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#### ARTICLE

# Policy Dismantling and Resilience: a Proposal for an Analytical Framework Based on the Case of the Food and Nutritional Security Policy in Brazil\*,\*\*

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This study examines the link between policy dismantling and democratic backsliding through a comprehensive analytical framework. This framework not only addresses dismantling strategies but also assesses resilience mechanisms, covering aspects like new policy implementation arrangements, diversification of governance, involvement of non-state actors, and the creation of alternative forums. Applying this framework, the study examines three food and nutritional security programs using qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Findings highlight significant impacts of dismantling on initiatives started during the Workers' Party administrations, especially affecting the Food Acquisition and the Cisterns Programs that heavily involve civil society in their operations. In contrast, the National School Feeding Program showed resilience, supported by established subsystems and a federative pact. The Cisterns Program's resilience, underpinned by effective mobilization of beneficiaries and civil society organizations, also stands out, illustrating the importance of community involvement in counteracting policy dismantling.

**Keywords:** Policy dismantling; democratic backsliding; food and nutritional security; policy resilience.

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his article addresses the dismantling and resilience of public policies, aiming to introduce an analytical framework that combines dismantling and resilience processes, with applicability across various policy domains. This framework is applied to analyze three programs within the Brazilian food and nutritional security policy. The main goal is to enhance our understanding of the interactions between policy dismantling and democratic backsliding.

The concern regarding the issue of hunger and the food security agenda has been a longstanding concern. In 1946, Josué de Castro (CASTRO, 2012) identified mass hunger as a significant social problem in Brazil. Since 2003, the field of food and nutritional security policies saw substantial growth and institutionalization, marked by the launch of various initiatives. During this period, the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (Consea) was reestablished and the Zero Hunger Program was implemented, integrating these initiatives (NAZARENO, 2016; SILVA, 2014). In less than a decade, Brazil emerged as an international benchmark in hunger alleviation efforts, exporting its programs (MILHORANCE, 2020).

While existing literature extensively covers the development and institutionalization of the food and nutritional security policy, along with its numerous programs and initiatives (ROCHA, 2009; ROCHA, BURLANDY, and MAGALHÃES, 2013; SILVA, 2014), there remains a need for mapping, systematizing, and explaining the changes in this policy, particularly during the second term of Dilma Rousseff's presidency (post-2015). Deinstitutionalization and dismantling are categories used to describe the phenomenon (BEZERRA et al., 2022; GRISA and NIEDERLE, 2021; MILHORANCE, 2022; NIEDERLE et al., 2021; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI, and MILHORANCE, 2020; SEIFERT JUNIOR, 2021). The initial mapping carried out in the existing literature already identifies several significant elements, including decreased funding, political violence, and non-execution of budget allocations (GRISA, 2012; MILHORANCE, 2022; MILHORANCE et al., 2023; NIEDERLE et al., 2021; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI, and MILHORANCE, 2020). This study aims to enhance these efforts by providing a comparative analysis of three programs within the food and nutritional security policy: the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), and the Cisterns Program.

The PNAE is the oldest among the cases examined, tracing its origins back to the 1950s with the introduction of the school meal program. The trajectory of the PNAE is marked by incremental changes over time. However, even with changes, the program persisted and improved despite shifts in governments and regimes (SILVA, 2019). The PAA was established by the Lula administration (2003 - 2010) in 2003. With its diverse purchasing modalities, the program is known for creating an institutional market for family farming and small farmers, thereby promoting agricultural production, combating hunger, and connecting production to consumption (GRISA, 2012; PERIN et al., 2021; SAMBUICHI et al., 2019). Lastly, the Cisterns Program was established also during the Lula administration, stemming from a civil society initiative known as the One Million Cisterns Program (P1MC), and it is mainly implemented in partnership with these organizations (ANDRADE and CALMON, 2021; CASTRO, 2021; NOGUEIRA, MILHORANCE, and MENDES, 2020).

Dismantling is a form of change that involves reducing or removing policy goals and instruments (BAUER and KNILL, 2014). Recent studies have shown that programs undergo dismantling while also demonstrating resilience (ALMEIDA, 2020; BEZERRA et al., 2022; HALL and LAMONT, 2013; MILHORANCE et al., 2023; PIERSON, 1994). Therefore, the outcome of the political process involves both dimensions. We propose an analytical framework that takes into account both dismantling and resilience. We begin with the hypothesis that dismantling prompts reactions from both institutions and political actors. When analyzing the outcome of the dismantling process, scholars should thus consider both the strategies used for dismantling and those for resilience.

The resilience factors examined in this study include 01. the level of institutionalization of the programs; 02. decentralization through the federative pact; 03. subsystems and its actors; and 04. the specific category of beneficiary population with territorial dynamics. The federative pact, along with implementation and formulation concentrated in state entities, and the presence of established subsystems, contributed to greater resilience for the PNAE. Conversely, the presence of a specific beneficiary population closely linked to territorial dynamics facilitated a more organized mobilization in support of the Cisterns Program, thus enhancing its resilience.

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. The first section provides an overview of the theoretical debate regarding policy dismantling and democratic backsliding, and it introduces the proposed analytical framework. The second section outlines the methodology used in this study. The third and fourth sections systematically present the findings for the three programs. The final section is dedicated to discussing the results and providing concluding remarks.

# Policy dismantling, democratic backsliding, and policy resilience

Policy dismantling is characterized as a form of policy change involving the cutting, reduction, diminution or even the complete elimination of a policy (BAUER et al., 2012; BAUER and KNILL, 2014). The dismantling of policies involving concentrated costs and diffuse benefits can be advantageous for certain political actors willing to bear these costs (BAUER et al., 2012). Politicians' motivations and preferences are influenced by external factors, opportunity and veto structures, and situational factors, all of which in turn affect their selection of dismantling strategies (BAUER et al., 2012).

While widely used, the model proposed by Bauer et al. (BAUER et al., 2012; BAUER and KNILL, 2014, 2012) has faced criticism regarding its explanatory capacity, proposed operationalization of variables, and scope. The model fails to explain the dismantling that occurs simultaneously with democratic backsliding and the rise of illiberal governments (GOMIDE, SILVA, and LEOPOLDI, 2023) in countries such as Hungary (HAJNAL, 2021; HAJNAL and BODA, 2021), Brazil (ARAÚJO, 2020b; GOMIDE et al., 2022; GRISA and NIEDERLE, 2021; NIEDERLE et al., 2021; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI and MILHORANCE, 2020; SILVA, 2020), Poland (MAZUR, 2021) and United States (BAUER et al., 2021b).

In the Brazilian case, although elements of dismantling were identified during the second term of Dilma Rousseff's government (2015-2016) (MILHORANCE, 2022; MILHORANCE et al., 2023; NIEDERLE et al., 2021; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI, and MILHORANCE, 2020), the process intensified during Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022). The rise of populist and far-right governments representing illiberal values around the world has brought the study of policy dismantling closer to discussions about democratic backsliding (BAUER et al., 2021b; SILVA, 2022).

Some authors have highlighted how the combination of policy dismantling and democratic backsliding impacts bureaucracy and the implementation of policies (BAUER, PETERS and PIERRE, 2021a; LOTTA et al., 2023; SILVA, 2020). Another key aspect of this convergence between bodies of literature was acknowledging that some policies are more affected than others not only due to perceived costs and benefits of dismantling but also because of their symbolic value. Therefore, policies developed through participatory processes, those associated with the Workers' Party administrations, and policies that oppose the conservative agenda were the main targets of the Bolsonaro government's dismantling efforts (BEZERRA et al., 2022; MILHORANCE, 2022).

The variation in the intensity and manner of dismantling has prompted researchers to investigate the resilience and durability of public policies in contexts of democratic backsliding (BAUER, PETERS, and PIERRE, 2021a; CAPANO and WOO, 2018, 2016; MILHORANCE et al., 2023). The analytical framework proposed in this article addresses the need to integrate discussions on policy dismantling with the emergence of illiberal governments and policy resilience. Therefore, resilience strategies were integrated into dismantling strategies.

Bauer et al. (2012) identify four dismantling strategies that vary according to the intentionality of the decision and its visibility (Table 01) (BAUER et al., 2012; BAUER and KNILL, 2014).

 Table 01. Dismantling strategies

	Intentionality of the dismantling decision		
		Conscious-active	Unconscious-no active decision
Visibility of	High visibility	Active dismantling	Symbolic action
dismantling actions	Low visibility	Arena-shifting	Default

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Bauer et al. (2012), and Bauer and Knill (2012).

The 'default' strategy can manifest through budget cuts, low visibility, and the absence of decisions, attracting less political attention. 'Arena-shifting', on the other hand, changes the decision-making arena, such as shifting to another level of government, less institutionalized agencies, or other sectors. 'Symbolic actions' include situations in which politicians explicitly express their intentions without making dismantling decisions (public statements). Finally, 'active dismantling' involves decisions made by politicians who genuinely believe that dismantling is the

appropriate solution, usually associated with a low cost of pursuing this direction (BAUER and KNILL, 2014, 2012).

By adapting Bauer and Knill's original analytical model (2012), Sabourin et al. (2020) structure the analysis of policy dismantling into two categories: causes and strategies. In this article, we build on this analytical model by incorporating resilience strategies. As a process with its own dynamics, resilience also has analytical categories related to strategies. Therefore, the elements of the analytical framework identified as causes affect not only dismantling but also resilience. Moreover, strategies for both dismantling and resilience are integrated into the framework as an intermediate analytical category capable of empirically linking agency and structure (HAY, 2002; JESSOP, 1996).

Table 02 presents the four resilience strategies proposed in this article. Building on the typology developed by Lotta et al. (2023) to analyze bureaucrats' responses to dismantling, we posit that resilience strategies vary based on the relationship between the resilience action and the existing institutional framework (formal/institutional and informal) and the scope of the strategy (local/regional and national). It is important to highlight that, in contrast to the approach adopted by Lotta et al. (2023), we did not formulate the resilience strategies based on analyzed empirical data but rather through deductive constructions, similar to the dismantling strategies developed by Bauer and Knill (2012). Also in contrast to Lotta et al. (2023) and Bauer et al. (2021b), this study acknowledges that resilience extends beyond bureaucrats' actions to encompass a variety of political actors influencing the policy process, including the media, organized civil society, lawmakers, researchers, among others.

With policy dismantling and democratic backsliding stemming from initiatives aimed at centralizing programs in the federal government (HAGGARD and KAUFMAN, 2021; LEITE et al., 2023), decentralization and a shift to other levels of government have emerged as alternatives to ensure policy continuity and service provision. Consequently, 'new policy implementation arrangements' started being promoted, funded, and implemented in collaboration with other levels of government. Another resilience strategy involves the implementation of policies by non-state actors (MILHORANCE et al., 2023). In this category, these actors may take over the operation

of policy instruments, mobilize their own resources, and 'implement' policies undergoing dismantling without the support of the federal government.

At the national level, actors may appeal to the legislative and judicial branches to prevent or slow down dismantling, a strategy of 'diversifying the governance' involved in the policy process. Finally, the federal executive's actions reduced spaces for dialogue and/or shifted the decision-making arena. In response, actors may establish their own 'parallel forums' as a strategy to maintain the agenda in focus and coordinate their actions.

Table 02. Resilience strategies

	Scope of the strategy		
		Local/Regional	National
Concrete action of	Institutional/Formal	New policy	Diversification of
resilience		implementation	governance
		arrangements	
	Informal	Implementation by	Parallel forums
		non-state actors	

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Leite et al. (2023), Lotta et al. (2023), Milhorance et al. (2023), Haggard and Kaufman (2021), Bauer et al. (2021b), Bauer and Knill (2012).

Examining how resilience is shaped by the dismantling process and identifying various resilience strategies in political decision-making contribute to recent progress in the literature on policy resilience (Figure 01). This field of study underscores not just the resilience and robustness of public policies in times of change and turbulence (ANSELL and TRONDAL, 2018; HOWLETT, 2019), but also the resilience of actors confronting policy dismantling and shifts in their well-being (ALMEIDA, 2020; BEZERRA et al., 2022; HALL and LAMONT, 2013; MILHORANCE, 2022; MILHORANCE et al., 2023).

Therefore, resilience is not a structural characteristic linked to policy design, but rather an outcome. As emphasized by Almeida (2020) and Milhorance et al. (2023), it is crucial to integrate agency into the analysis of resilience. The concept of social resilience, as developed by Hall and Lamont (2013), underscores the capacity of individuals to mobilize collectively. This capacity relies not only on material resources but also on cultural and social resources, such as networks, cultural repertoires, and the mobilization of narratives. Resilience is thus the outcome of an active process of response, and it involves creativity in developing strategies (HALL and LAMONT, 2013).

**OUTCOMES** DISMANTLING **RESILIENCE STRATEGIES STRATEGIES** - New policy implementation - Default arrangements - Arena-shifting - Diversification of - Symbolic action governance - Active - Implementation by dismantling non-state actors - Parallel foruns Causes Structural Factors Contextual Factors Institutional Constraints and Opportunities

Figure 01. Analytical model for analyzing policy dismantling and resilience

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Sabourin et al. (2020), Bauer et al.(2012), and Hall and Lamont (2013).

Finally, in line with the logic proposed by Bauer and colleagues to explain dismantling, this article proposes a repertoire of resilience strategies. The outcome of the political process depends not only on dismantling strategies, as indicated by Bauer et al. (2012), but also on resilience strategies adopted by various political actors. Therefore, we suggest considering the interaction between policy dismantling and resilience as a process in which contestation for institutional continuity or change takes place.

# Methodology

Drawing on Mello's study (2023), we have identified the following factors for analyzing policy resilience: level of institutionalization, degree of centralization in policy formulation and implementation, and target beneficiary population (MELLO, 2023). Based on Mello's (2023) study, we considered the categories: level of institutionalization, decentralization in policy implementation and formulation, and beneficiary population.

All selected programs have the same level of institutionalization. While access to food is considered a constitutional social right (Constitutional Amendment nº 64), each program has its legal framework established through specific laws and

complementary regulations (such as Law Nº 11,947/2009 for the PNAE, Law Nº 10,696/2003 for the PAA, and Law Nº 12,873/2013 for the Cisterns Program). Therefore, any modifications to these programs would require similar institutional processes.

The institutional design of the three programs follows a decentralized approach to implementation. The difference between them lies in defining which are the actors involved in this process and how they participate in it. While the PNAE is primarily implemented and formulated by subnational entities with a certain level of decision-making and financial autonomy, the PAA and, notably, the Cisterns Program, engage various actors in their formulation and implementation phases (GRISA, 2012; MORTARA, 2017). This distinction is crucial as it underscores the significant variation in coordination and funding capacity between programs.

The diverse beneficiary populations also contribute to creating distinctions between the programs. As argued by Pierson (1993), programs are capable of generating their own defenders, particularly when the benefits are concentrated within a specific social group. Similarly, diffuse benefits tend to lead to lower costs for dismantling, as they increase the challenges of coordination for defending the program (BAUER and KNILL, 2012). Mello (2023) contends that programs aimed at individuals and families are less resilient than those with territorial and collective dynamics. The PNAE reaches all students (individuals) in public schools across the country. The PAA and the Cisterns Program, on the other hand, target individuals and families living in rural areas based on their engagement with the territory. In addition, both require beneficiaries to be registered in the Single Registry (Cadastro Único). The PAA targets a specific population classified as family farmers, with specific eligibility criteria applying to this category (MDS, 2014; PERIN et al., 2021). Cistern construction, in turn, not only occurs in rural areas but also targets a population concentrated in the Brazilian semi-arid region.

The analytical framework also considers the policy subsystems involved in each program. In the literature, policy subsystems are regarded as the unit of analysis for policy processes. By defining the theme at hand, it is possible to map the actors influencing the discussions and implementation of a particular policy (JENKINS-SMITH et al., 2018; SABATIER, 1988; WEIBLE et al., 2020). A subsystem is characterized by the presence of a semi-autonomous community sharing expertise,

actors seeking to influence the policy over a long period, specialized agencies operating at all relevant government levels for the subsystem, and interest groups mobilized around the subsystem's theme. Subsystems comprised of non-hegemonic actors within the national socioeconomic context tend to be less resilient (HEINMILLER, OSEI and DANSO, 2021; SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999).

Actors from three distinct established subsystems are engaged in the PNAE: health, education, and food and nutritional security (SILVA, 2019). Family farming and agroecology represent non-hegemonic actors in the food and nutritional security subsystem who challenge traditional agricultural models (MOTTA, 2016). Family farming takes on a crucial role serving as the key element in the PAA, within the food and nutritional security subsystem (GRISA, 2012). The Cisterns Program has been institutionalized into the food and nutritional security agenda, involving actors associated with agroecology movements. This reflects a comprehensive approach to promoting food and nutritional security, preserving the environment, and supporting family farming simultaneously (ANDRADE, 2020; MORTARA, 2017; PEREIRA, 2016). During the dismantling process, family farming, particularly agroecology, was criminalized and delegitimized (NIEDERLE et al., 2021; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI and MILHORANCE, 2020).

The dismantling resulted in varied outcomes across different programs or subsystems, and our sample of cases reflects this diversity. The next section outlines the strategies used to dismantle each program. The design and operation of the PNAE remained unchanged; however, the federal transfers were not updated, and the pandemic threatened the regularity of such transfers. The goals of the PAA were altered, and symbolically, it was replaced by the Alimenta Brasil program (Law Nº 14.284/2021). The Cisterns Program came to a halt, operating marginally with alternative resources and the involvement of civil society. Table 03 summarizes the three discussed programs and their characteristics.

The dismantling trajectories for each program were mapped using the process tracing method. Process tracing is a qualitative method aimed at tracing the causal chains linking a specific phenomenon to a particular outcome. This method traces the presence of causal mechanisms from empirical evidence in in-depth case studies (BEACH and PEDERSEN, 2019, 2016). It has been used in policy studies to explain the

outcomes and paths resulting from the complexity of the phenomenon (HEDSTRÖM and SWEDBERG, 1998). In addition, the method highlights the characteristics of the contexts in which a particular process unfolds (FALLETI, 2016; FALLETI and LYNCH, 2009). In this study, process tracing was not used to delve into the causal mechanisms. Instead, it was employed to map out the events and entities involved in the process of policy dismantling and resilience.

**Table 03.** Food and nutritional security programs

	Institutionalization	Implementation and Formulation	Subsystems	Beneficiaries	Outcome
PNAE	Law 11.947/2009	Decentralization via federative pact	Established	Individuals	Remained in operation
PC	Law 12.873/2013	Decentralization involving multiple actors	Non- hegemonic actors	Individuals and families, territorial logic, in the semi-arid region	Paralyzed at the federal government level
PAA	Law 10.696/2003	Decentralization involving multiple actors	Non- hegemonic actors	Individuals and families, territorial logic	Replaced by the Alimenta Brasil program

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The data were collected from various sources. Documentary research was conducted, including analysis of laws, government documents, civil society documents, and other relevant materials. Additionally, our analysis was complemented by observations of meetings and semi-structured interviews. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), numerous events were streamed online. The main sources of online transmissions used in this work were the channels of the Popular Conference on Food and Nutritional Security and the Cátedra Josué de Castro. During these events, documents (later identified) were referenced, allowing us to track the viewpoints of key figures in the Brazilian debate on food and nutritional security, as well as to map out the various fronts of resilience.

Between 2019 and 2023, we conducted and analyzed 25 semi-structured interviews. All interviewees were engaged with the food and nutritional security agenda within their respective professional fields. Of these, 11 are public servants who are part of the Specialist in Management and Public Policy career, or Technical Analysts in Social Policies within the federal executive or federal agencies; 10 are affiliated with civil society organizations; 02 are employed by the judiciary; and

02 interviewees are researchers and university professors (Table 04). The interviews took place in person in Brasília and Recife, and some were conducted online. The researchers and the interviewees agreed to maintain anonymity. The quoted excerpts are cited with the year and month of the interview.

**Table 04.** Analysis code

Code	Subcategory	
Dismantling strategies	Default	
	Arena-shifting	
	Symbolic action	
	Active dismantling	
Resilience strategies	New policy implementation	
	arrangements	
	Diversification of governance	
	Implementation by non-state actors	
	Parallel forums	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. They were transcribed, and the written documents were analyzed using the NVIVO12 software. The analysis code employed categories from the constructed analytical model, as presented in Table 04 and discussed throughout the text. Since the analysis progressed alongside the process tracing, our goal was not only to identify the events and entities involved but also to organize the processes chronologically.

# Dismantling strategies for food and nutritional security programs

The institutional conditions for the development of the National Policy for Food and Nutritional Security emerged during a period of increasing demand for democratic revitalization, which led to significant mobilizations for the constituent assembly in the 1980s. This momentum persisted with the establishment of the social participation policy from 2003 to 2016 (ROCHA, BURLANDY and MAGALHÃES, 2013; SILVA et al., 2023). This policy encompasses several programs in its portfolio. This section will analyze the dismantling of three programs: the PNAE, PAA, and Cisterns Program.

Designed to serve students in basic education within the public school system, the PNAE is Brazil's longest-standing food and nutritional security policy. Its instruments and principles have been adopted by numerous countries as a strategy to

address food insecurity, promote healthy eating, and offer food education (FAO, 2022; VASCONCELOS, 2013).

The evolution of the PNAE reflects Brazil's democracy-building process following the years of military rule (1964-1985). During the 1987 national constituent assembly, amid widespread civil society mobilization, the state was mandated to provide school meals for elementary students. The PNAE has undergone significant changes over time. In 2000, the School Feeding Council was established, and since 2009, it has been legally required (Law Nº 11,947/2009) that at least 30% of the resources allocated by the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE) must be used to purchase products from family farming and rural family businesses. This measure prioritizes agrarian reform settlements and traditional communities.

Unlike the PNAE, the PAA was established in 2003, during Lula's first term, as a key component of the Zero Hunger Program. Its goals include bolstering agriculture, addressing hunger, and alleviating poverty (PERIN et al., 2021). The National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (Consea), dissolved in 2019, played a primary role in the creation of the PAA (NIEDERLE et al., 2021). The program promoted the acquisition of products from family farmers with the aim of: "01. supporting the public network of food and nutrition facilities and social assistance institutions; 02. structuring local supply circuits; 03. establishing stocks to provide food assistance to specific populations, people affected by disasters, and school populations experiencing food insecurity" (GRISA et al., 2019).

The PAA comprises instruments for direct purchases and commercialization of products across various categories, aiming to connect producers with individuals and organizations facing food and social vulnerability. Before its dismantling, the program underwent several gradual changes to enhance its effectiveness (PERIN et al., 2021).

Unlike the PNAE and the PAA, the Cisterns Program has a regional scope. This program is acknowledged and commended for its role in promoting the development of social technologies (cisterns), to gather and store rainwater in the Brazilian semi-arid region, with extensive social participation. The program's origins are tied to the challenge presented by the Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA) in 1999, which aimed to construct 01 million cisterns (P1MC) to tackle the recurring droughts

experienced annually. The cisterns are part of a larger strategy for sustainable development known as 'coexisting with the semi-arid' (ASSIS, 2009; SILVA, 2006).

The partnership with civil society was strengthened and expanded during the administrations of Lula and Rousseff (ABERS and ALMEIDA, 2019). Cisterns were built utilizing participatory methodologies and an educational approach, with this experience being expanded to regions with limited access to water outside the semi-arid region. Additionally, various types of social technologies were developed in order to promote access to water for different uses, such as drinking water, household water and water for school maintenance. In 2013, the National Program for Supporting Rainwater Harvesting and Other Water Access Social Technologies – Cisterns Program was institutionalized through Law Nº 12,873 (ANDRADE and CALMON, 2021; PEREIRA, 2016).

Consea served as the primary forum for coordinating the food and nutritional security agenda in Brazil. Established for the first time in 1994, it was dissolved the following year. In 2003, President Lula reinstated the council within the framework of the Zero Hunger Program. In line with the democratic-participatory project (ABERS and ALMEIDA, 2019), the recreation of Consea occurred alongside the institutionalization of various initiatives aimed at addressing the issue of hunger.

With Consea, civil society representation in the participatory process became more diverse, encompassing a wide range of social groups and perspectives. Through a discontinuous process, food and nutritional security evolved as a policy domain, driven by the efforts of participatory institutions engaged with this theme (ALMEIDA, MARTELLI and COELHO, 2021), particularly the efforts of a movement that expanded its activities as the national executive became more aligned and open to civil society demands (ABERS and ALMEIDA, 2019; BEZERRA et al., 2022).

The dissolution of councils in 2019 (decrees 9,759 and 9,784), including Consea, marked the start of President Bolsonaro's term, characterized by a strategy of 'active dismantling' and dismantling by 'arena-shifting'. Despite the dismantling beginning before his term, the strategy of active dismantling and arena-shifting – marked by the reduction or extinction of institutional social participation – became a hallmark of the Bolsonaro administration. We emphasize both the actions' high

visibility (GOMIDE, SILVA and LEOPOLDI, 2023) and the associated democratic backsliding linked to the dismantling (ALMEIDA, 2020; BEZERRA et al., 2022).

In addition to Consea, the National Commission on Agroecology and Organic Production (CNAPO), territorial development councils, and the civil society consultation group for school feeding were also abolished (MILHORANCE et al., 2023). The first two of these spaces directly influenced the Cisterns Program and the PAA, while the last one affected the PNAE. One interviewee<sup>1</sup> stated that "the government is not very open to civil society organizations. There's clearly an idea that forming big partnerships with civil society organizations is not a good strategy" (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2019, 0h37min).

It is worth noting that the PAA and the Cisterns Program involve a robust collaboration with civil society at both national and local levels. The PAA was created based on deliberations within Consea. Meanwhile, the Cisterns Program was institutionalized through collaboration between civil society and the bureaucracy in charge of social policies to develop technical solutions to ensure the program's continuity (ANDRADE and CALMON, 2021; NOGUEIRA, MILHORANCE and MENDES, 2020; PEREIRA, 2016). An interviewee<sup>2</sup> underscores that participatory institutions "play a crucial and fundamental role. The concept of food and nutritional security itself was formulated and coined during a conference, and it was the beginning of everything. [...] In the conferences, the guidelines, principles, and legal frameworks were established... all of this was consolidated throughout this process" (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02, 2022, online).

Another example of active dismantling was the Bolsonaro administration and its allies' efforts to pass laws aimed at reversing progress in coordinating policies and recognizing family farming as a category. PLS 5,695/2019 is an example of such an initiative. If passed, this proposal would remove the mandatory minimum percentage of food purchases from family farming under the PAA and PNAE and eliminate the priority for purchasing food from traditional communities and farmers working on land designated for agrarian reform.

Additionally, the Chamber of Deputies approved Bill 3292/2020, which includes provisions for a quota for milk acquisition. The School Food Observatory

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Federal Executive, interview conducted on 12/09/2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Civil society organization, interview conducted on November 05, 2022.

(OAE) considers this bill "a dangerous precedent of market reservation" that would condition the definition of the PNAE menu to the National Congress rather than nutritionists, as stipulated by current legislation (ÓAÊ, 2021a, 2021b). Furthermore, the proposed change not only aims to bolster and broaden the role of major market chains and industrialized products on the menu but also undermines respect for dietary habits and cultural traditions, which runs counter to the goal of promoting food and nutritional security.

Another strategy used was dismantling by 'default'. We identified two ways in which this strategy was used. First, it was used to affect the budget and prevent the updating of the value of transferred resources. The situation has worsened since 2016 with the approval of measures like Constitutional Amendment Nº 95, which imposes a 20-year ceiling on public spending.

According to Niederle et al. (2021), the PAA was not abolished, but its budget was drastically reduced. The budget cuts started as early as 2013, with a brief recovery in 2014 and 2015, but the budget has been steadily decreasing since then until the pandemic. In 2011, 1,006.8 million reais were allocated to the PAA, while in 2018, this amount was 232.7 million (SAMBUICHI et al., 2020).

In the case of the Cisterns Program, its budget has been reduced since 2015. During the Temer administration, the reduction persisted, but as mentioned by one interviewee<sup>3</sup>, "he made some changes, but he continued the same processes that were already in place. He didn't give it visibility; he put it on the back burner" (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 03, 2019, 0h48min). During the Bolsonaro administration, the program's implementation faltered, with greater involvement from actors in the business sector and allegations that the criteria used by the Single Registry for resource distribution were not being met. Additionally, Bolsonaro's government neglected to update the ordinances with the cost of each cistern. Therefore, even if the budget had been executed, the surge in prices across Brazil would render implementation unfeasible (MILHORANCE et al., 2023). Finally, the second aspect of the default strategy within the Cisterns Program was the frequent turnover of teams within the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Civil society organization, interview conducted on September 20, 2019.

secretariats, making it challenging to keep programs running (MILHORANCE et al., 2023).

As for the PNAE, a recent study conducted by the School Food Observatory in collaboration with the National Association for Research in Education Funding (Fineduca) examined the transfers from the FNDE for school feeding since official records began, as well as the additional amounts provided by federative entities for the program's implementation. The study concludes that the transfers made by the FNDE are outdated and that the amounts supplemented by states and municipalities, in varying proportions, may surpass the funds provided by the federal government. Therefore, the substantial disparity between the funding allocated by the FNDE and the expenditure on school meals undertaken by states and municipalities underscores the difficulty of guaranteeing adequate nutrition for students in municipalities with lower revenue, particularly amid rising inflation and food costs (ÓAÊ, 2021b, 2021a).

'Symbolic actions' were also mapped in the public criticisms frequently made by President Bolsonaro against civil society organizations (CONECTAS, 2018; MAZUI, 2019). According to the interviewees, the Cisterns Program suffered the most significant symbolic impact. According to an Interviewee<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added)

'When you discuss the Cisterns Program, you see that it's a social movement program, originated in the Northeast and implemented in a left-wing government, so-called left-wing, a center-left coalition. So, all of this has an effect'. [...] You can see that there's a very hesitant attitude towards these programs. But you might say, "But what about the PAA?" The PAA is a very strong program in Rio Grande do Sul. This movement [conservative-right movement], for those who are studying, you know this well, this political polarization, this more conservative movement comes from the South-Central region, which kind of softens it [for the PAA]. But when it comes to Cisterns, 'I've heard more than one political actor here say things like: "it's really Lula's thing. It's very much [something] from the previous government. It's painted red" (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 04, 2019, 0h45min).

In 2013, the dismantling of the PAA could already be identified. Former judge Sérgio Moro, who oversaw the Lava Jato corruption investigation, led a Federal Police operation in Paraná called Operation Ghost Agro to investigate alleged irregularities in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Federal Executive, interview conducted on September 12, 2019.

the implementation of the PAA. On this occasion, farmers were arrested preventively on charges including criminal conspiracy, forgery of public documents, misrepresentation, and aggravated fraud. They were acquitted and released due to lack of evidence (SALES, 2018). However, this legal action led to the criminalization of people connected to the rural sector and made it more difficult for rural producers to qualify for the program (NIEDERLE et al., 2021; PERIN, 2022; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI and MILHORANCE, 2020; SALES, 2018). Additionally, another significant symbolic element we identified was the government's attempt to remove specific lines of credit tailored for family farming, instead including it within the broader category of small-scale farmers (MILHORANCE et al., 2023; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI, and MILHORANCE, 2020). Finally, in 2022, the federal government replaced the PAA with the Alimenta Brasil program.

With respect to the PNAE, in 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food Supply (MAPA) released Technical Note Nº 42/2020, criticizing the content of the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population. The technical note was attached to a letter from the minister of agriculture, Tereza Cristina, requesting the Ministry of Health to review the publication. In the letter, the minister criticizes the food classification proposed by the Guide, arguing that it does not benefit the population (BRASIL, 2020). The minister's position contradicts the norms of the Ministry of Health, which serve as the foundation for preparing menus for the PNAE.

After mapping the dismantling categories across the three programs, the next section delves into policy resilience in response to attacks from the federal government.

## Dismantling strategies for food and nutritional security programs

In response to systematic dismantling, we observe several resilience strategies, as mentioned earlier: the emergence of new policy implementation arrangements, diversification of governance, implementation by non-state actors, and the creation of parallel forums.

The strategy of pursuing institutional action in other levels of government (local and regional) entailed collaboration between these governments and

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international organizations to establish or enhance 'new policy implementation arrangements'. This type of strategy involved the participation of state actors from the national executive branch bypassing the federal government. In the case of the PAA and the PNAE, civil society worked with municipalities and states to advocate for prioritizing the purchase of food from local family farmers instead of relying on emergency measures like distributing school meal vouchers to be used in supermarkets (see the efforts of the National Agroecology Articulation, ASA, among others). Moreover, to strengthen the central role played by the connection between the PAA and PNAE, the Brazilian Forum on Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Security (FBSSAN), in collaboration with the ASA, the creator of the Cisterns Program, conducted monitoring activities and produced a study, on the status of hunger and family farming in the semi-arid region during the pandemic (FBSSAN and ASA, 2020). Lastly, as described in the previous section, in the context of the PNAE, states and municipalities funded the program using their own resources (ÓAÊ, 2021a, 2021b).

The Cisterns Program made efforts to secure support and funding from municipalities, states, and international organizations to build cisterns. An example of these expansionist efforts included projects carried out through partnerships between the ASA, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN), ASA's internationalization efforts (in semi-arid regions of Latin America and North Africa), and collaboration for funding activities with the Northeast Governors Consortium (DAKI, 2022; MILHORANCE et al., 2023). Therefore, we emphasize the restructuring of the policy networks involved in the program.

National and formal strategies involved the 'diversification of governance' of the Republic that actors sought to influence in order to combat policy dismantling. This strategy was important since it fostered closer ties between civil society and the legislative branch. In line with the Cisterns Program, members of the ASA and lawmakers who are open to the proposal underlying the Cisterns Program launched in 2019 the Parliamentary Front for the Defense of Coexisting with the Semi-Arid (ANDRADE, 2020; ANDRADE and CALMON, 2021). While facing budget cuts, this Front effectively secured parliamentary amendments for building cisterns.

Civil society continued its actions within the legislative branch to oppose Bill 5,695 of 2019, which, as described in the previous section, sought to make changes to

the PNAE. A letter coordinated by the FBSSAN and signed by various organizations raised awareness among lawmakers and stopped the proposal from moving forward (FBSSAN et al., 2019).

The pandemic has drastically raised the number of Brazilians experiencing food insecurity and hunger to alarming levels (FAO, 2021; GALINDO et al., 2021; REDE PENSSAN, 2021). One of the resilience initiatives, prompted by pressure from civil society and politicians, was the approval of additional funds for the PAA (Provisional Presidential Decree No 957 of 2020). However, as noted by Niederle et al. (2021), these resources did not signify a government endorsement of the policy, as there was no shift in its rhetoric and no indication of an intention to sustain the implementation of the agenda.

In 2010, Constitutional Amendment Nº 64 was passed, establishing food as a social right. With the rise in hunger and policy retrenchment, the judiciary also became a target of organized civil society's influence. National movements like the FBSSAN and the People's Conference, with the support of the Federal Public Defender's Office, sought to involve the judiciary in upholding constitutional rights. The People's Tribunal on Hunger submitted a report to the Federal Supreme Court, while simultaneously, the Workers' Party and the Brazilian Bar Association filed Claim of Non-Compliance with a Fundamental Precept (ADPFs) Nº 831 and Nº 885 in the Federal Supreme Court (CPSSAN, 2021; FBSSAN, 2022).

Another resilience strategy involved a combination of non-institutional action within a regional level. These initiatives aimed to inform the public about the impacts on general well-being resulting from the dismantling of established programs in the field of food and nutritional security. Moreover, these actions also carried a political tone, standing against the Bolsonaro administration and voicing criticism of its management of the pandemic and the country's socioeconomic crisis. Organized civil society and other actors managed to 'implement' the instruments of programs that were being dismantled. Examples of these actions are not confined to a particular program but encompass initiatives such as the barbecue in front of the Golden Bull in São Paulo (MELITO, 2021), substantial donations by the Landless Movement (MST) (BERGAMO, 2021), public dining protests (banquetaços) advocating for the return of

Consea (DIAS, 2019), proliferation of community restaurants (ARAÚJO, 2020a), among others. Even though these were isolated actions, they garnered considerable visibility.

In the case of the Cisterns Program, civil society continued to implement the program independently of federal funding, given its established trajectory. Funding from international organizations and other partners has consistently supported the implementation of cistern construction projects to some degree. During the Bolsonaro administration, particularly amid the pandemic, the ASA managed to fully implement and execute the Cisterns Program as a resilience strategy.

Milhorance et al. (2023) emphasize that civil society's action during the pandemic, with financial support from autonomous public foundations, played a crucial role in the emergency response against hunger. These initiatives by non-governmental actors implemented the purchasing mechanism of the PAA to buy goods from agroecological producers and connect farmers with individuals facing food insecurity by assembling basic food baskets.

Finally, the last strategy we identified involved non-institutional nationwide initiatives through the creation of 'parallel forums', which are new participatory spaces formed in response to the elimination or capture of previous forums. In response to shifts in the political landscape, food and nutrition security movements that were engaged in participatory institutions established the People's Conference on Food and Nutritional Security. The Conference aims to serve as a permanent platform for grassroots coordination, organized by and for civil society. Its primary goal is to foster political mobilization around discussions on food and nutrition security. According to one interviewee<sup>5</sup>, "the policy can be dismantled, but we cannot let the agenda die. The agenda continues with us" (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 05, 2021, online).

The Conference played a significant role not only in coordination and mobilization but also in organizing five regional meetings in 2021, where priorities for the mobilization were established. Each meeting had over 100 participants. Moreover, the Conference hosted the Hunger Tribunal, where President Bolsonaro was tried for crimes against the Human Right to Adequate Food, as previously discussed (CPSSAN, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Civil society organization, interview conducted on November 30, 2021.

Given the health and economic crises, as well as the attacks on school feeding within the framework of the PNAE, civil society organizations and social movements that are dedicated to the agendas of food and nutrition security and health established the School Feeding Observatory to conduct monitoring activities and raise awareness within society about the importance of the PNAE.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

This article sought to reflect on policy dynamics in the context of policy dismantling and democratic backsliding. Existing analytical categories extracted from the literature were used to describe dismantling strategies: dismantling by default, arena shifting, symbolic action, and active dismantling. Drawing on the emerging literature on policy dismantling and resilience, we developed analytical categories to describe resilience strategies in response to dismantling: new policy implementation arrangements, diversification of governance, implementation by non-state actors, and parallel forums.

We can see that the three programs analyzed in this study are in various stages of dismantlement. Although all have the same level of institutionalization, as they are all supported by Constitutional Amendment Nº 64 and have their own laws, the intensity of dismantlement varied. The PNAE experienced the fewest changes. While bills of law pose threats to the program's objectives and adjustments to the prices for school meals await approval, the most notable change we identified in the program is the mandate to prioritize sourcing food from family farmers. Although the PNAE has been legally mandated to acquire these products since 2009, enforcement of this requirement was inconsistent even before dismantling, and its implementation varied depending on factors such as the organization of family farmers in the region, interactions between the government and local civil society, as well as normative and procedural aspects (VALARADES et al., 2022).

The PNAE operates under a decentralized arrangement with the main emphasis placed on the federative entities. Resource distribution, although overseen by the federal government, is managed by the FNDE, a federal agency tasked with managing the fund. This entity sets clear criteria for distributing funds to municipal and state bodies responsible for implementation (VALADARES, 2022). The

political and financial autonomy of the federative entities helps to strengthen the programs' resilience, serving as veto points against their dismantlement (MELLO, 2023; MILHORANCE et al., 2023). In addition to the resilience offered by the structure of transfers via federative pact, the process tracing method revealed that political actors linked to the subsystems of food and nutritional security and health mobilized to create the School Meals Observatory at the national level. The aim is to defend the PNAE and ensure its monitoring and social control. The School Meals Observatory attracted participation from actors in both established and non-hegemonic subsystems.

During the pandemic, the PAA gained traction as urban and rural organized civil society, alongside parliamentary action, advocated for using the program as a tool to alleviate hunger. Funding was secured during the pandemic, and civil society implemented the instrument to connect food producers with those in need. However, both the Bolsa Família Program and the PAA were terminated. The Alimenta Brasil Program, created as a replacement, not only changed the objectives of the previous program but also symbolically altered its name to align with the Bolsonaro government's agenda around national symbols.

The Cisterns Program, on the other hand, was not replaced and remained inactive. However, efforts to build cisterns and promote agroecological production persisted. We mapped out the significant mobilization of civil society in the Northeast region to devise resilience strategies for the program. As a result, organizations within the ASA not only pursued alternative funding sources but also utilized the PAA to address hunger. Additionally, they carried out campaigns to encourage municipalities and local authorities to purchase agroecological food from family farmers for the PNAE.

Both the PAA and the Cisterns Program were pivotal and emblematic initiatives of the Workers' Party administrations (ANDRADE and CALMON, 2021; GRISA, 2012; NIEDERLE et al., 2021), championed by non-hegemonic actors from subsystems. The beneficiaries of these programs have emerged as a crucial support base and a source of resilience against policy dismantling, mobilizing actors associated with alternative agriculture and actors from the Northeast region of Brazil. However, during the Bolsonaro administration, the PAA was replaced, and the Cisterns Program experienced a pause at the federal level. Yet, political mobilization and

program implementation through other channels continued on a smaller scale. Future research should delve deeper into the contrast between the dismantling and resilience of these two programs.

The food and nutrition security policy was developed with extensive social participation and successfully preserved its original features as its programs became institutionalized and strengthened. Comparing programs with similar formal institutional structures but distinct characteristics can provide valuable insights into processes of policy dismantling, democratic backsliding, and policy resilience. This study's first contribution lies in unveiling the resilience provided by decentralization through the federative pact and the allocation of resources via a relatively autonomous fund, as exemplified by the PNAE.

The study's second contribution highlighted that the dismantling by the federal government was more extensive and definitive in programs where civil society plays a significant role throughout the policy process and where the involved subsystems are comprised of non-hegemonic actors, such as those associated with family farming and agroecology (MOTTA, 2016). This occurred through the dissolution of councils and spaces for dialogue between the state and civil society, the criminalization of social movements, sharp budget cuts, and active dismantling. It is important to note that despite attempts at dismantling, the PNAE was not replaced, unlike the PAA, nor did it experience a halt, as was the case with the Cisterns Program. In addition to not having been created by the Worker's Party administrations, the PNAE is not implemented by civil society, nor does it involve family farming or rural movements that question the model of agricultural production in Brazil. Therefore, the dismantling during a period of democratic backsliding is political in nature. And, has affected policies whose processes stray from conventional methods.

Moreover, the absence of a policy design aligned with the federative pact has not reduced the resilience of the programs. Policies implemented with civil society participation at every stage have effectively mobilized resources and implemented programs, even without the federal government's participation. This shows a modality of resilience that emerges from the pattern of social relationships (MILHORANCE et al., 2023; SABOURIN, CRAVIOTTI, and MILHORANCE, 2020).

The study's third contribution highlighted the importance of explaining the current outcome through both the dismantling and its strategies, as well as through resilience and its strategies. Therefore, we propose analytical categories to classify resilience strategies and the factors that influence the resilience process. We found that actors sought alternative arenas (whether institutional or informal, at national or regional levels), other branches beyond the executive, and restructured existing policy networks, mainly through civil society participation. The actors were involved in multiple fronts simultaneously. In the Northeast region, these fronts converged, allowing us to map the integration between resilience strategies for the PNAE, PAA, and Cisterns Program (MILHORANCE et al., 2023).

In our analysis of the strategies, we also noticed the civil society's capacity to establish informal institutional frameworks during the dismantling process, ensuring continuous social control of the agenda. The actors were able to establish parallel forums for monitoring, social control, and knowledge production. A key and shared aspect of resilience across all three programs was the use of pro-democracy instruments and discourses. The actors asserted that social participation in the policy formulation process is not only vital for the programs' effective operation but also for the overall health of democracy in the country.

Finally, the primary factor distinguishing between the programs was the effectiveness of their resilience strategies. The PNAE succeeded in mobilizing actors and sparking a national movement in its defense, garnering broader support compared to the other programs. Groups not directly associated with food and nutritional security acknowledge and support the significance of school feeding. Moreover, unlike the other two programs analyzed, the PNAE did not encounter ideological opposition.

Because of its regional focus, the Cisterns Program was able to mobilize support from its bases in the territory. The territorial logic facilitated a more effective integration of resilience strategies for the PAA and PNAE in the Northeast region, drawing from the experience with the Cisterns Program (MELLO, 2023).

Future studies should delve deeper into the dynamics at the subnational level during this period. States, municipalities, and especially civil society are more deeply engaged with the territory and have greater political independence from the directives set by the central government. To better understand how resilience responds to dismantling, it is crucial to conduct a systematic mapping of these actors' actions,

emphasizing a territorial perspective that highlights both similarities and differences nationwide.

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ALIMENTAR E NUTRICIONAL DO ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO; CONSELHO MUNICIPAL DE SEGURANÇA ALIMENTAR E NUTRICIONAL DE SÃO PAULO; CONSELHO MUNICIPAL DE SEGURANÇA ALIMENTAR E NUTRICIONAL DE SANTA CATARINA; CONSELHO DE REPRESENTANTES DE CONSELHO DE ESCOLA (CRECE); ARTICULAÇÃO EM REDE PIAUIENSE DE AGROECOLOGIA; ASSOCIAÇÃO DOS COLONOS ECOLOGISTAS DA REGIÃO DE TORRES; ASSOCIAÇÃO PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DA AGROECOLOGIA: ASSOCIAÇÃO **ESTADUAL** PREVENÇÃO E TRATAMENTO DA OBESIDADE DO PIAUÍ; ASSOCIAÇÃO DE SAÚDE DA PERIFERIA (MARANHÃO); ASSOCIAÇÃO DE PESSOAS COM DOENÇA FALCIFORME DO PARANÁ; ASSOCIAÇÃO BENEFICENTE CULTURAL AFRICANA TEMPLO DE YEMANJA; ASSOCIAÇÃO ESTADUAL DE PREVENÇÃO E TRATAMENTO DA OBESIDADE DO PIAUÍ; ASSOCIAÇÃO SOLIDÁRIA DOM LUCIANO MENDES; ASSOCIAÇÃO MANIVA DE CERTIFICAÇÃO PARTICIPATIVA (AM); ASSOCIAÇÃO PROJETOS INTEGRADOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL DE SÃO PAULO: BANQUETAÇO; COALIZÃO NEGRA POR DIREITOS NÚCLEO SÃO PAULO; CENTRO ECOLÓGICO; CENTRAL DE ASSOCIAÇÕES DE PRODUTORES ORGÂNICOS SUL DE MINAS; COLETIVO DE SEGURANÇA ALIMENTAR E NUTRICIONAL SUSTENTÁVEL DE LAVRAS (MG); CENTRO DE APOIO E PROMOÇÃO DA AGROECOLOGIA; CENTRO DE TECNOLOGIAS ALTERNATIVAS DA ZONA DA MATA; CENTRO DE REFERÊNCIA EM SOBERANIA E SEGURANÇA ALIMENTAR E NUTRICIONAL/UFRRI E UFF; COMISSÃO MUNICIPAL DE AGROECOLOGIA E PRODUÇÃO ORGÂNICA DE TERESINA (PI); COOPERATIVA DE PRODUÇÃO AGROPECUÁRIA VITÓRIA; COOPERATIVA DOS CONSUMIDORES DE PRODUTOS ECOLÓGICOS DE TORRES; COOPERATIVA DOS BENEFICIADORES DE ARROZ DO POVOADO IPIRANGA; COOPERATIVA DOS AGRICULTORES AGROFLORESTAIS DE BARRA DO TURVO. 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