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## **Repoliticising and scaling-up ethical consumption: lessons from public procurement for school meals in Brazil**

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## **Repoliticising and scaling-up ethical consumption: lessons from public procurement for school meals in Brazil**

### **Abstract**

*Ethical consumption is a vibrant field of research but suffers from both empirical and conceptual biases. Empirically, too much of the data is gathered in the global North, often framing a false binary in which consumption spaces are located in the global North while production takes place in the global South. Conceptually, there is a growing demand for researchers to move away from an emphasis on the individual consumer and instead focus on collective agency and structural change. This paper offers contributions to both of these frontiers of research. It reports on data on ethical consumption and public procurement, collected through the first ever large scale representative survey on procurement criteria and 16 focus groups in Brazil. It concretises these debates by focusing specifically on the pioneering Brazilian school meals policy which supports both “family farms” and organic modes of production at a massive scale, in providing meals to 43 million Brazilian children. Lessons learnt from the study include, firstly, the potential for successfully scaling up ethical consumption through public procurement; secondly, the way in which such scaling-up forces the public debate to engage with food production and consumption at a systemic level; and thirdly, how the systems-level debate leads to a repoliticisation of the discussion of the cultural, social, economic and environmental role of food and farming. The focus group discussions showed a high degree of support for the school meals policy, including from affluent citizens whose children would not benefit from the scheme. Surveys also showed strong support from Brazilian citizens for using environmental and social criteria in public procurement.*

Key words:

Ethical consumption, sustainable public procurement, Brazil, food systems, school meals, scaling-up

## 1) **Introduction**

For too long, ethical consumption research has perpetuated a binary division, in which producer-related research is conducted in the global South and consumer-related research is conducted in the global North. Cotte and Trudel's review (2009) claimed that 90% of studies in the area of ethical consumption relate to North American or European consumers, and ethical consumption research published in English is characterised by an overrepresentation of the US and UK. Thus this special issue is a welcome departure from the common trend, highlighting instead consumption contexts in the global South.

This paper contributes to the debate by addressing two research frontiers in ethical consumption research. Firstly, by focusing on data from Brazil, it adds to the growing body of literature which addresses ethical consumption in the global South, in this case from a large middle-income country with high social inequality. Secondly, it supports calls in ethical consumption literature to move away from a focus on isolated consumption decisions by individuals to also examine mechanisms of collective and scaled-up decision-making. Such mechanisms, we argue, may hold powerful potential for more structural change. We examine sustainable public procurement and in particular the Brazilian school meals sourcing policy, as an example of such scaled-up decision-making. With, to our knowledge, the first large-scale representative survey and in-depth focus group research we examine the public's view on "ethical" criteria in public procurement. .

[Our project] brought together academic researchers from Brazil, Chile and the UK, as well as three ethical consumption NGOs from the respective countries<sup>1</sup>. It is worth noting the differences in language which existed among the project partner countries: While “ethical consumption” is a term familiar in UK academic discourse, our NGO colleagues in Chile spoke about *consumo responsable* - responsible consumption, while our Brazilian NGO partner preferred the phrase *consumo consciente* - conscious consumption. For the purpose of our academic project we agreed to make our terminology in English publications compatible with the “ethical consumption” literature. The international team jointly agreed a definition of “ethical consumption” (or its international translations) as: “consumption which takes into account aspects which go beyond economic price, such as social, environmental and wellbeing criteria. At the purchasing moment, “ethical consumption” attempts to take into account, based on available information, one or more of the following: a) the provenance of the good or service and b) the consequences of buying a good or service. We also include reduced consumption and non-consumption as a potential form of ethical consumption.”

In this paper, we focus on the findings from Brazil, a country which has experienced economic growth and prosperity over the last decade, with a greater percentage of the population going to university and pursuing what might be considered middle class careers. Official documents from the Brazilian government (Grosner et al., 2012) claim that in the last decade the Brazilian “middle class” expanded from 70 million to more than 100 million Brazilians<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the rise in disposable income for the population, inequality in Brazil remains high, with a Gini index of 0.55 (World Bank 2013a). Alongside the expansion of domestic consumption sit fears about how much of this consumption is based on credit and concerns that the new mass

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1 [Footnote listing project partners- omitted for blind review]

<sup>2</sup> According to government classifications, those who have a monthly per capita family income between R\$ 291 and R\$ 1,090 belong to the middle class [£1 approx. R\$3.78]. According to this classification, 28% of the Brazilian population belongs to the lower class, 52% to the middle class and 20% to the upper class (Grosner et al. 2012).

consumers are a particularly materialistic and status-focused group unlikely to make “ethical” shopping decisions.

Brazil, with a GDP of 2.25 trillion USD (World Bank 2013b), is now the seventh largest economy in the world with a population of 199 million (World Bank 2013b) and a large domestic market. Successive centre-left governments have presided over state spending which accounts for 39% of GDP in Brazil (IEF 2013).<sup>3</sup>

The project asked citizens in Brazil and Chile about their views on their own individual consumption, as well as on public procurement, or the processes by which the state makes buying decisions for goods and services in the name of all citizens, using taxpayers’ money. This allowed us, in 32 focus groups and in representative surveys in each country, to explore and compare individual and collective consumption. In this paper we present findings from Brazil, focussing particularly on public procurement, and here in particular on the specific example of the new Brazilian school meals law of 2009. This policy decreed that 30% of produce for school meals should be procured from family farms through a separate bidding process (Ministério da Educação, 2009) allowing a 30% price supplement for organic produce. It is also a fascinating example of how decades of civil society activism at both the producer and consumer end have now found their way into legislation. We explored people’s view on this new law, and in doing so enquired about the success and the challenges of this policy.

In our research we sought answers to the question of how choices on consumption made by many individuals might be successfully aggregated to guide collective choice. We were looking to identify whether any lessons might be learned from a progressive Brazilian policy which we interpreted as an expression of such collective citizen choice. If the policy were successful,

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the institutional contexts and economic history of Brazil (and Chile), please see Ariztia et al. (2014).

then the lessons to be learned from it might help in the quest for scaling-up, and potentially repoliticising, ethical consumption in other countries.

As researchers we inadvertently carried with us an assumption about how the Brazilian school meals policy was framed. When choosing state procurement as an expression of collective choice, we implicitly assumed that citizens saw the policy makers in charge of procurement as accountable, directly or indirectly, to the citizens as voters. As the paper will show, we found little evidence of this link in people's discourse. Instead of an understanding of a kind of voter-politician contractual politics, we instead found, in relation to public procurement and the school meals policy, a complex cultural politics of scale, intermingling with a politics of identity, expressed through food. The politics of public procurement will in each country be embedded in a specific social and political situation; however in principle key lessons should be transferable to any democratically governed country in which state representatives are asked to set the rules on buying goods and services on behalf of citizens.

Far from being apolitical, the discourses we found showed that the schools meals policy acted as a crystallization point for different visions of what food should be produced and consumed, and correspondingly, what food systems should look like. Aspects included the relationship between price and quality, the mode (organic/conventional), the scale (large/small/"family farm") and the origin (local, beyond local) of the food. The scale of the policy, requiring the sourcing of food for millions of children on a daily basis, meant that the debate had to be conducted at a systems level.

The Brazilian experience in constructing a public system of food and nutritional security has as its overarching principle the need to respect, protect, promote and provide the human right to adequate food. It does so by setting a number of guidelines: promotion of inter-sectoral policies; decentralization of actions; collaboration between different government spheres;

monitoring the food and nutrition situation to inform management policies; combination of immediate measures to ensure access to appropriate food with actions to foster autonomy and subsistence; linkage between budget and management; and support for research and capacity building (Leão and Maluf, 2012). It explicitly weaves together educational, cultural, social and economic objectives such as increasing consumption of healthy, safe and appropriate food that respects traditional diets and contributes to improved performance of students; ensuring universal school attendance; fostering involvement of national, regional and municipal authorities in food provision; providing incentives for the purchasing of food from family farmers, rural enterprises and traditional native communities; and enhancing the food and nutritional security of all school children, including the most vulnerable (Brazilian Government 2009). Thus, discussing in such a holistic way entire food systems and interpreting state buying as an expression of collective choice is a clear contrast to the ethical consumption studies focusing on the buying decisions of individual consumers.

This paper offers insights at the dual research frontiers of ethical consumption in the global South and on the issue of scaling up. The analysis of findings speaks to key aspects such as scaling-up, systems thinking and re-politicisation in ethical consumption. After a literature review and explanation of the methodology, the paper will present a brief overview of the survey findings related to ethical consumption and state procurement in Brazil before moving to the specific example of the Brazilian school meals policy, focus group participants' views on the policy, and our discussion of the findings.

## 2) Literature Review

### 2.1. Ethical consumption and the need for scaling up

Contemporary trends towards a politicization of consumption have brought up many issues of justice and responsibility. As noted by Barnett et al. (Barnett et al., 2011:6) a “recurring theme of public debates about what to do about consumption is the problem of where the effective agency for changing consumption lies. Is it the responsibility of ‘everyone’, as consumers, to ‘do their bit’ and play their part’ in reducing the unjust, destructive, unsustainable consequences of consumption? Or does attention need to be focused on structural factors, such as the regulation of markets, the monitoring of production and distribution systems, or re-gearing international financial and trade regimes?”

Public, and to some extent academic discourses of ethical consumption have often focused on the individual consumer’s responsibility to, in popular campaign language, ‘vote with their wallets’ for a greener and fairer society, and much emphasis has been put on the figure of the individual ‘ethical consumer’ as the main vector of change. An “ethical consumer” might be portrayed as a person (generally seen as from the global North) “concerned with the effects that a purchasing choice has, not only on themselves, but also on the external world around them” (Harrison et al., 2005: 2). Framing ethical consumption only in these terms comes with its problems. Firstly, it reinforces the imaginary binary of the poor Southern producer versus the affluent Northern consumer. Secondly, it imposes “unreasonable burdens on socially differentiated groups of consumers” (Barnett et al., 2011:6). It suggests that somehow individuals will be willing and able to balance often conflicting ethical claims and navigate the “messy ethics” (Eden et al., 2008) involved, in the hundreds of consumption decisions they make every week. Thirdly, the premium charged for environmental and social attributes can

exclude poorer consumers from quality markers and from the discursive field of ethical consumption. Finally, by placing responsibility on the consumer rather than examining systems of provision and the powerful economic actors governing them, it might let “the real culprits off the hook” (Barnett et al., 2011:6).

Initiatives exist such as Fair Trade, which aims at guaranteeing “a better deal for Third World producers” (FLO label) who are considered ‘disadvantaged’ (Fairtrade Foundation, 2013). These are often understood as a response to economic globalisation’s adverse impact on the livelihood of producers, including small agricultural producers. Labelling initiatives such as Fairtrade (FLO certified) not only seek to signal to consumers that the commodity purchased conforms to a set of principles (including quality), it also aims at reconnecting the two spaces by assuring Northern consumers that they can make a difference in the lives of Southern producers. Research on commodity chains and value chains seeks to expose the alienating aspects of modern capitalism by showing people how locations of production, networks of distribution and acts of consumption are deeply interlinked (Barnett et al., 2011). Critics, however, have pointed out that Fairtrade itself, “embedded in a capitalist market, sees a simultaneous commodification of producers’ lives and landscapes as well as commodification of the ethics and politics of Fairtrade itself” (Wright, 2009:140). Also, merely knowing about one’s participation as a consumer in extended networks of production and distribution might not lead to practical action (Barnett et al., 2011).

Despite Fairtrade’s obvious contribution to reductions in poverty and substantial growth in the last decade, such initiatives alone, argue Wilkinson and Mascarenhas (2007), have not been able to become a real alternative for sustainable development in the South. Often, it has been pointed out, Fairtrade initiatives compromise between their ethical impulse amidst other interests including the corporate strategies and management systems of retailers and suppliers (Crewe, 2004, Hughes, 2004, Hughes, 2005), as well as the conflicting politics between and

within various NGOs (Kleine 2005; Friedberg, 2004). Its emphasis on high quality and steady supply excludes from the ethical trading circuit the poorest consumers and producers (Goodman, 2004). As noted by Barrientos and Smith (2007) mainstreaming Fairtrade has often favoured larger scale over small-scale producers. Its limits are also evident from its reliance on a model of individual consumer sovereignty fitted into a neoliberal agenda that overlooks a collective notion of responsibility (Hudson and Hudson, 2003, Goodman, 2004).

Addressing collective notions of responsibility requires the mobilisation of political power at national and international levels in support of sustainable models of development in both the global South and North (Morgan 2010). Morgan argues that a “new politics of care will help to expedite this process, especially if care is acknowledged as a public discourse for citizens and not merely as a private discourse for consumers, because ethical consumption, although an important component of sustainable development, can never be a surrogate for the actions of ecological citizens working in tandem with green states at home and abroad to mainstream sustainable development” (Morgan and Sonnino, 2007:1863).

In our work across different national discourses, we found that the Brazilian concept of “conscious consumption” was also vulnerable to the same criticism as the public “ethical consumption” discourse in the UK. It could be argued that it relies on a questionable belief in a strongly rational consumer; and the idea that responsibility lies with the individual could also be critiqued. The Brazilian Ministry of Environment contends that a “conscious consumer [...] knows their power as a transforming agent of society through their act of consumption [...] Through each act of consumption, the conscious consumer seeks a balance between conscious consumption and sustainability, maximising the positive and minimising the negative consequences of their consumption choices, not only for themselves but also for social relations, the economy and nature” (MMA, 2012 author's translation).

This celebration of the powerful consumer sounds like a modified version of the *homo economicus* model of the rational profit- or utility-maximising agent. Maximising profit/utility is replaced by “maximising the positive and minimising the negative consequences of their consumption choices, not only for themselves but also for social relations, the economy and nature”. This seems like an impossibly taxing task, even in the utopian conditions of perfect information which it would require. Eden et al. (2008) argue that the “knowledge fix” of providing individual consumers with more information, firstly does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that information around a commodity flows both ways and is re-interpreted by each individual shopper. Secondly it does not recognise that choice is impacted by income, knowledge, personal circumstances, systems of provision and social norms. Thirdly, it overplays the rational and cognitive aspect of decision-making.

In this article, we want to examine the politicization of consumption beyond individualized consumer choices. In particular we examine novel models of collective provisioning with changes in public procurement practices, a trend which is happening around the world: in the UK, the Bristol Fairtrade City campaign which involved changing the systems of collective provisioning of whole organizations, both public bodies and local businesses, is one such example (Barnett et al., 2011). Others include but are not limited to creative procurement practices for school meals in Italy, UK and Colombia (Ashe and Sonnino, 2013, Morgan and Sonnino, 2007, Sonnino, 2009).

It can be argued that “whereas ethical consumption is usually portrayed in terms of conscious consumer choice, transforming procurement policy can go so far as to withdraw choice from the consumer at the point of purchase” (Barnett et al., 2011:196). It is the Brazilian school meals policy, a change of consumption practices at institutional level at an unprecedented scale (affecting 43 million school children) which we will explore in this paper. In parallel, we will examine the role of the state in such a “scaling up” of ethical consumption and production.

## **2.2. Sustainable public procurement in Brazil**

Public procurement is the technical term for the state's purchasing of goods and services with taxpayers' money on behalf of all citizens. In democratic states, citizens have, in theory, indirect democratic control over such buying decisions in that through their vote they can elect the politicians who in turn instruct the civil servants acting as procurement officers on which criteria to use in the purchasing decision.

Even though public procurement makes up a considerable part of national economies and can strongly influence even large corporations' behaviour, citizens tend to be relatively unaware of this key mechanism for policy making. Instead, except in cases of corruption or high-profile campaigns against specific companies, routine procurement decisions rarely get discussed in public debate. Public procurement as a discourse tends to be framed and enacted in more technocratic fora and in the public administration literature.

Foresti et al. (2006) have usefully characterised two different paradigms framing different schools of thinking about public procurement. The "efficiency paradigm" focuses on increased competitiveness, cost efficiency, fast and lean systems, transparency and accountability to the public. The "public purchasing paradigm" goes further, seeking not only to make public procurement easier, faster and more transparent, but also seeing it as an instrument for industrial, social and, recently also for environmental policy.

The "efficiency paradigm" is more widely and vocally accepted internationally, but many countries also apply the "public purchasing paradigm". Examples include the United States with their Buy American and Small Business Act (Moreira & Morais, 2002), South Africa with their black economic empowerment policies (McCrudden, 2004) and, as we will see, Brazil,

with its school meals policy. At international level, the UN Environmental Programme UNEP has been driving the Marrakech process, an international policy harmonisation process to foster sustainable consumption and production, which has worked with a number of pilot countries on methodologies to implement sustainable public procurement.

In Brazil, according to the Ministry of Planning, the state consumes 15% of annual GDP in products and services, estimated at 600bn Reais (MPOG 2012). Increasingly, and in particular in the aftermath of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) in 2002, and the integration of Brazil into the Marrakech Process in 2007, Brazil has embarked on a process of adjusting its public purchasing towards more sustainability (Machado 2002). A key step was the Action Plan for Sustainable Production and Consumption (PPCS) which was launched in 2011 and linked the economic, social and environmental aspects of development (Bartholo et al. 2012). Sustainable Public Procurement is one of the action lines of this plan.

The national policy on Climate Change (Presidência da República, 2009) states that in public procurement preference should be given to processes and technologies that reduce carbon emissions and make the most efficient use of energy, water and other natural resources. Law on Public Tender 8.666/93, Instruction 1, was passed in 2010 and states that energy efficiency, reduced water consumption, use of renewable energy, waste management, biodegradability and traceability should be included in purchasing for public works (MOPG/SLTI 2010).

On the social criteria side, the creation of the National Secretariat for the Solidarity Economy in 2003 and the Programme of Affirmative Action led to an increased focus on preferred supplier status for companies who can prove that they are adopting positive action in order to include more *Afrodescendentes*, women, and people with disabilities in their workforce (Bartholo et al., 2012).

### **2.3. The Brazilian school meals policy**

A particularly pioneering policy at federal level is Law 11.947/2009 which sets out the principle that state schools should serve healthy meals. It defines healthy food as “a diet which has a variety of safe products and respects culture, tradition and nutritious eating habits”. By stipulating that 30% of ingredients for school meals have to be sourced directly from small farmers and that organic produce can be procured at a price up to 30% more expensive than conventional produce (Bartholo et al. 2012), this initiative brings together public health, social and economic development as well as environmental care.

Despite the fact that, as pointed out by Maluf (2010) a category such as ‘family farming’ is extremely generic in a country like Brazil, as it involves those that are consolidating a family agribusiness, as well as those that follow agroecological principles and the newly constructed categories of ‘traditional populations’, the law has undoubtedly opened up market opportunities for small producers. Each individual farmer can sell up to R\$20,000 a year (US\$7540), thus providing a steady income to farmers and their families.

The 2009 law was a key step in a policy process which reaches back into the 1940s when the Serviço de Alimentação de Previdência Social (SAPS – Social Security Food Service) was set up to provide food for workers’ children (Sonnino et al. 2014). In the early decades public food contracts were administered in a very centralised fashion, with standardized menus utilised nationwide and large-scale public bidding processes. A major change came in 1994, when law 8913 shifted the responsibility for organising the daily menus to municipalities. Further steps towards decentralisation followed. The Zero Hunger campaign under President Lula in the early 2000s sought to “bridge rural development and food security policies by forging new relationships between producers (small holder farmers) and consumers (schools and other public canteens such as popular restaurants) (Sonnino et al. 2014).

Funding for school food increased from around \$450 million in 2002 to \$1.9bn in 2012, and from 2006 the food agency became integrated into the innovative participatory approaches to social policy. Sonnino et al (2014) identify the emerging process of regular Conferences on National Food and Nutrition Security every four years as a case of “reflexive governance”, a process of governance informed by self- and social questioning in a multi-stakeholder policy process<sup>4</sup>. Delegates from different regions and stakeholder groups collaborate in working groups to contribute to the final conference declaration. The national conference is linked to state-level conferences and in turn with municipal conferences.

While the process is an innovative way to include the voices of different stakeholders and represents a good example of multi-level governance, it is not without its critics. Racial minorities and income-poor groups are underrepresented among the delegates, reflecting the wider problem of “eliticization of participation” (de Moura and Monteiro, 2010, Sonnino et al. 2014) in participatory processes in Brazil. Finally, it has been argued that the link between food security and rural development has led to a neglect of the urban sphere (Sonnino et al. 2014).

Decentralisation is progressing, with some suggesting that the schools themselves, rather than municipalities, should be making purchasing decisions. This could either be an empowering move; or else running the bidding processes could prove a burden for schools (Draibe 2014). Even in the decentralised system there are also practical problems with supply where farmers struggle with the logistics of meeting demand at regular intervals and at scale. Transparency is a major challenge. “Over the years PNAE [the school meals agency] has faced systemic

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the participatory processes and of the history of the school food policies, see Sonnino et al. 2014.

problems of mismanagement, embezzlement of funds, and corruption” (Draibe, 2014:249). Decentralisation is seen to have had positive effects in terms of transparency, accountability and reduction of corruption (Draibe, 2014; Valente da Silva, 2009) as well a general effectiveness (Valente da Silva, 2009). PNAE’s evaluations showed that decentralisation led to better responses to complaints, and to menus which were more appropriate to local patterns of consumption. Decentralisation made it possible to pass a resolution (Brazilian Government 2013) to limit the use of canned food in favour of fresher, perishable products. However, the practical challenges of sourcing fresh products locally in quantities that family farms can offer remain.

In their overview of sustainable procurement in Brazil, Bartholo et al. (2012) make the point that these Brazilian policies excel at making radical and progressive suggestions; but that there are weaknesses in enforcing these laws and measuring the impact that they are having. Brazilian public food procurement policies, and the reflexive governance processes framing them, represent an instance in which “ethical consumption” decisions are being made at a collective, rather than an individual level. Brazilian citizens as taxpayers fund the implementation of these policies, and more research is needed to discover whether, and for what reasons, they support these policies, and the decisions which are being taken in their name.

### **3) Methodology**

The project employed a multi-method qualitative and quantitative approach, which combined reviews of academic, policy and online literature with 16 focus groups and a nationally representative survey in Brazil. The focus groups (FG) were designed to address people’s understandings of ethical consumption as well as their views on public procurement.

### 3.1. Focus Groups

The main criteria used to recruit focus group participants in purposive sampling were gender, socioeconomic background, age and urban/rural location, in order to tap into a diversity of views. In total, 87 participants in Brazil took part in the discussions. Participants were identified using purposive sampling and recruited using snowball sampling. Given the vast size and regional diversity of Brazil, a wider regional coverage was attempted by running focus groups in northeast, centre-west, south and southeast regions. We ran more focus groups in urban areas (12) where 74% of the Brazilian population is concentrated (IBGE, 2010). In Rio de Janeiro we also included four specific groups which we believed could contribute to an alternative understanding of the topics due to their positionality: a group of organised consumer activists; members of the Rede Ecológia in Rio; a group of black activists (*Afrodescendentes*, one of the predominant, but often marginalised ethnic groups in Brazil); and a group of organic producers from rural areas. There were more groups with women (five), since due to the traditional division of labour in many Brazilian households, women are more likely to be responsible for household grocery shopping. We constructed a purposive sample which included different class backgrounds and different age groups. In order to capture the views of younger people we ran a separate focus group with teenagers.

Three team members coded twenty percent of the transcripts using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti. Emerging codes from open coding, as well as the code list were subject to researcher triangulation and agreed among researchers from the three countries. Among the codes there were some which we decided to maintain as verbatim codes in Portuguese in order to capture the nuances of meaning as introduced by the participants in their language.

### 3.2. Surveys

The surveys were conducted by our partner organisation [name] in Brazil<sup>5</sup>, who ran our question block as part of their biannual survey of ethical consumption in Brazil. This is the most authoritative survey on the subject and has run since 2000. In Brazil, between October 26 and November 21 2012, the survey was administered through interviews with 800 women and men over 16 years old, from classes A, B, C and D, from all geographic regions of Brazil, in a weighted sample<sup>6</sup>. A structured questionnaire was prepared jointly by GfK Brazil and [partner organisation], and included five questions from the [project] questions. Survey interviews lasted 45 minutes and took place face-to-face at respondents' homes<sup>7</sup>. For the survey in Brazil, the maximum margin of error is a percentage of 3 points more or less, considering a confidence interval of 95% (AKATU, 2012: 98-9).

Before going any further, it is worth pointing to the limitations of the method. Firstly, the questions might come with a high social desirability effect, especially on topics such as animal cruelty. Secondly, it is worth noting that in a survey such as this, there is no cost, especially no financial cost, associated with asking the state to buy the most ethical product possible. In reality, however, it is often the case that a criterion such as decent labour conditions would result in an increase in overall cost of procuring the goods or services. Thus, the overall percentage data is expected to be higher than it would be if both the social desirability and the “ethics for free” effect were not at work. Thus the absolute numbers ought to be treated with caution while the overall trends should be robust and comparisons between different criteria are possible.

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<sup>5</sup> More information can be obtained at [website giving access to survey methodology, omitted for blind review]

<sup>6</sup> From the following locations: Southeast: Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; South: Curitiba and Porto Alegre; Northeast: Fortaleza, Recife and Salvador; North and Midwest: Belem, Brasilia, Goiania and Manaus

<sup>7</sup> The results of the whole survey can be accessed from [partner organisation]'s report (2012)

#### 4) Survey data on citizens' views on sustainable public procurement

Our survey was, to our knowledge, the first nationally representative survey asking Brazilians which criteria they wanted the government to use when making buying decisions in their name.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE]

Figure 1: Respondents' support for criteria beyond price and quality

In Brazil there was, on the face of it and granted the aforementioned limitations of the methodology, strong support for the state to use environmental and social criteria as well as the criteria of price and quality. Support figures ranged from 51% to 89% in Brazil. The top five supported criteria were no animal cruelty (89%), energy efficiency (88%), environmentally-friendly (certified) (87%), decent labour conditions (86%) and respect for the local community (86%). Overall it was interesting to see that environment-related criteria seemed to slightly outrank social criteria.

When looking at the criteria which were less strongly supported, it is striking that while 82% of Brazilians wanted the products sourced nationally, only 52% saw it as a priority that these should come from SMEs. Overall the citizens were concerned more with the origin of the products than with the scale of the producer companies supplying the state. Apart from buying from SMEs, which was seen as the least important of the criteria, support for buying organic was, in an "ethics for free" survey exercise, one of the less frequently demanded buying criteria. Still, in this scenario 73% Brazilians wanted the state to buy organic products. This is an important result to keep in mind for when we discuss the Brazilian school meals' policy which both favoured produce from "family farms" and, for 30% of its sourcing, encouraged buying

organic. At a meta-level it is worth considering whether a government should wait until there is strong majority support for a particular criterion, or whether we in fact expect governments to take a leadership role and become early adopters of e.g. environmental criteria as a matter of good practice and to stimulate demand in the market.

Further on the survey, we asked Brazilian which role they expected the state to play. The social desirability and “ethics for free” effects can still be expected to play a role, but overall there was clear support for an active role of the state. Overall, 96% of Brazilians wanted the state to force companies to report on their social and environmental record. 93% of Brazilians agreed with the state using public procurement to support small enterprises and producers and virtually the same majority (93%) supported the idea that the state should only buy from companies with good social and environmental record.

The final question in this block was less about the outcome and more about the process of applying additional criteria in public procurement. Here a full 47% of Brazilians “strongly agreed” that citizens should be consulted on criteria. Here it may be of interest that in the partner study only 24% of Chileans “strongly agreed” with this idea of consulting citizens. Thus, while in both countries (Brazil 90%, Chile 74%) there were majorities (agreed + strongly agreed) for having citizens involved in deciding criteria for public procurement, this was far more strongly felt among the Brazilian respondents.

[INSERT Figure 2 NEAR HERE]

Figure 2: Brazilian respondents’ views on the role of the state

It is hard to know exactly the reasons for these comparative differences. It is possible to suggest that Chileans, occasionally described as “the English of Latin America”, do not express their convictions with as much passion as their Brazilian neighbours. Another approach would be to consider the relative discursive spaces in each country. In Chile, all mainstream parties support, albeit to varying degrees, the neoliberal macroeconomic consensus in a system in which the role of the state has already been shrunk significantly during the Pinochet years. In Brazil however, the state is expected to play both a developmental and regulatory role, and examples of direct democracy, for example the participatory budgeting processes pioneered in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, are common.

Having analysed the data on citizens’ views of public procurement, we will now turn to the specific case of the Brazilian school meals policy. Within sustainable public procurement, this is one of the most ambitious policies to date, in scale as well as in its (re-) imagining of food systems.

##### **5) Pioneering at scale: the Brazilian school meals policy**

In Brazil, school meals are a universal right of students enrolled in public basic education and a duty of the State, granted by the Constitution. The National School Meals Programme (Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar – PNAE) covers all state subsidised and community schools in the basic education system, from day care, kindergarten, elementary school, high school to education for young adults. With a total budget of R\$3.5 billion (US \$1.3bn) in 2014, the programme served around forty-three million students (Educação, 2014). From this total value, 30% was allocated to buy products directly from family farmers.

The programme has a long history, but its redesign, which was based on an intersectorial food and nutrition security approach, is quite recent. Brazilian public procurement policy for school meals as it stands today is deeply embedded in proposals for sustainable rural development and food and nutritional security, and it is the result of long standing demands from social movements and civil society organisations.

In the next paragraphs we summarise how the programme has evolved in Brazil, based on extensive accounts by Otsuki and Arce (2007) and Sonnino et al. (2014). Discussions over food security in Brazil started in the 1930s, with the work of social nutritionists, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), fighting against endemic hunger in the impoverished rural areas in the North East of Brazil. In 1955, some schools throughout Brazil were the pilot locations for a national food programme, which was eventually incorporated into the National Food and Nutritional Programme (PRONAN). In this first phase PRONAN failed to reach the interior regions of the north and was supplemented by the work of the Catholic Church network for children (Pastoral da Criança).

In 1976 a second phase started and was run by the National Institute of Food and Nutrition (INAN), part of the Ministry of Health. The programme was highly centralised, with the central government sending food and other school materials to warehouses for redistribution to schools. Precarious distribution systems and the choice of powdered mixtures meant that the food arriving at schools was of poor quality and rejected by school children.

Renamed as the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) in 1979 and implemented by the Foundation for Student Assistance (FAE, created in 1981 as part of the Ministry of Education), food procurement remained centralised until 1994. The decentralization of the school feeding operation (or municipalisation as it is called in Brazil) began to be pushed

forward by FAE, but municipal governments' roles in the PNAE was only recognised in 1994 (Law 9.913, 12/07/94). This came after much pressure from the National Council of State Secretaries of Education as well as from municipal governments and town councillors, who had become increasingly critical of the centralized school feeding operation of FAE and the Ministry of Education.

Decentralization and localization gained momentum during President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's period in office (1995-2003): the procurement process became streamlined in 1998 through a policy shift which meant allowing the financial resources for school meals to be automatically transferred to local governments. President Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva raised PNAE's budget considerably by linking it to the *Bolsa Família* programme and the new Zero Hunger Project (*Fome Zero*). *Bolsa Família*, originally initiated by the former Cardoso Government as *Bolsa Escola*, aimed to improve the school enrolment rate of children by transferring cash to impoverished households. Both *Bolsa Família* and *Fome Zero* were coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development (Hall, 2006). Further, there were initiatives aimed at improving the quality of the meals in order to tackle obesity and malnourishment.

Brazil's multisectoral food and nutrition security strategy (*Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional*, or SAN) developed from 2003, prioritized the expansion of school meals and brought significant changes in the programme's design and implementation. The creation of the PAA (Food Acquisition Programme), for example, developed as part of SAN to guarantee regular and sufficient access to food to those in situations of food and nutritional insecurity, was also widely used by local authorities to supplement school meals. This included the promotion of "food sovereignty", a concept which brings to the fore the political right to food, stating as a

basic principle that sufficient quantity of good-quality food is considered to be a human right that should be protected by the government (Braga, 2004; Valente, 2007; Otsuki, 2011).

Alongside the concept of food as a right, the concepts of “food culture” (*cultura alimentar*) and that of providing local food as part of familial agricultural development also emerged. Legislation approved in 2009 (Law 11.947, Resolution FNDE 38) further strengthened these commitments, by stating that at least 30% of the allocated budget should be used to procure preferably organic produce, from local, regional or national family farmers, without a need to go through tendering processes.

It is also worth mentioning the participation of civil society in governance - at many scales - via nutritional and security councils. These councils have created institutionalised spaces for dialogue with policy makers, and civil society organisations. This participation has been “promoting ‘intersectoriality’ – a more integrated perspective in public policy planning (integrating agriculture and health, and reinforcing environmentally sustainable food production), and healthy practices (strengthening the availability of healthy foods in schools and other social institutions)” (Rocha et al., 2012: 526). An example of this is the School Feeding Committee (CAE), which both conducts the fiscal inspection and decides on menus and the direction of local procurement (under FNDE’s instructions and rules) (Spinelli and Canesqui, 2002).

Data from 2010 shows that the 47.4% of local authorities who do not go through catering companies but buy direct acquire an average of 22.7% of products from family farmers. By 2012, income-rich municipalities in the South of the country were spending an average of 37% of their budget for ingredients with family farms, while in income-poor areas in the

North and Northeast, the figure was much less (23%) (IPC-IG 2013). Saraiva et al. (2013) consider part of the explanation to be the structure of supply: In the south of Brazil, family farming is more organised and is responsible for supplying the internal market, whereas some other regions are characterised by big properties with an emphasis on export crops (Saraiva et al., 2013).

## 6) **Transparency, holistic criteria-setting, systems thinking: citizen views from the Focus Groups**

In this section we are going to present which criteria participants across the 16 focus groups undertaken in Brazil considered important in public procurement, and particularly in respect to school meals (for a broader comparative perspective of our focus group data from Brazil and Chile on ethical consumption, see authors, forthcoming). In order to discuss public procurement, the participants were asked which criteria they would use if they were the mayor of their town. After they had spoken freely – and anticipating that they would say price and quality, which they did - we added, “and if price and quality were the same?” After that, we asked, “as the mayor, which criteria would you use to buy products for the school meals?”

### **6.1. Transparency**

Data from the focus group discussions revealed a strong criticism of local government buying decisions. Clearly, at the most basic level, “ethical procurement” encompasses an absence of corruption and a focus on achieving value (however defined) for money. Transparency, planned expenditure according to collective needs, and more participatory budgeting were raised by participants across all the focus groups as aspects they would like to see in public

procurement generally. However these were practices which they did not see being followed by their local authorities:

*[R]: First of all, I would make sure there is a transparent bidding process, not just choose a provider because he is my relative. And evaluate price and quality, the best cost and benefit.*

*(Middle class, urban female, Santa Catarina, Brazil)*

*[A]: Think about it collectively.*

*[Facilitator]: What do you mean?*

*[A]: Purchasing decisions should be made collectively, I think.*

*[Facilitator]: For example, if [purchases for] the school meals were decided by the community, maybe they would not buy so much fatty meat and stuff ...*

*[B2]: They do not think about who is going to eat it. As far as I am aware, they buy what is cheaper.*

*[A]: They buy a lot... I heard about a story from a town that bought too much chicken and a lot of it went off and it was lost.*

*(Young, lower middle class females, urban, Bahia, Brazil)*

Thus participants criticised lack of transparency, nepotism and clientelism in procurement decisions, an overemphasis on cheap food, and disorganised buying leading to waste. This finding needs to be triangulated with the survey data which clearly shows support for social and environmental criteria. The neat bar charts suggest clear priorities based on aggregated individual choices which can now be integrated as collective choice into the governance process. However in focus groups participants did not see a competent or trustworthy state performing a transparent and reliable procurement process at municipal or regional level.

## 6.2. Quality, health, wellbeing and regional diversity

The choice of the lowest price relative to value, as proposed by - as stated in the policy - “the most economically advantageous tender” (Morgan and Sonnino, 2007, p. 20) is a decision-making route which is followed by most governments. However respondents across all focus groups disagreed with this emphasis on the lowest price. Participants from 14 focus groups out of the 32 we conducted in Brazil and Chile, spontaneously mentioned quality as an important criterion, and were critical of government practices of buying cheap products that did not last, therefore leading to a false economy.

*[E]: I would buy the best quality; make sure the people have access to good quality products and services.*

*[M1]: In truth most mayors do not look at this...*

*[E]: They don't...*

*(Lower middle class, rural youth, Bahia)*

*[T]: [...] First of all, you have to make sure you buy quality products, be they perishable or industrialized products or grains. I think quality comes first, but the way the purchases are made, they try to buy the cheapest and not the better. But tendering processes are sometimes so badly designed that they end up with the worst product, and not always the cheapest.*

*(Urban, middle class female, Brasília)*

*[P]: First of all, quality, look for organic produce as well as hygiene standards.*

*(Rural, lower middle class, male, Santa Catarina)*

*[L]: [...] I think that on the issue of price when buying organic produce for school meals, you cannot compare the organic with non-organic.*

*[C]: Yes but there is a budget, and it would not be possible to buy organic at a large scale. You remember the Jamie Oliver programme and the trouble he had trying to cook on a budget?*

*[L]: What I wanted to say is that you cannot only use the price as the only factor...*

*(Urban, middle class, female, Santa Catarina)*

The strong support for quality as a basic right is somewhat surprising, especially if we take into consideration that this support for good quality food for school children also came from ‘traditional’ middle class participants whose children are not beneficiaries of the programme. The children of Brazil’s ‘old’ middle class tend to attend private schools (with approximately 10 million students in 36,800 schools (FENEP (Vargas, 2005)/FGV 2005)) and these schools are not part of the school meals programme. Note in the last quote how concerns over the budget were not only linked to examples taken from the Brazilian reality, but also related to the campaign launched by the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver in the UK, whose programmes have appeared on Brazilian television.

It is worth considering whether framing public procurement for school meals alongside individual buying decisions for the household leads to more emphasis on health and wellbeing, and thus on quality, in the minds of respondents. A key difference with school meals is that the “end-funder” and the “end-consumer” are not the same in schools as they are in the household where meals are shared. Thus collective buying decisions require empathy with and “care at a distance” for the school children. More research could be undertaken whether the strategy of

lining up individual buying for the household and collective buying for a school in parallel enhances empathy for the “end-consumer” and thus makes a decision based on quality more likely.

In his analysis of the Brazilian Home Grown School Feeding Initiative<sup>8</sup>, Otzuki argues that defining quality as a basic right is the basic precondition required to enable participation and cooperation because “it focuses on the qualities of public services that do not fully follow the conventional free market principle, but which involve a deliberative set-up of non-monetary values, which are in turn articulated by the collective engagement of a wide range of actors” (Otzuki, 2011:214). These non-monetary values were expressed in a number of focus groups. Participants argued that their government should be concerned about pupils’ health and well-being, as well as respecting the children’s regional food habits and cultural traditions. The latter emphasis on regional food habits and respect for cultural diversity introduces dimensions into the debate which might in some cases compete with optimally balanced healthy diet plans as drawn up by nutritionists.

Since 2001, the school meals menus have been drawn up by nutritionists, and from 2004 onwards these professionals also became responsible for the implementation of new school meals policies. One of the main challenges is to balance a technical view from nutrition studies with traditional regional food habits and identify meals which are both reflective of the region and its cultures and which are healthy. Furthermore, different stakeholders such as farmers, nutritionists, school cooks and pupils might have different understandings of what constitutes

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<sup>8</sup> The Home-grown School Feeding Programme is an international initiative led by the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and shows a unique institutional experiment in promoting a green economy by linking public sector food procurement to sustainable agriculture.

quality. Nevertheless, acknowledging the role of food as an expression of cultural identity was an aspect which participants in the focus groups could easily relate to but which is rarely discussed in Northern ethical consumption literature.

Ashe and Sonnino (2013:4) have pointed out that the most successful reforms tend to occur within a wider political and legislative context that views school food as a health and well-being, rather than a commercial service. This support for health and well-being was also shown by upper class urban adults while they had their own vision of what a healthy diet entails. When asked about what they would consider important when procuring school meals in the hypothetical case of being mayors of their town, health came first:

*[C]: Health*

*[P]: Health*

*[G]: Health*

*[J]: The first thing I would think about is healthy eating, to educate a child how to eat properly.*

*[Facilitator:] Is it the same for everyone?*

*[R]: Yes... But would you buy chicken?*

*[C]: I would buy fish, it is healthier.*

*[R]: But it's more expensive.*

*[G]: It has to be balanced.*

*[Facilitator]: And what is healthy food for you?*

*[J]: A balanced, healthy, low fat diet, which teaches children to eat properly, including fruit, vegetables etc. People from poorer backgrounds don't eat that, they spend their money on rice, beans and manioc flour.*

*(Young, upper class adults, Rio de Janeiro)*

It is interesting to see particular foods classified here as poor people's food which in the view of the participant needed to be upgraded to a "balanced, healthy, low fat diet". Despite the emphasis in government procurement literature on decentralization and self-determination, the quote exhibits a degree of paternalism. It is not unlikely that unless a rights-based approach is taken, the willingness of richer Brazilians to pay more so that other people's children have a healthier meal may become linked to notions of "teaching poor people to eat in a certain way".

Controversies in the interpretation and balancing of criteria such as "healthy" and "culturally appropriate" should be expected as part of the democratic process leading to collective choices. In any case, it is worth noting that the cultural and social roles of food are present in many debates over food insecurity in the Global South which emphasise autonomy, self-determination and cultural appropriateness. These cultural and social aspects have not been appreciated to the same extent by discourses in the Global North (Ashe & Sonnino 2013). They have been demanded by social movements, and they are particularly relevant in a country of the size of Brazil, which has strong regional culinary traditions.

*[A]: I think that in terms of the school meal one of the things that has to be considered is what I mentioned before: the question of regionalism, what the children are used to eating. All my life I went to government schools and the school meals did not serve the fare we were used to, so we refused to eat it. Brazil is a country which has many different culinary cultures and children demand this variety and say 'I will not eat this, I don't like it; it is not part of my diet, my food habits'. This is an important factor within the school meal policy: providing the type of food that children are used to.*

*(Urban, female, adults, middle class, Brasília)*

Indeed, regional and cultural diversity is officially endorsed and nutritionists responsible for the school meal menus have to incorporate local and regional products and recipes as part of a varied menu. Examples of this are *acaí* with *tapioca* flour, and beef stew with *jambu* (Pará state), cornmeal couscous (Bahia), *carne de sol* (sun cured beef) and *pequi*, a kind of nut (Minas Gerais state) (Educação, 2014).

### **6.3 Systems of food production: perspectives on scale and modes of production**

In Brazil, according to Maluf ((Maluf, 2009/2010), family farming emerged as a sociopolitical category during the 1990s, following the introduction of a social-liberal democracy in Brazil after the end of the military dictatorship in 1985. It gathered the support of organisations and social movements as well as researchers and policy makers. Although there are links between industrial agriculture and family farming, the latter began to assert its difference from agribusiness, proposing another, more sustainable model of agricultural development in Brazil. Family farm establishments represent 84% of the country's farms and occupy 80 million hectares of land, or 24% of total farmland in the country (FAO 2012). This sector also contributes 38% of the gross value of agricultural production (BR\$ 54 million in 2006) (FAO, 2012). In the focus groups there was strong support for relocalization of agri-food systems and family farming:

*[J]: Because now the government has opened up this opportunity with the 30% [of produce for school meals coming from family farms] which was not the case before.*

*[C]: Apart from all the produce being organic, it supports small farmers from the region.*

*[A]: Quality, children should have quality [food]! Depending on the region, using local produce. That's what counts.*

*[G]: Sometimes you pay more for something which is nutritionally inferior because it is not produced locally and comes from somewhere else.*

*[R]: I would encourage local production by sourcing it locally.*

*(Urban middle class females, Brasília)*

The reasons for supporting family farmers and locally produced food ranged from the belief that it would be nutritionally superior, to ideas that it would support the local economy, cut down transport costs and also that it would help people in the countryside to live with dignity.

Here we have clear indications of participants discussing, in their own words, issues which transcend the common individual consumer-individual producer dualism and instead starting to discuss systemic issues such as “encouraging local production”. The scaling-up of ethical consumption into sustainable public procurement as an expression of collective choice clearly facilitated the participants’ moving their thinking to a systems-level. This also affected discussions of mode and scale of production, when participants juxtaposed family farming against large scale agriculture:

*[B]: Thinking about sustainability in the case of Brazil, we have to take the countryside into consideration. We live in a country where... In books you see the large scale agriculture and I saw that with my own eyes when I travelled to Mato Grosso by car and for an hour and a half I only saw soya plantations on both sides of the road, belonging to the same farm. That's when you realise the scale of monoculture. Meanwhile small-scale farming in Brazil is still very much linked to poverty. Actually when I travelled to São Pedro da Serra I saw small*

*farmers living well and thought that maybe it is possible. But when small farmers are not organised and part of networks. They do not know who they are going to sell to, and have to rely on the buyer setting the price. I think public policies should help people to stay and live in the countryside with dignity*  
*(consumer activist focus group, female consumer, Rio de Janeiro)*

In this quote, the respondent covers multiple systemic issues: monoculture (and by implication biodiversity); farm sizes and implicitly, economies of scale and market access, insecurity of demand, rural people being able to “live in the countryside with dignity” also as a means of reducing inward migration. While as an individual consumer she might feel helpless to consider and address all these systemic issue in her everyday buying decisions, in the focus group she called on public policies, including public procurement policies, to act on behalf of the citizens.

#### **6.4. Challenges of scaling up**

A key positive aspect of the school meals policy has been the opportunity it has opened up for farmers to sell directly to local authorities, thus eliminating some intermediaries. This has had an impact, not only on the price, but also on the quality of the products, as other research has shown (ROCHA et al., 2007). By having a direct contact with buyers (in this case the municipality or the school) farmers receive direct feedback and have to pay more attention to the quality of their products. This in turn makes it easier for them to access other quality markets.

The farmers using organic methods argued in the focus groups, that, if local authorities were now prepared to pay the 30% more as stipulated in the law for organic produce, then public procurement of school meals would provide a very positive stimulus for local organic

production. This in turn, they explained, should eventually lead to more organic produce on offer and a lowering of prices. However, despite the long term benefits of organic and agro-ecological production, small farmers still felt they were constantly fighting a battle to include their products in the market, as the participants' comments show.

*[L]: I think that when the local authority starts buying from small farmers it will increase the number of farmers that will grow food without pesticides and the price of food will go down. Nowadays growing organic is a battle - you have to fight for it.*

*(Organic producers, low income, Rio de Janeiro)*

They also raised the issue of a very important bottleneck in the programme: the huge demand imposed by the programme in terms of volume of production, regularity of supply, quality and variety cannot always be met by small family farmers. Indeed, prior research documents that local authorities blamed the lack of regular supply as one of the main reasons for not reaching the 30% quota (Saraiva et al., 2013). In one of the focus groups undertaken in Brasilia, which included a government official among the participants, similar discussions ensued:

*[R]: Today there is a law that says that 30% should be sourced from family farmers. A good part of the local authorities are not able to do that. There is a deficiency in the production, in terms of regularity of supply. There is no point in being generous in the legislation if the conditions are not in place for that level of production to be reached and expanded. [...]*

*[R]: Brazilian legislation [in the past] has managed to break an enormous barrier imposed by the agro-industry, in relation to processing methods. For example, there were many barriers to sell unpasteurised milk. Now there are other aspects such as financial investment, commercialisation etc.*

*(Urban, middle class men, Brasília)*

Here participants started discussing how to create enabling environments for small family farms in which steady demand from the state was only one element. Other key elements which would help family farms compete would include access to finance, technical expertise on commercialization and appropriate legislation on processing methods.

There is a long way to go before such an integrated system-wide approach can happen in terms of legislation. However, studies have shown that short circuits of food production and consumption might generate more equitable power relations in markets. “Local actors might be more active in voicing their opinion over the definition of rules and procedures that regulate food production, manufacturing, distribution and consumption” (Petersen, 2011:2). This creates an arena of various and partially conflicting commercial interests trying to affect the market place. It is here that the collective choice in favour of more socially and environmentally conscious public procurement meets the “messy ethics” of the market place.

“Messy ethics” is a well-known challenge in the literature on individual consumers’ ethical consumption (Probyn, 2011). A key difference to public procurement is that in state procurement, the state is also the rule-making body for the market place in which public buyers are making choices in the name of the collective of citizens. As our Brazilian participants rightly observe, this should provide leverage to counteract the structural disadvantages which small-scale and more sustainable producers face in a more systemic way.

7) **Discussion: Moving from individual ethical consumption to redesigning food systems**

In theory, public procurement is a good example of aggregate collective decision-making and thus of action which goes beyond the figure of the individualised consumer overly prevalent in ethical consumption literature. Indeed, in a functioning democratic system it is theoretically the case that citizens vote for elected representatives who then use the democratic mandate to set criteria for public procurement which the public servants acting as purchasing officers would then have to apply in their decision-making on behalf of the citizens as a whole. Our survey research showed that a majority Brazilians wanted the state to use criteria which went beyond price and quality and included social, environmental and animal rights aspects. 90% of survey respondents wanted citizens to be involved in setting the criteria for public procurement.

When exploring this further in focus groups, however, it became clear that participants in Brazil did not have this sense of an electoral contract with their representatives who would then be accountable for procurement decisions. Instead, one of their first concerns was that public procurement processes would have to become more transparent and that elected officials should cease the nepotistic and clientelist approaches they saw as widespread in state procurement practice.

This lack of trust in politicians did not mean that participants were politically apathetic. The school meals policy is itself the product of decades of demand from social movements with many of their representatives taking on roles in the Lula da Silva and now the Rousseff governments. Civil society participation in the policy is institutionalised via many representative forums and multi-sectorial arrangements. Our focus group participants, after at first being taken aback by the subject of public procurement as a technocratic and technical discourse, quickly became interested in the subject once we had concretised it through the figure of the mayor or the discussion of the school meals policy. There were certainly strong

views emerging from the participants. This suggests that latent interest exists which could be tapped into through more awareness-raising.

The discussions that ensued were political in that they spoke about a politics of identity relating to food, and in that they strongly advocated a holistic view of the “right to quality food” which went far beyond procurement’s conventional focus on price. This support for good quality and culturally appropriate food was found even among middle class participants whose own children were enrolled in private schools and thus would not benefit from the policy, while their parents would be taxed for it. There was consensus on the main aspects of the scheme: participants strongly supported focusing not just on price but on good quality food, relocalization of food systems, sustainable rural development, support for family farming, and appreciation for regional food culture and tastes. Our focus groups covered a range of regions, age ranges and class backgrounds but we did not have specific focus groups with the pupils who were actually eating the new school meals. This is a promising area for future research.

The sheer scale of the Brazilian school meals policy, which reaches 43 million pupils, means that changes to procurement criteria will have significant systemic effects in the whole food and indeed farming system. As a result of the collective and scaled nature of public procurement, the discussions with Brazilian participants about school meals led naturally to the level of food systems and to debates about what scale of production (small/large-scale/“family” agriculture), which mode of production (conventional/organic) and sourcing from which origins (regional vs national scale) would be preferable. Thus, the combined power of the twin characteristics of public procurement - being large-scale in nature and theoretically allowing for collective setting of criteria- forced the debate to turn to structures, including structural disadvantage and inequalities. This was a far more politicised debate about ethical consumption than the majority of literature which discusses individual consumers’ buying

decisions. It thus offers hope, and an interesting strategy, for a repoliticisation of the ethical consumption discourse.

The Brazilian school meals policy is clearly facing challenges in terms of implementation of the legislation. Our data confirmed Sonnino et al's (2014) observation that small farmers were sometimes unable to keep up a regular supply, especially when they were not organised in cooperatives. Small family farms also struggled to provide products to a fixed standard of quality and food safety. Further, and especially in the North of Brazil, our data confirms that logistics proved a real challenge, with a lack of storage facilities and school kitchens available to process fresh produce. Despite these practical challenges, the overall implementation figures show that up to now the policy represents a significant success within the "public purchasing paradigm" (Foresti et al 2006) of state procurement. It remains one of the largest experiments to date of scaling up sustainable public procurement.

#### **8) Conclusion: Scaling up, repoliticisation, focus on systems**

This paper addresses two research frontiers in ethical consumption. Firstly, exploring perspectives of ethical consumption from the global South, and secondly, identifying ways of scaling up and repoliticising ethical consumption.

Our work on the[X] project gave us the opportunity to compare individual purchasing with collective consumption in the form of state procurement in Brazil. The representative large-scale survey showed that Brazilian citizens strongly supported social and environmental purchasing criteria in public procurement. Further, what we found was that the repoliticisation opportunity that we saw in public procurement due to the voter-politician contractual link did not resonate with participants in focus groups. Instead, a different repoliticisation was taking

place. In the case of the Brazilian school meals policy, we saw that the combined cultural, social and economic rootedness of food led to discourses of regional cultural identity mingling with social movements' discourses of food sovereignty.

Because of the audacious scale of the policy, and the nature of public procurement as a form of collective choice, participants in focus groups moved very quickly to discussing not just individual buying decisions but the entire systems in which these choices are embedded. The policy's introduction of criteria of scale (small family farms), of mode of production (organic), and its clear statement on price (up to 30% price increase to cover cost of organic production), the school meals policy immediately triggered highly political debates about the sustainable or unsustainable way food is produced; the relationship of price and quality; the mode of production; the scale of production and the origin (local, regional, or beyond) of the food.

This was a pioneering policy which also created a discursive space and space to imagine alternatives where these questions (and associated trade-offs) became concrete for people. The focus of attention was not, as it would be in the familiar individual ethical consumption literature, on the responsibility of the consumer to make complex moral trade-offs amidst "messy ethics" in their everyday life, potentially driving them to a state of both paralysis and disempowered guilt. Instead, the attention turned towards the need for structural change, for changing entire food and farming systems. Further, by starting from the example of a massive and popularly supported policy, the power of collective purchasing was immediately evident and citizens could feel a sense of empowerment at what could be achieved.

Another important consideration here is also that while the individual ethical consumer perspective excludes those who do not have the financial means to be able to afford the more costly option, the debate about the collective choice of school meals procurement could include all citizens, regardless of their buying power. Remarkably, even in a highly unequal society

such as Brazil, more affluent citizens who educated their children in the private sector and thus were not affected by the policy except through taxation, argued passionately for the right of the children in the public school sector to access high-quality, organic and culturally appropriate food.

It could be thus argued that participation in public procurement decisions may foster a deeper and more democratic sense of collective citizenship which goes beyond an atomized “voting with your wallet” as a privilege of those with sufficient spending power. This would be very much in line with the origins of the school feeding program governance structure which is rooted in participatory and reflexive governance (Sonnino et al. 2014).

What can we learn from the Brazilian example, not just for other countries in the global South, but globally? Firstly, scaling-up, secondly, focus on whole systems, thirdly, repoliticisation (but not as we thought). The specific example of Brazil’s pioneering school meals policy not only offers lessons on how to scale up but also how to start a discussion, not just about food, but about food systems. This is a form of politics that is different from the voter-politician contract we had envisioned. At its best, it could be a deeper democratic discussion among citizens, about the agrarian, environmental and economic systems they want to live in and the minimum rights afforded to all citizens attending school in regard to food, regardless of ability to pay. It is also a cultural politics of food, intermingling with economic policy, negotiated in the public sphere with a wide variety of stakeholders.

The negotiations are on the one hand formalised in the participatory multi-stakeholder governance structure of the National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN). On the other hand, the possibilities for collective decisions at the systems scale opens up spaces for informal debates and negotiations between citizens as they reflect on and interact with the school meals system. In all its complexity and remaining implementation challenges, it is a

fascinating example of scaling up ethical consumption within one of the world's largest economies, with important lessons for many other democracies around developing policies towards more sustainable futures.

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