Belo Horizonte, a city of 2.5 million people, around 11% of the population was living in poverty and 20% of children were going hungry each day (Lappe, 2009). In an effort to redress the inequality and improve citizens’ access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food, in 1993 the city established an integrated approach to food security policy that remains in place today.

The guiding principle behind the policy is the human right to food. This means that instead of focusing on charitable or emergency food provisioning, it has mainstreamed the pursuit of inclusive, universal food and nutrition security into public policy.

The policy encompasses a range of different programmes, which are managed by SMASAN — the ‘Municipal Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Security’. The programmes fall under six workstreams:

- Subsidized food sales, e.g. four Popular Restaurants that serve nutritious meals at (or below) cost.
- Food and nutrition assistance, e.g. the School Meals Programme; the Food Bank.
- Supply and regulation of food markets, e.g. ABastaCer (low-cost food) stores that sell food staples at a price fixed by the municipality; Straight from the Country, through which associations of small-scale producers sell directly to consumers.
- Support for urban agriculture, e.g. school gardens, community plots, container growing.
- Food and nutrition education, e.g. online resources and a policy knowledge centre.
- Job and income creation, e.g. professional food courses in schools and for mature students.

Through these programmes, Belo Horizonte has built a government-led alternative food system that runs in parallel to the conventional, market-led system (Rocha & Lessa, 2009; Rocha, 2007). Programmes are delivered in partnership with civil society and private companies, as well as other municipal departments. Between them the programmes reach around 300,000 Belo Hortontinos — 12% of the population — every day (Souza et al., 2014).

According to SMASAN, in 2015 the School Meals programme served 155,000 children in the public school system, while the Popular Restaurants served over 11,000 meals per day. SMASAN supported 133 school vegetable gardens and 50 community gardens, while the Straight from the Country programme supported 20 family farmers and there were 21 grocery stores in the ABastaCer programme.

According to the Human Development Atlas of Brazil7, poverty rates in Belo Horizonte have steadily declined from 17.23% in 1991 to 5.6% in 2010. Infant Mortality Rates declined from 34.6 per thousand in 1993 to 13.9 in 2010, while Child Mortality rates (under five years) declined...
from 39.6 to 15.2 over the same period. These statistics indicate that the approach has been effective, although they cannot, of course, be attributed solely to SMASAN.

This case study examines how Belo Horizonte’s food security policy was established and how its influence was ensured. It shows how cross-departmental integration and public legitimacy were achieved, and how this unique approach to food security has managed to survive for over 20 years, through several changes in municipal leadership, with its core principles intact.

**ESTABLISHING THE POLICY AND ENSURING INFLUENCE**

Belo Horizonte’s food and nutrition security policy began in 1993 when Mayor Patrus Ana-nias created the Municipal Secretariat for Food Supply (SMAB, now known as the SMASAN), an agency under which all food-related policies and programmes were to be centralized.

The context for its creation included favourable policy winds at the federal level, in response to both political and public pressure for action over food insecurity. The opposition Workers’ Party,

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8. *Secretaria Municipal de Abastecimento*

9. The name was changed in 2011 to represent the broader concept of food and nutrition security and the connection with the human right to food.
led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), had been advocating for a national policy on food security from the early 1990s, while bottom-up pressure came from the Citizens’ Action Campaign Against Hunger and for Life, led by popular activist Herberth de Souza (Rocha, 2001). The response of President Itamar Franco (of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) was the 1993 Plan Against Hunger and the creation of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), made up of civil society and federal ministry representatives. Together with the Brazilian Forum for Food and Nutrition Security that was formed in 1998, it would eventually be responsible for some of the country’s most innovative federal food security programmes (Rocha et al., 2016).

10. Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional. Two thirds of members are from civil society, and the rest are from different federal ministries. The first council lasted only two years as it was dismantled by incoming President Cardoso, but it was re-established by President Lula in 2003.

11. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional, made up of social organizations, researchers, government staff, and other food security and nutrition professionals.
This movement across Brazil was reflected in Belo Horizonte, where civil society groups were advocating for local policy to address food insecurity and forging contacts within the city government. Such popular support meant that food security was, politically, a very powerful idea. Mayor Ananias (a member of the Workers’ Party) made addressing food and nutrition security in Belo Horizonte his keystone project. By determining that SMAB was to have equal standing alongside traditional municipal departments, such as Education, Public Health and Social Welfare, Ananias sent a clear signal that food was a municipal priority and imbued the new agency with political clout to start delivering on its mission (Rocha, 2001). The Mayor’s support for this agency was unwavering throughout his five-year term and he allocated municipal funds to it: the initial annual budget under Ananias was around US$18m.

The Mayor decided that the new agency would be responsible for all policies and programmes related to food in Belo Horizonte, including those that previously fell under the remit of other municipal departments. However, the transfer of responsibilities was not always smooth. For instance, the Department of Education was originally unwilling to cede the School Meals Programme and the accompanying budget allocation (Rocha, 2016). In time, and with the political backing of the Mayor, several city departments played a helpful partnership role in delivering the programmes, such as facilitating access to target social groups in the places they frequent (e.g. without the cooperation of the Department of Education, SMASAN would not be able to deliver the School Meals Programme in the school setting), and overseeing quality assurance (e.g. the Agency for Urban Cleaning and Municipal Environment ensures safety, hygiene and quality of ABastaCer produce). According to Rocha (2001), the very existence of SMASAN enables the municipality to address food issues more efficiently, and in a more integrated way, than in cities where responsibility for food is split between several municipal departments, such as education, public health, and social welfare.

**GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Today SMASAN employs 180 civil servants, including nutritionists, agronomists, technicians and social workers. It is led by a director who is appointed by the Mayor of Belo Horizonte. This means that each change in municipal leadership is likely to bring a change in SMASAN’s leadership — and appointees do not necessarily have a background in, or knowledge of, food and nutrition security issues. The director is ultimately responsible for the approach and activities of SMASAN, but internally they are guided by a technical team of civil servants, many of whom have been in post since the agency was first established and have extensive knowledge and expertise.

At the time of this research there were also three adjunct entities involved in SMASAN’s governance, the first two of which are required under national legislation: the Municipal Council of Food and Nutrition Security (COMUSAN); the Intersectoral Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security of Belo Horizonte (CAISAN-BH); and the Municipal Forum of

12. Conselho Municipal de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional
13. Câmara Intersetorial de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional de Belo Horizonte
Food Supply and Food Security\(^\text{14}\) (FOMASA). All three of these entities feed into policy and programme development. Their roles and responsibilities are as follows:

- **COMUSAN** is a 24-member advisory board and a vehicle for civil society involvement in SMASAN. Created in 2003, it is intended to ensure SMASAN’s programmes are relevant to Belo Horizontinos. One third of COMUSAN’s members are representatives of municipal departments, while the remaining two thirds are from the education and research sectors, social movements, consumer groups, the food industry, the farming sector, and professional organizations, all of whom participate on a voluntary basis. COMUSAN’s work in developing, implementing and monitoring programmes is supported by a secretariat of SMASAN staff, which brings a degree of formality and accountability\(^\text{15}\).

- **CAISAN-BH** is an inter-sectoral (inter-departmental) body that was created in 2015 in fulfilment of federal requirements under the National System for Food and Nutrition Security, as explained below. It is intended to give municipal departments a formal role in SMASAN’s governance, and to ensure integration and transparency. It is made up of civil servants from SMASAN and the departments of social policies, health, education, social assistance, rights and citizenship, and environment. CAISAN-BH is chaired by the director of SMASAN (Rocha, 2016).

- **FOMASA** is a board composed of actors from agricultural associations, the food and farming industries, restaurants, supermarkets, cooperatives, and representatives of the state agency for rural extension and technical assistance (EMATER-MG)\(^\text{16}\). It was created in late 2015 by municipal decree on the initiative of the then-director of SMASAN, to give the private sector a greater voice\(^\text{17}\).

It is somewhat early to judge the effects of either CAISAN-BH or FOMASA. However, an interviewee reported that CAISAN-BH’s first year was marred by patchy attendance by departmental directors, which weakened discussions and the potential for action, and lack of representation of some key municipal departments or teams — notably Planning and the City Hall budget team. The absences were attributed partly to SMASAN’s failure to make the case for involvement, and partly to these teams being unused to collaborating in multi-departmental groups.

Since the establishment of FOMASA, meanwhile, there have been concerns about excessive private sector influence. The private sector’s interests are, ultimately, profit-oriented, and one interviewee was wary of the views and interests of economically-stable groups being prioritized over those of vulnerable groups.

\(^{14}\) Fórum Municipal de Abastecimento e Segurança Alimentar

\(^{15}\) COMUSAN’s predecessor as a civil society advisory board to SMAB/SMASAN, COMASA (Conselho Municipal de Abastecimento e Segurança Alimentar, ‘Municipal Council of Food Supply and Food Security’), was beset by personal and political conflicts. COMASA existed from 1993 until its collapse in 1998 (Rocha 2001). Since membership was entirely voluntary the conflicts (details of which have not been recorded) led members to stop attending meetings so that eventually the board could no longer perform its function.

\(^{16}\) Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural do Estado de Minas Gerais.

\(^{17}\) FOMASA was an initiative of the then director of SMASAN who, according to a member of COMUSAN, had strong ties to the food industry and a tendency to view food security (and not food and nutrition security) as just a matter of appropriate food supply. A new Mayor, Alexandre Kalil, came to power in January 2017 and will appoint a new director for SMASAN.
There was a fear that, should this emphasis continue, SMASAN would eventually become a secretariat dedicated only to managing food supply, to the detriment of programmes to promote the human right to food.

Under the National System for Food and Nutrition Security\(^\text{18}\) (see below), CAISAN-BH has a legal obligation to interact with COMUSAN; this interaction is facilitated by their overlapping memberships. CAISAN-BH is responsible for drawing up the Municipal Policy and Plan for Food and Nutrition Security, based on the outcomes of a conference convened by COMUSAN. Thus, COMUSAN plays a crucial role in ensuring public participation in policy development, thereby ensuring it is informed by the needs and priorities of the people and, consequently, has a high degree of legitimacy with Belo Horizontinos.

Indeed, legitimacy and trust have also ensured high take-up of food provided through SMA-SAN’s programmes. Great emphasis is placed on nutritional standards, quality, food safety and cleanliness, standards that set SMASAN’s work apart from government programmes of the past that were renowned for providing ‘poor quality food for poor people’ (Rocha & Lessa, 2009; Dubbeling et al. 2016a).

\(^{18}\) Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional.

\[**I see that intersectoral work is not easy, especially because it involves people, power and political interests of each sector. [Yet], I understand that it is necessary to raise awareness among partners about the relevance of their engagement in developing programs that help overcome the problems faced in everyday life, and to improve the ability for intersectoral action, without denying the specific interests of partners.**\]

Civil servant within SMASAN
SMASAN has survived for over 20 years with its core principles intact — but not without some challenges.

One difficulty has been the waning of high-level support for SMASAN, which left it with less influence over the city's political priorities than it enjoyed under Mayor Ananias. In 2005, during the term of Mayor Fernando Pimentel (like Ananias, a member of the Workers' Party), SMAB lost its status as a stand-alone department and became a sub-division of the Department of Social Policies. As a result, while its core activities remained the same (with some natural evolution of programmes), the agency slipped down the pecking order and its political clout and efficiency have been declining ever since, according to a civil servant within SMASAN.

The fact that the directorship of SMASAN is a political appointment, and is therefore liable to change with electoral cycles, can also pose a threat to its programmes — and the core values underpinning them. The director under Ananias was Maria Regina Nabuco, an academic expert on food security who defined the approach and put together a team of experienced and committed staff-members, some of whom are still in post. Subsequent directors have not always understood or agreed with the principles of the human right to food, social justice, universality, and food quality. Some have not realized that it would undermine the integrity of the programme to allow food companies to sponsor school meals under the guise of ‘curriculum support’. Others have questioned the universality of the programmes, seeing value only in serving those who are food insecure at a given moment (Rocha, 2016).

Despite these difficulties, four factors have safeguarded SMASAN and Belo Horizonte’s food and nutrition security policy:

Firstly, a supportive federal policy framework has continued — and been strengthened — over the last two decades. Food and nutrition security became institutionalized as a responsibility of the federal state in the 2000s, under President Lula. The Lula government introduced its flagship anti-hunger policy, *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger), in 2003. The following year it created the Ministry for Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger, and Ananias was appointed as its head. Then, in 2006, Congress passed Brazil’s National Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN)\(^{19}\), implementation of which required development of a National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN)\(^{20}\). In 2010 the Constitution of Brazil was amended to include the human right to food.

This federal framework has provided institutional structures and policies that have complemented and supported Belo Horizonte’s approach at the municipal level. In particular, under SISAN all levels of government (federal, state and local) must form Intersectoral Chambers for Food and Nutrition Security (CAISAN) composed of representatives from relevant government departments. As noted above, CAISAN-BH was created in 2015 in fulfilment of this requirement. Governments must also support and participate in Municipal Councils for Food and Nutrition Security (COMUSAN), work-

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19. *Lei Orgânica de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional*. This law was passed following a major advocacy effort by the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security and the Brazilian Forum for Food and Nutrition Security.

20. *Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional*. 

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ing alongside civil society representatives. In addition, SISAN includes a pact for municipalities to strengthen food and nutrition security. The pact — signed by Belo Horizonte — consists of a set of actions, against which the city’s performance is reviewed annually.

The supportive federal framework has also brought funding to supplement SMASAN’s municipal budget, which is used primarily to pay the wages of 180 staff and has always accounted for less than 2% of the total city budget (Rocha, 2016; Souza et al, 2014). For instance, grants from the Fome Zero programme funded construction of three of the city’s four Popular Restaurants and the refurbishment of the original one. Fome Zero also provides incentives for the Popular Restaurants to source fruit and vegetables from family farms via its Food Acquisition Programme.

Secondly, working in partnership has been fundamental to programme delivery. Businesses and civil society organizations provide co-ownership, meaning SMASAN’s programmes are not tied to one politician or administration and are therefore harder for new city leaderships to dismantle (Rocha & Lessa, 2009). Partnerships with other municipal departments and with external organizations have also helped to overcome budgetary constraints — although such arrangements may present barriers to ongoing municipal commitment, since credit for success goes to mainstream city departments, rather than to SMASAN. This can weaken the case for retaining a dedicated food agency when a new municipal government takes office (Rocha & Lessa, 2009).

Thirdly, Belo Horizonte’s approach to food and nutrition security has attracted the attention of academics, the media, and international organizations (Rocha, 2001; Rocha & Lessa, 2009; Lappe 2009; Souza et al., 2014; Gopel, 2009). It has inspired civil society actors and academics in other parts of the world to propose a similar approach in their cities, such as Windhoek in Namibia, and Cape Town, South Africa (Gerster- Bentaya et al., 2011; World Future Council, n.d.). According to a member of COMUSAN, such external recognition means that even leaders who are not wholly invested in the policy deem it worthwhile to continue with cost-effective or federally-subsidized programmes when they provide such good public relations. Moreover, Belo Horizonte is a signatory of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) and is already well on the way to fulfilling many — though not all — of its commitments (Rocha 2016). Thus, international momentum for food security and sustainability at the city level provides a framework for a new era of food policy in Belo Horizonte.

Fourthly, throughout its history SMASAN has had a dedicated team of civil servants who defend its core principles. In particular, members of the original technical team selected by Nabuco have engaged in reasoned argument and endeavoured to educate newly-appointed directors (Rocha, 2016). So far they have been largely successful.

Our secret is the ethics in our work, respect for the people we serve, a philosophy of work dedicated to the neediest population of the city, those who never had access or rights to anything. . . We wanted to show something new, something which would be ahead of its time from a social and democratic perspective. And this was something innovative, not only for the city, but for all of Brazil.

SUMMARY OF ENABLERS

This case study has shown that the main enablers for developing Belo Horizonte’s approach to food and nutrition security and establishing SMAB/SMASAN were political commitment of the then-mayor, and strong support from within the community and the civil society sector — both in the city and as part of a wider Brazilian movement — which made the very idea of addressing food security a powerful one that politicians would be wise to address. Ongoing policy processes, including the development of a new Food and Nutrition Security Plan, have been enabled by public participation through members of COMUSAN, which ensures policy is relevant to needs in the city.

A key enabler in delivery has been the central location of SMASAN within city government, which sent a clear message on the importance of food and nutrition security and meant the agency had strong political influence in its early days. Implementation has been enabled by core funding from the city government, as well as additional funding from federal programmes. Project partners, including other government and state agencies and private businesses, have provided additional resources and access to target users. Moreover, the core values of the approach — universality and nutritious, safe and high quality food — have promoted wide take-up of food provision under SMASAN’s programmes.

The longevity of Belo Horizonte’s approach to food and nutrition security is thanks largely to its institutionalization within city government — as well as subsequent institutionalization of the human right to food at the federal level, which provides supportive framing. Although the political nature of the directorship of SMASAN has made its underlying values somewhat vulnerable to electoral cycles, not least with the perceived increased influence of private sector interests via FOMASA, to date they have been successfully upheld thanks to civil servants’ insistence, as well as a desire to maintain Belo Horizonte’s good reputation thanks to positive publicity.
TABLE 1 - KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES

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| Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva                   | • Opposition leader in 1990s, raised awareness and support for addressing food security through lobbying  
|                                             | • President 2003-2011, institutionalized food security and nutrition |
| Herbert de Souza                            | • Leader of the Citizens Action Campaign Against Hunger and For Life  
|                                             | • Mobilized popular support for food security, making it a powerful idea |
| Mayor Patrus Ananias                        | • Mayor of Belo Horizonte 1993-1998                                  
|                                             | • Made food security a political priority, created SMAB and insisted other departments hand over food responsibilities |
| Subsequent Mayors/Administrations           | • Re-structured SMAB under Department of Social Policies             |
| SMAB/SMASAN civil servants                  | • Possess knowledge and institutional memory of SMASAN              
|                                             | • Educate and seek to influence new directors to retain core principles |
| Director of SMASAN                          | • Political appointee                                               
|                                             | • Determines approach of SMASAN and influence of different sectors, according to ideology |
| Various municipal departments               | • Some are programme partners (provide funding and/or access to target social groups)  
|                                             | • Director-level membership of CAISAN-BH advises SMASAN and ensures integration and transparency |
| Civil society groups                        | • Some are programme partners                                       
|                                             | • Membership of COMUSAN advises SMASAN; enables public participation |
| Private sector                              | • Some are programme partners                                       
|                                             | • Members of FOMASA advise SMASAN                                   |
| Academics, media and international organisations (FAO, World Future Council) | • Publicize Belo Horizonte’s food and nutrition security work       
|                                             | • Draw global attention and accolades                               |