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INTEGRATING NUTRITION AND CLIMATE ACTION TO TRANSFORM BRAZIL'S FOOD SYSTEM

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Summary

In Brazil, adopting a systemic approach to food systems means looking beyond individual sectors to understand how local, regional, and national policies, actions, and social movements intersect to link climate and nutrition. This integrated perspective is critical to addressing the country's persistent health and environmental challenges, marked by deep regional inequalities. This policy brief presents findings from a 2025 rapid assessment of nutrition and climate integration in current active public policies, together with a mapping of key stakeholders, in Brazil. The results reveal that, while nutrition and climate have historically been addressed separately in Brazil, recent policies show progress in integration. Notable examples include synergies between the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) and the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), as well as newer initiatives like the National Program for Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (PNAUP), the National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security in Cities – Feed Cities, and the Reference Framework on Food Systems and Climate for Public Policies. These programs promote agroecology, local food procurement, and sustainability. However, challenges remain in continued fragmentation across sectors and levels of government, and in stakeholder integration. To move forward, Brazil must strengthen integrated climate-nutrition policies, support social safety nets and rural development programs, and foster collaboration among governments, civil society, and academia.

KEY MESSAGES

- While nutrition and climate have historically been addressed separately in Brazil, recent policies show progress in integration. This reflects a promising shift toward a systems thinking approach.
- Civil society organizations and NGOs play a vital role in communication and bridging collaborations among civil society, public officials, academic institutions, and international organizations in Brazil.
- Brazil has a strategic opportunity to showcase how integrated, inclusive, and climate-sensitive food policies can drive sustainable development, reduce vulnerability, and promote the right to adequate food for all.

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, an estimated 33 million Brazilians were facing severe food insecurity. Even before the pandemic, conditions were already concerning: among children under five, 7% were stunted and 7% were overweight for their age. These national averages mask deeper regional inequalities that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations.

The current Brazilian food system is also a major driver of biodiversity loss and soil degradation, key contributors to climate change. Approximately 70% of greenhouse gas emissions are linked to food systems, including deforestation for livestock and cropland, as well as the emissions from production processes themselves. According to the 2017 Agricultural Census, 41% of Brazil's land is used for agricultural purposes, with 64% of that land dedicated to animal farming. Among crop-based agriculture, most land is allocated to commodity monocultures, such as soy, sugarcane, and corn, used primarily for exports, biofuels, animal feed, and ultra-processed food production.

Brazil has developed internationally recognized policies in both nutrition and climate, although these areas have traditionally been addressed in isolation. However, recent efforts to integrate these agendas demonstrate innovation and a shift toward systemic, cross-sectoral approaches. Programs such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) and the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) exemplify how integrated strategies can positively impact both public health and climate outcomes.

The Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN), launched at COP27 in 2022 by the Government of Egypt with UN agencies and partners, is a flagship multi-stakeholder effort to accelerate transformative action at the nexus of climate change and nutrition. In 2023, the I-CAN baseline assessment showed limited integration of nutrition and climate in national plans worldwide, with progress mostly in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, but lagging investments, highlighting the urgent need to bridge policy and implementation gaps.

Brazil, as one of the countries with the most advanced policy experiences in food and nutrition security, represents a relevant case study within this global effort. The present policy brief aimed to explore the Brazilian landscape on initiatives approaching sustainable food systems by assessing nutrition and climate integration in Brazilian public policies and mapping the roles of key stakeholders in advancing this agenda.

METHODS

All assessment activities were conducted between April and June 2025. To assess nutrition and climate integration, a comprehensive review of national and subnational (state-level) public policies was conducted following the 2023 I-CAN Baseline methodology. Active policies from 1940 to 2025, relevant to the integration of nutrition and climate agendas in Brazil, were assessed and assigned levels of integration, ranging from low (Level 1) to high (Level 4), across 80 legislative texts (38 national and 42 state level), as outlined in the following criteria:

Level 1: No intentional connectedness between climate and nutrition

Level 2: Some intention to connect climate and nutrition

Level 3: Intention to mobilize resources to connect climate and nutrition

Level 4: Commitment to mobilizing resources and with distinct plans to take action to connect climate and nutrition

To identify and characterize actors with potential interest and influence in nutrition and climate agendas, key stakeholders were identified and invited to contribute through an electronic form. A snowball sampling approach was then used, whereby participants recommended additional relevant peers to expand the sample. Stakeholder feedback was then used to identify barriers to, and best practices for, nutrition-climate integration in public policies.



KEY RESULTS

Key result 1. Recent and promising shift toward a more integrated approach in public policies

Although most nutrition and climate policies were classified in the lowest levels for integration (Levels 1 and 2, comprising 50% and 40% of the evaluated 80 legislative texts, respectively), those classified in the highest levels (3 and 4, comprising 5% each) were adopted in the most recent years (2023 and 2024).

Best practices (Levels 3 and 4) for nutrition and

climate integration were found in the National Food Supply Policy (2023), the National Program for Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (2023), the National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security in Cities – Feed Cities (2023), the Rio Grande do Sul State Strategy for the Promotion of Popular Centers for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (2024), the National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (2012), the National School Feeding Program (2009), and the Food Acquisition Program (2003).

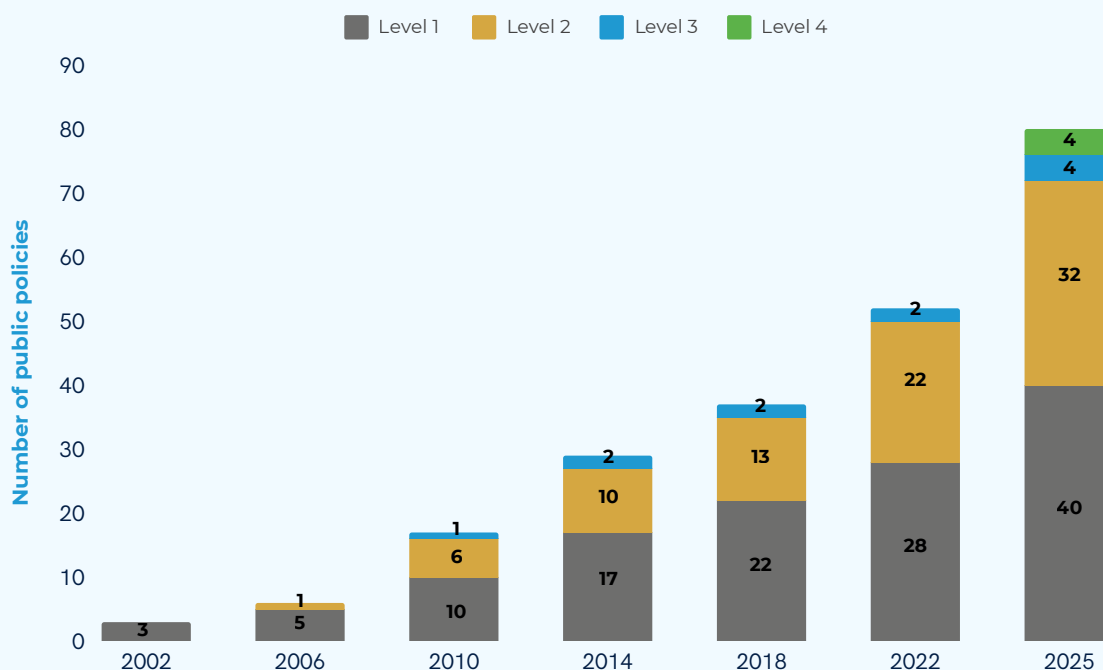


Figure 1: Cumulative number of currently active public policies and their climate-nutrition integration level over the years in Brazil

Key result 2. Synergy between policies

Some policies demonstrate strong performance and hold significant potential through synergy with existing initiatives, and recent updates further reinforce this positive trajectory.

Notably, PNAE requires that at least 30% of its federal funds go to purchasing from family farming, supporting local economies and sustainability, especially through partnerships with the PAA — a threshold that will increase to 45% from 2026 onwards. Special attention is given to populations in situations of vulnerability, including agrarian reform settlements, indigenous and quilombola communities, and women's groups.

A 2025 resolution further strengthened the program's nutritional profile, reducing the permitted share of ultra-processed foods to 15% in 2025 and 10% from 2026, recommending against the purchase of ultra-processed foods with front-of-pack warning labels, and setting a minimum of 50 different types of fresh or minimally processed foods to be procured annually.

PNAE could further advance integration by prioritizing public procurement for school meals from local, agroecological, and diverse food production, efficiently using land and water resources. Additionally, the National Productive Forests Program can complement PNAE, ensuring that sustainable production improves overall nutrition in the population.

Key result 3. Foundational social protection policies — LOSAN/SISAN, Bolsa Família, and the Cisterns Program — build the capacity vulnerable populations need to benefit from climate-nutrition integration

Brazil has developed a robust set of public policies that, while not exclusively focused on climate and nutrition integration, form the institutional and social foundation upon which more specialized interventions are built. The Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN) is central to this ecosystem. It enshrines the right to adequate food in Brazilian law and established the National Food and Nutrition Security System (SISAN), a landmark framework that coordinates food and nutrition security policies across federal, state, and municipal levels.

Building on this foundation, key social programs like Bolsa Família and Cadastro Único support low-income families by ensuring access to essential services and benefits. These initiatives not only improve food affordability and stimulate local economies but also include health and education conditionalities that help break intergenerational cycles of poverty and malnutrition. In addition, the Cisterns Program represents a notable example of a low-cost social technology of adaptation and resilience, providing safe water for rural and semi-arid communities. Together, these policies ensure income security, access to water, and institutional visibility for vulnerable populations — strengthening their capacity to access climate and nutrition interventions while fostering more equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food systems.

Key result 4. Civil society organizations and NGOs are the critical bridge between engaged-but-marginal stakeholders and government decision-makers

The 53 key nutrition and climate stakeholders that were consulted reported working across multiple areas, such as food security, food systems, healthy eating promotion, public health, climate change, sustainable agriculture, social justice, food sovereignty, and nutritional surveillance. There was a diverse representation of different sectors as well, categorized into research and academia (38% of respondents), civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (30%), government (21%), private sector (7%), international organizations (2%), and the press (2%).

Representatives of academia, civil society organizations, NGOs, and the press self-classified as having high interest but low influence in the nutrition and climate agenda, in contrast to government representatives. This finding points to civil society organizations and NGOs as key interlocutors, connecting government officials, academic institutions, and international organizations while promoting social mobilization, public campaigns, and effective communication strategies — and underscores the importance of fostering dialogue between these highly engaged but less influential stakeholders and those with greater decision-making power.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support best practices and policies with strong transformative potential. Brazil has both the institutional foundation and innovative policy experiences, such as the National Food Supply Policy, the National Program for Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture, the National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security in Cities – Feed Cities, and the Reference Framework on Food Systems and Climate for Public Policies, to scale up integrated approaches to nutrition and climate action.
- Invest in and ensure the continuity of policies that form a foundational ecosystem for vulnerable populations, such as Bolsa Família and the Cisterns Program, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities can access nutrition and climate interventions. Expanding municipal adherence to SISAN represents a concrete step toward decentralizing food and nutrition security governance, ensuring that national commitments translate into local action.
- Strengthen policy integration and intersectoral dialogue. Integration both within and across policies is not only necessary but also demonstrably effective, as illustrated by the synergies between PNAE and PAA, and the promising potential for alignment between PNAE and the National Productive Forests Program. Strengthening integrated national and subnational public policies, promoting intersectoral dialogue to attenuate power imbalance, and ensuring sustained investments in both human and environmental resilience are essential steps forward.
- Deepen collaboration between sectors. Overcoming fragmentation through strengthening intersectoral dialogue and ongoing cooperation among government, academia, and civil society is essential to enhance policy effectiveness and to promote sustainable change, particularly in the most vulnerable communities. National policies at the highest levels of integration (Levels 3 and 4) were predominantly coordinated by multiple institutions, in contrast to those at the lowest level of integration, which were mainly characterized by centralized coordination — underscoring the value of collaborative, multi-institutional efforts in fostering integration.



CONCLUSION

Brazil has demonstrated that integrated, inclusive, and climate-sensitive food policies are not only possible but already underway. The findings presented in this policy brief show that, while challenges remain, the country has both the

institutional foundation and the policy momentum to advance sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems. This is not only a national imperative but a shared global responsibility.



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