Food Insecurity and Covid-19 in Brazil
FORMULATION, EXECUTION AND COORDINATION

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The Brazilian Research Network on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (Rede Brasileira de Pesquisa em Soberania e Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional - Rede PENSSAN) presents the results of the II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil (II VIGISAN) to the Brazilian society, fulfilling its commitment to contribute to the knowledge and science-based discussion about the country’s social reality regarding Food Security (FS). This contribution gains even more relevance due to the absence of official surveys with the frequency required to monitor Food Security, which is a key condition for a dignified and healthy life.
The current context, in which the existing financial and political crisis overlapped the health crisis requires frequent monitoring of the food and nutritional condition of the Brazilian population. This need was evidenced by the magnitude and speed with which, in early 2022, the various manifestations of Food Insecurity (FI) worsened in Brazil, especially severe FI, which means living with hunger, when compared with the results of the I VIGISAN survey, published in April 2021. Evidencing the different levels at which this worsening took place among the various social segments - according to gender, race/color, education, and place of residence - means complementing the information necessary to better understand and take action in a society with such large social inequalities as the Brazilian society. We should point out that there are still gaps due to the lack of information on indigenous peoples and other traditional communities and populations.

We hope that the results of this survey, and the gravity of the situation they reveal, will contribute to stress the urgent need to adopt integrated and participatory public policies capable of addressing the multiple dimensions of the problem, as well as being a factor to generate indignation and mobilization of the Brazilian society in the face of such a calamity.

Executive Coordination of the PENSSAN Network
In 29 years of fighting against hunger, Ação da Cidadania is facing one of the worst moments of hunger since its foundation. We can no longer tolerate that 33 million people do not have enough to eat in a country as diverse as Brazil. It’s a complete setback. Betinho created our institution when he felt outrage as he came across this same number of Brazilians in severe Food Insecurity. Today, we are reliving that same tragedy.

Just 2 years after Brazil was removed from the UN Hunger Map, in 2014, Ação da Cidadania already started noticing through its national network of committees that hunger was making a strong comeback. In 2017, we resumed the Christmas Without Hunger (Natal Sem Fome) campaign and we refocused our initiatives on fighting against hunger. Since then, our campaigns have helped almost 20 million Brazilians.

We strongly resumed our advocacy actions so that public policies would not be destroyed. Many of those policies were inspired by our founder Betinho and his efforts. With the Federal Government’s data blackout, we understand the importance of supporting the generation of information on Food Security so that society can understand the actual dimension of the problem and can take effective actions in order to end hunger in Brazil, once and for all. PENSSAN Network’s survey is of paramount importance to this battle – one that Ação da Cidadania has been fighting for 29 years and that will last as long as there is hunger.
For over 20 years, ActionAid has intensified initiatives to fight against hunger and overcome poverty in Brazil. During this journey we have witnessed the results of public policies and civil society initiatives that led the country to be removed from the UN Hunger Map in 2014. However, in recent years, we have also seen substantial setbacks and we began to raise awareness about this tragedy waiting to happen, which worsened with the impacts of Covid-19. The PENSSAN Network translated this issue into essential data and analysis in its first survey. One year later, we still face a blackout of official data and the negligence of the authorities, but the context of hunger and Food Insecurity in its various aspects is reaching even more appalling levels. The growth of poverty, added to food prices inflation and the dismantling of effective policies only deepens inequality, and drives to destitution those groups and regions that historically have been most affected. Underlying hunger is the scourge on children, women, and the Black population. Added to that is climate change denial, which greatly harms agriculture production and is directly related to Water Insecurity.

Therefore, this new study fulfills the role of providing an urgently needed x-ray of the current food situation Brazilians are facing, to foster a qualified discussion on a way out of this tragic situation in which we live. Brazil, especially a significant part of its population, should not be going through this. No one can remain indifferent.
Hunger in Brazil is a very cruel injustice, and we know that it affects historically marginalized sectors of society more severely. This problem cannot be viewed as merely situational since it is not dissociated from the structural inequalities of society and the world. In a country with high agricultural production and with a track record of policies to fight against hunger and inequality, the current situation seems even more cruel.

The II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, conducted by the PENSSAN Network, shows us the sad reality of hunger in Brazil and is a key instrument that shows us the seriousness of the setbacks caused by the overlapping of multiple crisis we are currently experiencing. It is disquieting that hunger has reached such high levels in Brazil. Studies such as this one are essential to raise society’s awareness about the urgency of this issue and to promote an evidence-based discussion. These are key elements to develop and re-institute policies that lead to eliminating hunger and inequalities.
The National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil is a pioneer initiative launched by the PENSSAN Network in 2021. It provided an accurate and comprehensive portrait of the alarming situation of Food Insecurity and hunger in the country in 2020. By observing the impacts of the pandemic and the country’s political and economic context on the population, the survey generated great repercussion in the public debate. The results presented in this second survey show an even worse scenario for people who suffer from hungry in Brazil. For this reason, the document reinforces the importance of up-to-date and reliable research that provides information for policies and programs to fight against hunger. Since elections will be held in 2022, this initiative should also be a tool for candidates to include in their programs the creation and advancement of national public policies to fight against hunger, guided by healthy diets based on a fair and sustainable food system. This has been a priority initiative in Ibirapitanga. In times of a full-fledged social-environmental crisis, hunger must be fought against based on its multi-factorial nature, with an approach that transforms food systems to reduce impacts on climate change, to care for people’s health, to promote a sustainable economy and, ultimately, to build fair and equitable social relations.
The II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, proficiently conducted by the PENSSAN Network, shows the sad reality of hunger in the country. At the same time, it reminds us of the need to think of alternatives that interrupt this cycle of vulnerabilities that are exposed from time to time; and calls us to take action in favor of an effective and permanent improvement of each person’s health and quality of life, enforcing the principles of citizenship, diversity, equality and solidarity, values that sustain us and give us meaning.

For Sesc, these ideals are combined to strengthen social-educational initiatives carried out in the State of São Paulo, especially through the Mesa Brasil program, whose objective is to fight against hunger, minimize social inequalities, and prevent food waste, weaving a solid network of collaborators. **As of now, the results of this survey will guide many of our initiatives and will be disseminated with the determination and seriousness that the topic requires.** Betinho used to say that “those who are hungry are in a hurry”. Let’s hurry to collectively staunch hunger.
For more than a decade, Brazil was admired for its policies on Food and Nutrition Security. The set of policies and programs together with the work conducted by the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional - Consea), where civil society, government agencies and other sectors reach an agreement on the course of action, was key for the country to be removed from the United Nations Hunger Map in 2014. For Oxfam Brazil, these successful policies have always been a reference to be shared with other countries.

Since their first day in office, the current government has worked to end internationally recognized social programs and policies that had concrete results in the fight against hunger. The end of the CONSEA, on January 1, 2019, left no doubt about this. Brazilian inequalities were exposed wide open with the Covid-19 pandemic, as was the existence of a government without leadership and commitment to establish the necessary public policies and priorities.

The II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, prepared by the PENSSAN Network, sheds light on the drama that the country is going through. For Oxfam Brazil, this is a work of great importance for our society. We cannot normalize hunger. We should be outraged! The day in which we, as a society, lose the ability to be outraged with the fact that there are people grabbing bones from trucks, is the day we will lose our humanity and our ability to build a fair and compassionate country.
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Introduction
Introduction

The I National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil (I VIGISAN), conducted at the end of 2020 by the PENSSAN Network and partners1, revealed that 55.2% of Brazilian households were experiencing Food Insecurity (FI) and 9.0% were facing hunger. More than the effects of the Covid-19 health crisis, these restrictions on access to food exposed a worrying picture of social-economic deterioration and deep inequalities in the Brazilian society that existed prior to the pandemic and was worsened by it. This situation persisted in 2021, with high unemployment, job insecurity, loss of social rights, and a drop in purchasing power – while Covid-19 continued to claim hundreds of thousands of lives at a terrifying pace. More than 660,000 people had died from Covid-19 by April 2022. These facts revealed a disconcerting self-image to the Brazilian society, expressed in social ills that are worsened and perpetuated.

In this sense, alarming levels of FI and hunger are part of the context of crises that continue to make a growing proportion of the population vulnerable. The numbers now include a middle-income population segment that used to be more socially protected. On the other hand, added to this advancing social degradation environment was a process that progressively dismantled public policies and weakened institutions that compose the social protection network, both with respect to food security as well as the other conditions required for a dignified and healthy life.
Introduction

The various manifestations of social inequalities in 2021/2022, especially those related to race/color and gender, worsened in all aspects of governmental actions, particularly in the areas of education, health, science and technology, environment, and protection of traditional peoples and communities, especially indigenous peoples.

The intensification of the government’s deforming wave, ongoing since 2016, has impacted social, economic and environmental rights, with an especially serious impact on the Human Right to Adequate Food. The government’s mismanagement of the pandemic in Brazil is an aggravating factor of this pre-existing scenario.

The weak signs of recovery in economic activity measured by growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) were not followed by an improvement in the population’s income and a significant recovery in employment. These facts led to an increase in inequalities in the country, which, added to high inflation, particularly in food prices, had a greater impact on the purchasing power of the most vulnerable, since the lower the family income, the greater the proportion of it that is allocated to food. Thus, these social groups were displaced to the lower edge of survival, without sufficient income, adequate housing, sanitation services, access to education and health services, and also started to face hunger in their daily lives. In other words, these social groups are disdained by the country’s economic elites and disowned by a government ruled by a neoliberal doctrine and obsessed with fiscal balance and spending control.
In this scenario of dismantling public policies that directly or indirectly protect and promote Food and Nutrition Security, it is important to highlight the extinction, in 2021, of the Public Food Procurement Program (Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos - PAA) and the Bolsa Família Program (PBF), replaced by the Alimenta Brasil and Auxílio Brasil programs, respectively, considered by analysts on the subject to be weak in their concepts and objectives, in addition to covering a limited part of the population. It is estimated that only half of the 100 million people who previously received the PBF and the Emergency Aid (Auxílio Emergencial) continued to have access to Auxílio Brasil. In addition, during the pandemic, the poor management of the National School Food Program (Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar - PNAE) stands out.

The suspension of face-to-face classes was used to justify the near elimination of food purchases from family farmers and, consequently, reducing the supply of quality meals to schoolchildren.

The urgent task is to reverse this scenario, for which it is necessary to resume the path of prioritizing the fight against hunger and poverty as government policy. Implementing initiatives to generate income and promote adequate and healthy food is imperative, as well as resuming regulatory actions to address food price inflation, emphasizing creation of food stocks and encouraging production from the diversified family agriculture.

The evidence presented by II VIGISAN shows the persistence and resurgence of this desolate landscape and represents the social commitment of researchers from different fields of scientific knowledge and from several institutions and organizations – Ação da Cidadania, ActionAid, Fundação Friedrich Ebert Brasil, Instituto Ibirapitanga, Oxfam Brasil and Sesc São Paulo - which sign this report together with the PENSSAN Network.
Food insecurity is the condition of not having full and permanent access to food. Hunger represents its most severe form.

When looking at hunger, it is important to remember that each absolute number represents a person’s life. And that changes in percentages of food insecurity – even if they seem small – can mean millions of people living with hunger on a daily basis.

We looked at hunger when the I VIGISAN data were published in 2021. Some were perplexed with the figures, and, unfortunately, others remained indifferent which, in a way, reflected the ineffectiveness of leaders at that time.
In 2022, even more Brazilian families are facing food insecurity. The worsening of the economic crisis, the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic and the continuous dismantling of public policies that were previously effective in reducing social inequalities, kept more than half of the Brazilian population in food insecurity (at different levels of severity).

Here we present the key results from the II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil (II VIGISAN), conducted by the Brazilian Research Network on Food Sovereignty and Security (Rede Brasileira de Pesquisa em Soberania e Segurança Alimentar - PENSSAN) and its partners.

The II VIGISAN collected data between the end of November 2021 and the beginning of April 2022 among a representative sample of the Brazilian population, covering all 5 macro-regions (rural and urban). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with an adult in 12,745 households, located in 577 municipalities, distributed across 26 states and the Federal District. As in the I VIGISAN, Food Security and Food Insecurity (FI) were measured using the 8-question version of the Brazilian Food Insecurity Scale (EBIA).
Brazil, which was once an international reference in the fight against hunger, seems to be coming undone. The public policies to fight poverty, which reduced hunger by more than half between 2004 and 2013, from 9.5% to 4.2% of Brazilian households, are no longer part of the Brazilian reality.

Data from the 2020 I VIGISAN showed that hunger had returned to the same levels of 2004. In early 2022, the reality is even worse. There are no longer 9.0% of households going hungry; the figure now in 2021/2022 is 15.5%. This is the equivalent of 33.1 million Brazilians - an increase of 14 million more people who have come to live with hunger in their daily lives.
The trends shown in the figure below (Figure 1) reveal that initially the decrease in food security was mainly due to an increase in Mild FI, and proportionately less due to the more severe levels of FI. Between 2020 and 2021/2022 the landscape changed dramatically with a sharp rise in Moderate FI and Severe FI, now because families’ situations worsened from Mild FI to the more severe levels of food restriction and lack of food. This sad trajectory reveals the ongoing violation of the human right to adequate food, affecting lives in the present and impacting the future of the Brazilian population.

**FIGURE 1**

Food Security trends and levels of Food Insecurity (FI) in Brazil, 2004 to 2022. II VIGISAN - SA/IA e Covid-19, Brazil, 2021/2022.

Hunger, the most severe form of food insecurity, increased from 9.0% to 15.5% between the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2022. In numbers of people, it jumped from 19.1 to 33.1 million. There are 14 million additional Brazilians in a situation of hunger in just over a year.

In 2021/2022, only 41.3% of households were food secure. In the remaining 58.7% of the households, families lived with food insecurity.

In absolute numbers: 125.2 million Brazilians experienced some level of food insecurity, ranging from uncertainty about their ability to obtain food in the near future, to limitations in the quality of their diet and restriction in the amount of food, to lack of food – an increase of 7.2% since 2020. If we compare with data from 2018, the last national estimate before the Covid-19 pandemic, when food insecurity affected 36.7% of Brazilian households, the increase reaches 60.0%.
Between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, 28.0% of households were concerned about their ability to obtain food and were decreasing the quality of their diet (mild FI). In 30.7% of households (1 in every 3) the residents reported not having sufficient food to meet their needs (moderate or severe FI), half of which (15.5%) lived with hunger (severe FI). (Figure 2)

FIGURE 2

Percentage distribution of Food Security and Food Insecurity (FI) levels in Brazil and in household setting (urban and rural). II VIGISAN - SA/IA and Covid-19, Brazil, 2021/2022.

In Brazil in 2022, only 4 out of 10 households manage to maintain full access to food. The other 6 households are divided among those who are concerned about the possibility of not having food in the future, leading to a reduction in the quality of the diet, and those who are already without enough food to eat or, at the extreme end, experiencing hunger.
The geography of hunger persists

The North and Northeast regions are still the most affected by food insecurity in 2021/2022. Hunger was part of the daily life of 25.7% of households in the North region, 21.0% in the Northeast, and approximately 10.0% in the South.

The most severe forms of food insecurity (moderate or severe) are more prevalent in the North (45.2%) and Northeast (38.4%).

When we look at moderate and severe food insecurity together, the numbers are even more shocking: approximately 4 out of 10 families in the North and Northeast Regions, 3 out of 10 in the Midwest and Southeast Regions, and 2 out of 10 in the South Region reported partial or severe reduction of food consumption in the three months preceding the II VIGISAN interviews.

Across all regions, approximately 3 out of 10 households reported uncertainty about having access to food in the near future, and worsening quality of the diet.

Hunger spreads in the countryside and in the cities

Food insecurity affects more than 60.0% of households in rural areas and 18.6% live with hunger, which is higher than the national average. Poverty of rural populations associated with the dismantling of policies to support populations that live in rural, forest and water settings continues to inflict hunger.
In percentages, the situation of rural populations is more serious. And the absolute number of people affected by hunger in urban areas – around 27.4 million people – is staggering.

Food insecurity percentages in rural areas in the South and Southeast were higher than in VIGISAN (2020), indicating food access significantly worsened in rural Brazil, even in regions considered to have a more developed economies.

In Brazil, even those who plant have nothing to eat

Hunger affected 21.8% of family farmers and rural producers’ households. If we look at the most severe forms of food insecurity (moderate and severe) the total reaches 38.0% of households – even higher in the North (54.6%) and Northeast (43.6%) regions. This population was especially affected by the dismantling of public policies aimed at small producers.

Hunger increased among the Black population by 70.0%

Food security affected 53.2% of the households where the reference person declared themselves to be white. In households where the head was Black food security drops to 35.0% – that is, 65.0% of households headed by Black people live with food insecurity. That means 6 out of 10 households live with some level of food insecurity and 18.1% of residents are living with hunger.
In households headed by Black people, there was a significant reduction in food security between 2020 (I VIGISAN) and 2022 (II VIGISAN), from 41.5% to 35.0%. The opposite happened with hunger, which increased from 10.4% to 18.1% between 2020 and 2022.

As seen in households headed by women, even in households with monthly income above 1 minimum wage per person, food insecurity is more prevalent among households where the reference person declares themselves to be Black.

**Women are the most impacted by hunger**

More than six out of 10 households headed by women live with food insecurity, or 64.1%. Only 35.9% of households whose person of reference was a woman were food secure, compared to 46.4% of households headed by men.

Between late 2020 and early 2022, hunger increased in the Brazilian population in general. However, in households where the person of reference was a women, the situation worsened even more. In these households, hunger increased from 11.2% to 19.3%. In households headed by men, hunger increased from 7.0% to 11.9%.

Regardless of the income range, when the person of reference in the household is a women, the risk of food insecurity is always higher. The fact that households headed by women are more affected by hunger can be explained, among other factors, by the difference in income that place women at a disadvantage in relation to men, evidencing the social vulnerability of women.
More households with children under the age of 10 face hunger

Hunger has doubled in families with children under the age of 10, an increase from 9.4% in 2020 to 18.1% in 2022. Hunger affects 25.7% of those households with 3 or more people under 18 years of age. Similar data were obtained for moderate food insecurity, indicating a situation of partial food restriction as well.

Food security reached 47.4% of households where all residents were adult, a figure higher than the national average.

Hunger almost disappears with income of just one minimum wage per person

Some degree of food insecurity affected 91.0% of the households whose income per person was less than 1/4 of the minimum wage. In 43.0% of them (4 out of 10 households), the residents experienced hunger. On the other hand, 67.0% of households with an income greater than 1 minimum wage per person were food secure.

In late 2020, there were no households with an income greater than 1 minimum wage per person in a situation of hunger. At the beginning of 2022, we found 3.0% of households with this income level in a situation of hunger and 6.0% with reduced diet quality and quantity of food consumed. The results show that these families migrated from mild FI to more severe forms of food insecurity, as food security remained higher in this upper income range.
Formal employment promotes access to food

Hunger was greater in households where the head was unemployed (36.1%), worked as a family farmer (22.4%) or held an informal job (21.1%).

Food security was greater in households where the head of the family worked with a formal contract - 53.8% of households, which is similar to that found in I VIGISAN (2020).

In 2020, hunger affected 3.3% of households where the head held a formal job. This percentage increased to 7.3% in 2021/2022. In households where the person of reference held an informal job, hunger increased from 14.3% in 2020 to 20.3% in 2021/2022.

Education matters

Hunger (severe FI) affected 22.3% of the households where the head had a low education level, 4 years of schooling or less.
Changes in the families financial dynamics

Families resort to mechanisms such as taking on debt or selling goods to face their hardships, including to obtain food. This allows us to understand the finding that moderate and severe food insecurity affected 49.1% of households that reported having gone into debt as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, 48.7% of those that reported selling assets or work equipment, and 55.2% of those that reported that a resident stopped studying to contribute to the family income.

In the households that reported cutting essential expenses, 43.6% experienced moderate or severe food insecurity. Among those who cut non-essential expenses, 39.0% experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.

Regardless of the presence of food security or food insecurity, approximately 30.0% of the households needed to use their financial savings in 2021/2022.
Shame, sadness, or embarrassment to obtain food

8.2% of the families reported having to do something that made them feel ashamed, sad or embarrassed to obtain food. Of these, 24.3% were facing the most severe forms of food insecurity (moderate or severe). In absolute numbers, it means that 15.9 million Brazilians were subject to using social, inhuman and unacceptable strategies to obtain food, thus violating their dignity and the right to access food. This sad reality significantly increased in households in urban areas and in the Southeast.

The difficult situation of having nothing to eat

15.4% of respondents did not eat breakfast daily; 10.1% of the people interviewed did not have lunch every day of the week; and 19.9% did not have dinner every day of the week.

In 28.3% of the households, at least one resident did not eat 3 meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) a day.
When hunger approaches, the purchase of staple foods changes

About half of the families that reduced the amount of rice, beans, vegetables, and fruit purchased lived with moderate or severe food insecurity.

In families that stopped buying meat in the three-month period prior to the survey, 70.4% lived with hunger. Similar data was found for households that had not purchased fruits (64.0%) and vegetables (63.6%).

Photo: Márcio de Carvalho
Retirement

In households with at least one resident retired through the Brazilian Social Security system (INSS), the percentage of food security was higher (46.5%) and of hunger was lower (11.9%). Hunger is more frequent (16.7%) in households where there are no pensioners.

Bolsa Família/Auxílio Brasil

Moderate and severe food insecurity was high even in households that received financial assistance from the Bolsa Família/Auxílio Brasil Program.

In the income range of ≤1/2 minimum wage per person, hunger affected 32.7% of the families who reported receiving aid from the Bolsa Família/Auxílio Brasil Program and affected 29.4% of those who did not.

Hunger affected 56.7% of households with a family income less than or equal to 1/4 of the minimum wage per person and that did not receive aid from the Bolsa Família/Auxílio Brasil Program.
The lack of regular and permanent access to water, that is, water insecurity, is a reality that affects 12.0% of the general population in Brazil. Of those households affected by water insecurity, 22.8% suffered with moderate food insecurity and 42.0% suffered from hunger.

Food insecurity affected 48.3% of the households with water insecurity in the North region, 43.0% of the households with restricted access to water in the Southeast, 41.8% in the Midwest and 41.2% in the Northeast.

Even those households that receive the Auxílio Brasil, 47.5% of the families still go hungry.
Closing Remarks

Photo: Meire Muniz/ActionAid
The results presented by II VIGISAN (2021/2022) show that food insecurity has worsened in the Brazilian population, especially hunger. This scenario results from the dismantling of essential national public policies, especially those aimed at fighting against hunger and promoting family farming and controlling food prices and the economic crisis – both of which were aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Adding to this context is a government that continues to operate ineffectively, combined with decisions based on the false dilemma between caring for the country’s economy and the health of its population.

If, on the one hand, the results presented here reflect the environment of social degradation and, therefore, of setbacks that contributed to impoverishing Brazilian society, worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, on the other hand, they show the magnitude of the challenges involved to overcome them.

It will not be enough just to reactivate the economy through growth, but it will be necessary to connect it with preserving social-environmental living conditions and guaranteeing human rights – including adequate food – in an equitable manner for the entire Brazilian population.
HUNGER
DOESN’T
WAIT