

Brazilian School Nutrition Program: limits and opportunities for ensuring the human right to adequate, healthy and sustainable nutrition

The Brazilian School Nutrition Program (PNAE) is essentially the country's longest-standing public policy for promoting food and nutrition security. Considered one of the largest and most comprehensive school nutrition programs in the world, the budget of the Program for 2012 was R\$ 3.3 billion, benefiting 45 million students (www.fnde.gov.br).

In Brazil, the first governmental actions geared to school nutrition were created in the 1930s, when nutritional diseases related to hunger and poverty (malnutrition, iron-deficiency anemia, iodine deficiency, vitamin A deficiency, among others) represented serious public health problems. The embryonic project of the current PNAE program, however, was established in 1955 with the creation of the Brazilian School Snack Campaign. This campaign, linked to the Ministry of Education and Culture, initially had the support of international food donations, under the auspices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), based on the dedication of Josué de Castro and other social actors imbued with the arduous and complex task of combating hunger in the country (Vasconcelos FAG. Combating hunger in Brazil: a historical analysis from Vargas to Lula. *Rev. Nutr.* 2005; 18(4):439-457).

The progress that PNAE has achieved over the 58 years of its existence are clear for all to see, especially since 1995, and particularly in the period from 2003 to 2012. In this period, there was a major expansion of the Program in terms of allocation of funds and population coverage. Other advances relate to the establishment of technical and operational criteria striving for flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness in the program management. This includes the stimulus for the expansion and strengthening of the role of the School Nutrition Councils in social control and regulatory strategies for the actions of nutritionists as the technicians in charge. The enactment of Law No. 11.947/2009 brought new advances for PNAE, such as extending the program to the entire public grid for basic education as well as for youths and adults. It also ratified the requirement that at least 30% of the total funds transferred by the Brazilian Education and Development Fund (ENDF) for the implementation of PNAE by executing agencies should be invested in the direct purchase of products from family farms, a measure that boosts the economic development of communities in a sustainable manner.

Another relevant development was the creation in 2007 of the Cooperation Centers for Student Food and Nutrition (CECANEs) following the decentralization of the FNDE budget to federal public universities. The objective was to develop programs of teaching, research and extension activities that result in enhanced management of quality and social control of the PNAE in the different municipalities and, therefore, in promoting and ensuring healthy nutrition and food and nutrition security in public schools.

To the detriment of its comprehensiveness and relevance in the national and international field of public policy, there are as yet very few scientific publications on the historical trajectory, scope, efficiency and effectiveness of the PNAE. The new national epidemiological profile, characterized by the emergence and predominance of non-communicable chronic nutritional diseases (obesity, diabetes, dyslipidemia, hypertension, certain types of cancer, etc.) and the maintenance of nutritional deficiencies, requires constant monitoring of the PNAE. In this sense, the purpose and opportuneness of this special edition on the PNAE is to disseminate and promote the important academic contribution that the CECANEs provided to enhanced management of the PNAE and, consequently, the improvement of food and nutrition of Brazilian schoolchildren.

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