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**T20 POLICY BRIEF**

Task Force 01

**FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER**

# Towards a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty: The Role of the G20 in Strengthening Development Cooperation and Mutual Learning on Food and Nutritional Security

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## Abstract

The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty launched by Brazil's G20 Presidency builds on a long history of G20 efforts to address global food and nutritional insecurity. However, unlike previous initiatives which focused primarily on the G20's contribution to addressing hunger in low-income countries, the Global Alliance has the potential to innovate in this field by strengthening mutual learning for domestic policy action in G20 countries themselves, as well as enhancing North-South, South-South (SSC) and Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC).

Hunger and poverty are not limited to lower-income countries. Severe food insecurity increased in every region of the world in 2021, including in high-income areas and across all G20 countries. Given the universal framing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the fact that the world is currently off track to achieve the goal of Zero Hunger should encourage G20 countries to support multilateral action at the global level while at the same time intensifying policy learning to support their own domestic efforts to tackle these challenges.

In recent decades, TDC and SSC have enabled many countries in the Global South to share knowledge on effective policies to tackle hunger and poverty. This Policy Brief draws on specific lessons from two examples that make use of the Brazilian experience with strong civil society and academic engagement to develop recommendations for the recently announced Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. It proposes a strategy for enhancing the potential of TDC to foster mutual learning on hunger and poverty reduction among G20 countries, as well as action by G20 members to support other countries and strengthen United Nations (UN)-led multilateral efforts. It also discusses risks and opportunities for the proposed Alliance to support scaling up local and national innovations to address entrenched and intersecting inequalities.



**Keywords:** Poverty, Hunger, Food and Nutritional Security, International Development Cooperation, South-South and Triangular cooperation, Mutual Learning, Universality, G20



## Diagnosis of the Issue

Hunger and poverty remain severe in low-income countries but are becoming more universalised: severe food insecurity increased globally in 2021, including in high-income areas (FAO, WTO, WB 2023). All data show the world is “off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger” (UK 2019), and progress has stalled or reversed since 2015 (Global Hunger Index 2023). Yet this is principally a political problem: in a world with enough resources, the normalisation of poverty and inequitable food systems is not inevitable; neither are hunger, poor diets and rising obesity (Cabral et al. 2023).

The fight against poverty and hunger has been at the heart of international cooperation efforts and discourse since the 1990s. However, these efforts largely focused on low-income countries, taking a food production approach which assumed hunger resulted from insufficient agricultural output rather than food system injustices. This privileged engagement with transnational corporate food suppliers meant that development cooperation paid less attention to middle-income countries and almost none to high-income ones. By contrast, hunger and poverty have long been recognised as major challenges in MICs (Abdenur 2016). Through South-South (SSC) and Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC), Latin American, African, and Asian countries have shared knowledge from their domestic contexts to develop innovative and effective social policies, strengthening capacities by bringing new ideas, practices, and delivery modes to the table.

Brazil played a key role in this, drawing on domestic success in tackling hunger to achieve global leadership in Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) (Oliveira and Lima

2023). Despite recent setbacks, Brazilian social policy successfully tackled poverty and hunger, generating a strong evidence base on what works (Maluf et al. 2014), including:

(i) Ensuring strong political leadership to make FNS a national priority, backed by legislation to secure state-financed continuity;

(ii) Embedding FNS in all policies via a multi-level intersectoral systems approach underpinned by legal and institutional frameworks;

(iii) Establishing decentralised and participatory governance structures like Brazil's Councils for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEAs) to ensure accountability and place-based delivery.

We focus on the third lesson, linking it to evidence from our own engagement with CONSEA and the Trans-Atlantic Platform initiative 'Building Back Better from Below' (B4)<sup>1</sup> to show the potential of decentralised South-North learning to support the scale-up of local innovations in global efforts to reduce food insecurity.

Through its international engagement, CONSEA has advocated for coherence and cohesion between domestic FNS policy and what Brazil 'exports'. Still, while Brazilian cooperation has 'mutual benefits' as a core principle, operationalising mutual learning has been harder to achieve. One factor is the disconnect between *government-to-government* cooperation, and the flourishing *decentralised* mutual learning networks that connect subnational governments, academia and civil society internationally (Constantine and Shankland 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic provided an urgent impetus for

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ids.ac.uk/projects/building-back-better-from-belowb4-harnessing-innovations-in-community-response-and-intersectoral-collaboration-for-health-and-food-justice-beyond-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

decentralised mutual learning, and there is significant potential for the G20 to work through established city-to-city networks such as United Cities and Local Governments, C40, and Milan Urban Food Policy Pact to enable multidirectional policy learning, transcending the geographies of 'Global North' and 'Global South.'

The B4 project, connecting three cities in Brazil, Canada and the UK, is one such network. It demonstrated how collaborative decision-making during the pandemic – between civil society, local government, the public health system and volunteers – created simple yet innovative responses which helped address deeply entrenched inequalities, enabling so-called ‘hard to reach’ populations to access healthy food in diverse cities with high levels of socio-economic inequality. The evidence demonstrated the importance of enabling local innovations that can be scaled-up effectively.

Equally relevant to the Alliance is Brazil’s three-pronged approach to development cooperation, based on *knowledge creation*, *capacity development*, and *policy dialogue*. Brazil’s global hunger and poverty response ecosystem is anchored in a set of key national institutions (Leite et al. 2015) and international partnerships with multilateral and bilateral aid agencies and foundations. Central to this are knowledge and policy learning hubs such as the former Brazil-UNDP International Policy Centre on Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the Brazil-WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger (WFP CoE) (Waisbich and Haug 2023). Lessons learned by institutions and experts within this ecosystem provide a foundation for the proposed Alliance’s work, as outlined below.

## Recommendations

The significant, long-lasting negative impacts of the pandemic on poverty, inequality, and hunger are a stark reminder of the pressing need for international commitment in these times of poly-crises and instability. Concerted, high-level multilateral action is urgently needed to tackle global FNS problems, building on the consensus established by the SDGs. Examples of effective policies and programmes tackling hunger and poverty already exist, as do fora and mechanisms for mutual learning and multilateral policy coordination. The proposed Alliance is well placed to draw on G20 support to give new impetus to Zero Hunger ahead of the fast-approaching 2030 deadline.

A G20-backed Alliance can provide leadership, putting hunger back onto the global agenda, integrating lessons from the pandemic and evidence on healthy, sustainable and equitable food system transitions. Ensuring strong engagement between the multilateral system and national and subnational governments is key to harnessing lessons learnt to build back better. The G20 can be a powerful ally for galvanising efforts to make this initiative a political priority at the multilateral level, transforming it into an effective vehicle for collective action on hunger and poverty.

TDC is one proven way in which developed and developing countries can work together, and if taken forward under the umbrella of the Alliance, it could help close the gap that often exists between domestic and foreign policy on poverty and hunger. The G20 is well-placed to work with the UN to facilitate mutual learning through TDC, mitigating the risk of duplication of efforts.

Drawing on lessons learnt from Brazil's development cooperation, the Alliance can catalyse resourcing and connection building within the existing TDC ecosystem. To date, Brazil's joint ventures have overwhelmingly targeted hunger and poverty within the

Global South, leaving untapped potential for mutual learning exchanges to include South-North sharing of strategies and policies. Brazilian cooperation institutions have also focused on the export and adaptation of Brazilian innovations rather than on mutual learning for its own benefit. This is a missed opportunity for deeper iterative learning drawing on the circulation of policy innovations. This also applies to countries such as the UK, where domestic social policy does not formally intersect with international development cooperation despite the potential for learning and innovation across both contexts.

G20 members who are traditional development partners could offer a vital source of funding and programming support for scaling up initiatives, strengthening delivery mechanisms, and supporting monitoring and evaluation to embed evidence-based learning. At the same time, this refresh of the existing institutional infrastructure for cooperation initiatives would ensure that all G20 members could benefit from a reinvigorated approach to multidirectional policy learning.

*On knowledge exchange: framing the policy challenge*

The creation of the Alliance provides a crucial opportunity to re-frame food insecurity as a universal political problem underpinned by intersecting poverty and inequality, which we can resolve. This framing of food insecurity also underlines the importance of rethinking the rights and responsibilities within food systems. As discussed before, food and nutritional insecurity are prevalent across the world. Inequitable food systems create barriers to accessing healthy food with significant repercussions for people's health and well-being, which in turn impacts the state health and welfare system. Just access to healthy food for all requires state-led reform of the food system, with greater engagement and regulation of the corporate actors who control the bulk of the food economy. The



pandemic demonstrated that state intervention can be extremely effective in providing a safety net for the most vulnerable and to the growing number of citizens who experience precarity.

A G20-backed Alliance could be a vehicle for progress toward recognizing the universality of these issues, moving away from the usual North-South dichotomies that have long shaped development cooperation. The international recognition of poverty, hunger and all forms of malnutrition as challenges in low-income and in middle- and high-income member countries of the G20. It should also mean recognising that food inequities and growing levels of malnutrition are political issues which can be resolved, and that relevant experience of acting on these can be shared across very different contexts.

*On knowledge exchange: policy solutions*

While designing its Knowledge Repository, the Alliance Secretariat must avoid one-size-fits-all recommendations and instead work with a diverse set of policy solutions. This means making available to partner countries and their policy communities a broader set of policy instruments and governance arrangements, going beyond national policies and programs to include civil society-led innovations and subnational experiences.

*On policy dialogue: development cooperation and mutual learning*

Recognising there are already multiple forms of international cooperation addressing food insecurity (North-South, South-South, Regional and Trilateral Cooperation), the Alliance will need to be a vehicle for innovative thinking and new connections and synergies between existing initiatives. There are mechanisms for cooperation and exchange, for example, between the Rome-based food agencies, among OECD countries,

or through the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, but more work is needed on connecting them and disseminating innovations by subnational state and non-state actors.

In addition to symbolising a renewed global commitment to fighting hunger and poverty in times of global turbulence, the Alliance should use its political clout to establish concrete mechanisms that foster development cooperation and mutual learning across its member countries. To do so, in addition to a Knowledge Repository of good practices, the Alliance should develop a mechanism that serves as a 'matchmaking' service. This can draw on existing examples of 'drawdown intelligence services' used by government agencies, and the 'honest broker' services offered by research institutes, civil society organisations, and existing global policy centres within and beyond the UN system.

Equally important, the Alliance should openly encourage participation based on a commitment to share *and* learn. This can be done through a sign-up agreement that explicitly asks prospective members:

- what types of issues they envisage requiring assistance with
- what policy solutions they can offer as a basis for exchange and learning
- what they would like to learn
- whether they can contribute with financial resources to enable such exchanges.

Further developing a pledging or marketplace-style mechanism to support exchanges would ensure that exchanges are based on need, alongside a Monitoring Evaluation and Learning component to ensure ongoing learning and the iterative capacity development of the Alliance. Finally, the Alliance could work with the UN Global Compact to benefit from corporate actors willing to support such efforts. A similar model could also be used for universities and their federations.

*On policy dialogue: reinvigorating existing multilateral mechanisms*

To succeed, the Alliance must pay attention to international cooperation dynamics, drawing on existing evidence on the conditions under which multidirectional cooperation initiatives work best. To build initiatives that enable and enact coordination, cooperation, and mutual learning, a key aspect is for the G20-backed Alliance to work multilaterally through existing mechanisms such as the Committee on World Food and Security and UNOSSC's South-South Galaxy, among others. A way to bolster global and country-level efforts to translate this experience into opportunities for wider learning and implementation is to engage existing knowledge and policy networks to co-construct a shared strategy, using their platforms for outreach and engagement, thus accelerating learning through existing channels. This would give visibility to tried and tested local innovations with global relevance, fostering mutual learning and supporting knowledge transfer to strengthen SDG-aligned national policies. Such alignment requires modest financial support while delivering valuable processes and resources to policy actors across states, civil society, and academia.

Finally, it is vital that the proposed Global Alliance avoids duplicating, competing with, or undermining existing multilateral initiatives as it is being forged at a moment when the multilateral system itself is at risk of fragmentation. It should throw the G20's weight behind existing initiatives and internationally agreed guidelines for helping countries deliver on these commitments while laying the foundations for future agreements. These should reflect the lessons learned on the importance of cross-sectoral approaches, participatory governance, locally-led innovation, and multidirectional mutual learning for effective responses to the injustices that allow hunger and poverty to persist in the Global South and North alike.

*On the G20 role*

Once the Alliance is formally launched, the G20 will continue to play a role in ensuring that it builds the necessary bridges with the broader multilateral system. G20 members should also commit to the principle of universality, setting the example for participation based on countries' clear offer and/or demand for 'solutions.' The G20 should also commit to an initial contribution of seed funding for learning initiatives among G20 Alliance members and initiatives between G20 Alliance members and other non-G20 Alliance members.

## Scenario of outcomes

*Committing to mutual learning to address the universal challenge of poverty and hunger, irrespective of countries' income status.*

In 2015, UN members agreed on the 2030 Agenda and committed to treating development issues as integrated, intersectional, and universal within the framework of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities. By adopting a universal and mutual learning approach towards fighting hunger and poverty, the Alliance will be fostering policy learning across all members, regardless of their current economic development status, in the spirit of the hard-fought consensus achieved by the SDGs.

*Enabling mutual learning through and beyond TDC to empower reforms within and across countries*

By creating TDC and mutual learning mechanisms (like initial adhesion terms, surveys of needs and offers, and a matchmaking platform), the Alliance will be better prepared to engender change on the ground, avoiding policy incoherence. In international cooperation, there are often gaps between domestic and foreign policy, with high(er) income countries committing to tackling issues abroad while taking little action domestically. The Alliance should demonstrate how multidirectional mutual learning can and should inform food security actions targeting more vulnerable groups in all countries, regardless of per capita income level. This process should harness existing networks, linking state and non-state actors within countries and researchers, citizen groups, and

subnational governments across countries rather than remaining confined to state-to-state exchanges.

*Catalysing global action without undermining existing multilateral structures*

By supporting the new Alliance, the G20 will reiterate its political commitment to fight hunger globally. The symbolism of this commitment is important, but the Alliance should avoid becoming ‘G20-centred’. Only by creating synergies and reinforcing existing inclusive multilateral initiatives can the Alliance fulfil its mission to serve as a catalyser for change and effective multilateral action.

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