

The G20s fight against hunger and poverty: an ambitious promise or just wishful thinking?

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Executive Summary

The G20 summit in Brazil heralds the long awaited official launch of the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, the ultimate mechanism facilitating the gathering of resources, knowledge and funds to fight the hunger and poverty that persists across the world. The summit, hosted in Rio de Janeiro is a pivotal opportunity for Brazilian president Lula da Silva to showcase his Alliance which has been worked on diligently for the past year. If successful, this Alliance will play a significant role in working towards achieving the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2, focusing on poverty eradication and an end to global hunger.

Why hunger and poverty?

Brazil made clear their goals for their G20 presidency, declaring a precise three-point

agenda in combating hunger, poverty and inequality, and the establishment of Lula's Global Alliance is perhaps more important now than ever before. The world is strife with conflict and humanitarian crises at an unprecedented scale. The wars that persist in the likes of Palestine, Ukraine and Sudan have left millions of people in states of immeasurable suffering and impoverishment, yet the international community have not done enough to end this hardship. They have turned a blind eye to civil society's resistance and protests that continue to take place across the world, calling for an end to the conflicts that have devastated the lives of so many.

Nonetheless, Lula's agenda is unique in G20 terms: although successive summits have paid lip service to questions of hunger and poverty, Lula is arguably one of few global leaders—perhaps even since [the New Labour governments in the UK](#) in the pre-global crisis era of the mid-2000s—to

have sought explicitly to build a G-summit agenda around the issue. Indeed, he is also arguably—given his own political trajectory—one of few leaders in office today to have the requisite moral authority and reservoirs of political capital to both make such a case convincingly and catalyse meaningful action.

Meeting the SDGs established in 2015, urging the global community to work together to adopt '[peace and prosperity for people and the planet](#)', seems to be an insurmountable task. A [third](#) of such goals have made no progress or in some cases regressed, notably with the deterioration of food security. Thus, the need for a Global Alliance reminds governments of their commitments to SDGs 1 and 2. The former being the eradication of poverty in all forms, wherein achieving this would bring more than 300 million people, who survive on [less than \\$2.15 a day](#), out of such hardship. Furthermore if the poverty threshold of \$2.15 is raised to the minimum acceptable standard of living at \$3.70 then the incidence of poverty will increase three fold. Similarly, SDG 2 promises to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030, but the slow progress so far demonstrates that without critical action taken from today, this goal is unachievable.

A dire picture

Recent statistics highlight the harrowing situation our planet is facing, a position that

has only been further exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic which burdened us with a [3 year loss](#) in the relentless battle against hunger and poverty and has worsened the desperate conditions that millions of people are facing today. According to a UN report published in 2022, it is estimated that nearly [924 million](#) people faced severe levels of food insecurity in 2021, an increase of [207 million](#) from 2019, namely due to the supply chain disruptions and the significant increase in food prices caused by increased consumer demand. It is therefore imperative that the Alliance works with experts and directs funds to better prepare for future outbreaks in order to prevent the recurrence of such a catastrophic rise in hunger. The Alliance already has members who will be well versed on pandemics like the World Health Organisation (WHO) who have established institutions in place, such as the [International Coordinating Group on Vaccine Provision](#) which will be essential for many developing countries by coordinating the provision on vaccines and antibiotics.

Projections confirm a lack of faith in SDG 2 being achieved, with a predicted figure of [582 million people](#) who will be undernourished at the end of the decade, an outcome starkly different to the optimism of SDG 2 in eradicating hunger. Africa remains the region with the largest hungry population at a staggering [300](#)

[million people](#) with Latin America coming second with over 40 million people suffering from hunger, with an obvious prevalence of this deprivation in and around Brazil. The participation of the likes of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will be essential in the Alliance's success as they can provide insight into what policies and programmes will be most effective to eradicate hunger in these areas.

Nonetheless, the situation of extreme poverty that around [9%](#) of our world's population faces is a disgrace to global governance, and shows the international community's inability to fulfil their duty to alleviate the burden of poverty for the people they represent. This responsibility sits with the powerful states, banks and actors who will form the foundation of the Alliance. The lack of results by the previous global governance begs the question of whether or not this Alliance will be any more successful, or is it in fact too ambitious. Lula recognises the monumental task that lies ahead and emphasises that it is inexcusable that such levels of impoverishment persists, stating 'it is up to those of us gathered around this table to take on the urgent task of ending this scourge that shames humanity'.

What went wrong?

Progress in achieving SDGs 1 and 2 has been slow and is yet to yield profits. The main drivers behind this can be attributed without doubt to the war that persists in Ukraine with the two biggest global producers of [staple cereals, oil seeds and fertiliser](#) being disrupted and causing unprecedented repercussions for the countries that rely on them. Furthermore the catastrophic climate crisis and the frequent occurrence of extreme weather conditions has had [sobering implications on global food security and nutrition](#), especially in low-income countries. Extreme weather conditions increase displacement and in doing so cut communities off from their reliable sources of food and their ability to grow crops. This process of adapting to the new environments and then being displaced once again by the destructive weather phenomena is relentless. Madagascar, for example, is one of the most disaster prone and food-insecure countries in Africa wherein [2 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance](#), worsened by the tendency of tropical cyclones. Furthermore the effects of climate change in Brazil will have devastating consequences for the global food supply chain. By 2050, Brazil may reach temperatures [2.81°C higher](#) than pre industrial levels. Considering that Brazil is one of the world's '[breadbaskets](#)', providing the essential nutrients of our daily diets found in rice, wheat, corn and soy, it

will be an undeniable challenge to meet the world's food supply without effective global efforts to combat the consequences of climate change.

Lula's symbolic G20 Social, which brought together voices of civil society and the most marginalised communities, included the presence of social groups most affected by climate change. Representatives from Indigenous communities and youth groups, emphasise the necessity of the Alliance to focus on climate change. Food security is deeply threatened by climate change and it is imperative that this Alliance works to create a more [sustainable and resilient food](#) system. It is the most impoverished of society that are disproportionately affected by climate change, with severe weather phenomena destroying the limited resources that are available to them and forcing displacement on an unprecedented scale. Nonetheless, food security and nutrition has not been prioritised by international donors. In fact, other aid sectors have benefited from finance from donors with an [increase of 4%](#) compared to only 2% for food security and nutrition during the period between 2017 and 2021, demonstrating a lack of desire to combat perhaps the most significant crisis our planet has faced. It is through multilateral cooperation and the sharing of expertise that the Alliance promises, that those affected by climate change can be supported and not neglected. SDGs 1 and

2 are truly unattainable without a sustained effort to combat climate change.

As the 2024 [State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#) report highlights, 'the lack of consensus about what should be financed and the different objectives among stakeholders have led to a proliferation of actors that often step outside their mandates instead of collaborating among them'. This demonstrates the fundamental need for a body to organise and direct funds to where they are needed most, with collaboration and communication between members being of utmost significance. The inclusion of International Financial Institutions (IFI) in the Alliance will provide the knowledge and funds that are to be directed to the places that are in desperate need.

Why is Brazil up for the task?

It may be debated why Brazil is the most appropriate country to lead this fight against hunger and poverty considering nearly [30%](#) of the population lived in poverty in 2021 and a staggering [8.1%](#) of the population continue to live in the notorious Brazilian favelas, however evidence has shown that no other country has yet to be fit for the challenge. In fact, Brazil is perhaps the most equipped for the task considering the success of their various programmes that have reduced poverty and inequality. Lula has tackled hunger in Brazil since his first term in 2003.

Having been born into a poor family himself, he knows '[what it means for a child to go to sleep without anything to eat](#)' and he has put these social policies aimed at eradicating hunger at the top of his agenda.

The Programa Bolsa Familia (PBF) has helped to halve poverty and has fundamentally changed the lives of millions of Brazilian people due to its successful conditional programme. Escaping poverty is more than just having the financial means to support yourself and your family but it is having the access to resources, healthcare and employment opportunities, and the PBF ensures that those who access this funding comply with certain obligations. When in a position of extreme food precarity people tend to cut down on essential needs like education and healthcare in order to survive. Lula acknowledges this, remarking that women, men, and children rights to life, education, development, and food are violated daily by the prevalence of hunger and poverty.

The PBF provides a fixed monthly payment to those in need in exchange for families fulfilling core responsibilities like sending their children to school or receiving health check ups and immunisations. It is this investment in human capital that has helped to break the '[poverty cycle](#)' that has plagued Brazil for many years. PBF reaches millions of families each year and international faith in this scheme can be seen by the [\\$572 million loan](#) that the World Bank gave to the programme at its

inception. This programme is evidence of real tangible successes by Lula in ameliorating the lives of so many Brazilians and one would hope that the success this programme has had in reducing poverty and inequality will be reflected in the new Alliance albeit on a much grander international scale.

Further evidence of Brazil's successes can be seen by the [40 million students](#) who benefit from the Brazilian National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) which has helped promote adequate and healthy eating as well as psychosocial development for all students enrolled in public schools in the country. Lula da Silva takes pride in the success in reducing poverty in Brazil but [he advocates that](#) countries must unite to eradicate hunger in the world arguing that 'hunger and poverty are a phenomenon of human behaviour' [and also that](#) 'as long as there are families without food on the table, children in the streets and young people without hope, there will be no peace. A just world is a world in which people have unimpeded access to food, health, housing, education and decent jobs'.

It must be said that, regardless of the success of Lula's policies, the level of deprivation and poverty that remains in Brazil puts into question whether or not Lula's Alliance will be successful on an infinitely greater, global scale. Lula emphasises this duplicity of wealth and poverty on the streets of Rio in his speech

launching the Alliance stating ‘on one side is nature’s exuberant beauty under the open arms of Christ the Redeemer. A diverse, vibrant, creative, and welcoming people. On the other, profound social injustices. A living portrait of persistent historical inequalities’. Nonetheless, Lula’s domestic policies are promising but in an Alliance with 81 countries as well as 31 other members and counting, it will be a challenge to get all parties on board and collaborating to the extent that is required to replicate PBF on an international scale.

How will the Alliance function?

The role of Lula’s Alliance is to facilitate collaboration and partnership on an international level. These partnerships will work to mobilise financial resources and expert knowledge that countries in need can access to help establish domestic policies and programs to achieve SDGs 1 and 2. In other words, the Alliance works as a mediator between different countries, NGOs and various other organisations, including international banks, so that their expertise can be shared and their funds directed to those that are suffering the most.

Members that wish to join the Alliance must submit their own Statements of Commitment to the Alliance’s Support Mechanism (staff), outlining ‘a robust declaration of intent’. The Alliance structures itself around three fundamental pillars; National, Financial and Knowledge

and members can choose to align themselves with whichever pillar(s) they feel they can contribute to the most. By submitting a Statement of Commitment the member acknowledges the mission, objectives and principles of the Alliance in working to meet SDGs 1 and 2. It must be noted that the pledges made are not legally binding but rather demonstrate a strong desire and willingness on part of members to collaborate in order to bring an end to poverty and hunger.

These commitments recognise the need for large-scale, integrated approaches to helping impoverished populations including interventions to reduce poverty, increase food security and nutrition, develop health, education and employment services and facilitate farmers and smallholders’ access to financial support. The goal of the Alliance is to use international expertise and knowledge to help implement programmes at the national level.

The foundational documents established at the inception of the Alliance provided a reference basket that members have contributed to with, in many cases tried and tested, policies and programmes that will serve as suggestions that the countries in most need can benefit from. This basket is fluid and will be adapted and added to as more members join the Alliance and collaborate. It is important, however, that like many empty promises that are made at global conventions, such as the ambitious SDGs, that are more than likely to not be

met by 2030, it is imperative that these countries implement these strategies rather than just suggest them. One question that cannot be avoided when evaluating such an ambitious policy is how will the members be held accountable for their pledges as after all the Statements of Commitment are fluid and can adapt with time. Nonetheless this Alliance's guiding principles relies on partnership and cooperation. It is through this exchange of knowledge and expertise that national governments will gain the tools to implement policies and programmes that will alleviate the burden of poverty and hunger that so many millions suffer with as after all, actions speak louder than words.

In order for this Alliance to be successful there must be open participation and effective cooperation between members. It is beneficial that the countries with the resources and funding provide adequate support to the countries most in need but perhaps more importantly, the voices of these countries must be amplified especially when considering the amount of members that are involved. It is imperative that this Alliance does not replicate the elitism of the G20 where often only a few countries lead the conversations. This Alliance needs to function at a level where all members are willing to share and collaborate as hunger and poverty cannot be solved without unity.

As stated, the G20 has often been criticised as being purely discursive and lacking impact on the ground level, helping those most in need. In order to escape this perception of an elitist G20 that does not function for the benefit of the people, this Alliance must focus on practical actions and interaction with those who will profit the most. Lula's presidency of the G20 welcomed the first formal engagement with society with the G20 Social, demonstrating a desire to work with the people to address their concerns and grievances with the current state of global governance. The goal of the G20 Social was to involve civil society in decision making processes and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. It is the likes of the Indigenous communities, the population living in Favelas and the Brazilian youth that are perhaps the most effective non stakeholder members of the G20, they are the people that know what policies and programmes will benefit them the most.

The G20 social shows that it is time for decision making to not exclusively work from the top down but involve the people and work upwards and the success of the G20 Social collaboration is seen by South Africa, the next G20 host's desire to replicate the G20 Social during their presidency. The declaration by the G20 Social emphasises the need to ['strengthen the international community'](#) in order to address the challenges that social inequalities, geopolitical crises and climate

change poses. It is particularly important that the voices of these marginalised groups are amplified especially when considering that the prevalence of food insecurity remains higher for women. This disparity is prevalent in the Global South wherein Latin America suffers with the largest gender gap for moderate or severe food insecurity in the world where [30.3%](#) of women were food insecure compared to 25.1% of men.

Who is on board?

It is important to note that this Alliance will be open to all interested parties, not just G20 members, highlighting a further move away from the exclusivity of the G20 and their permanent members. After all, this Alliance aims to be an action-oriented coalition working collectively to attain SDGs 1 and 2. How the Alliance plans on fulfilling its duties relies on sustained political momentum and collective action. This need for global collaboration is seen by the Alliance's desire for a range of national governments, international organisations, development banks, knowledge centres and philanthropies to sign its Declaration of Commitment. Confidence in this Alliance is clear with 81 countries having joined by the official launch at the G20 summit.

The international organisations that have committed to ending world hunger and poverty provide expertise ranging from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the new African Union Development Agency (AUDA) alongside 23 other organisations. The myriad of organisations and their distinct knowledge areas will be key in providing the most relevant and effective policy recommendations for countries to adopt at a national level. Poverty and hunger is affected by many conditions whether that be due to climate change, political policies, civil war and affects men, women and children, particularly in marginalised communities and lower-income countries. It is therefore crucial that these institutions and organisations that have worked on these issues and with these people are willing to work collaboratively as their expertise is fundamental to creating sustainable and effective programmes and policies that are successfully implemented.

In order to direct funds towards those most vulnerable there are numerous international financial institutions that have pledged to play their role in achieving SDGs 1 and 2 such as the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF) and the New Development Bank (NDB). The Alliance seeks to create meaningful, well-defined policy that is implementable by governments and is evidence-based. The involvement of a range of philanthropic foundations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have joined this global effort shows that global hunger cannot be solved without

the expertise of people from a range of disciplines. Unlike other policies that are established without the input of the people it is affecting, the Alliance plans to reach out directly to those experiencing poverty and hunger, employing the expert knowledge of the global community to channel financial support where it is most needed.

What next?

This optimistic launch of the Alliance is marked by the obligatory group picture, with representatives of the 81 countries smiling together hand in hand, perhaps unaware of the monumental task that faces them. The success of this Alliance depends on the willingness of the members to collaborate, perhaps a challenging task as many internal conflicts exist within the UN alone, so only time will tell if these countries and organisations are prepared to put their differences aside and work together for a common cause. Lula highlights the need

for global unity, [stating that](#) 'the fight against inequality, the fight against hunger, against poverty, is a battle that cannot be won by a country alone. It has to be won by all the countries that are willing to assume this historic responsibility'. Above all, countries must prioritise the eradication of hunger and poverty and it must not be sidelined especially by the Western powers that do not suffer to the extent that other countries, particularly in the Global South do. It is imperative that the members of this Alliance work together and collaborate to support the most vulnerable. Lula epitomises this stating 'The Alliance was born in the G20, but its destiny is global'.

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