Policy Memo

Elevator Pitch

Dear President Lula, investing in healthcare and infrastructure in the North and Northeast of Brazil is fundamental in order to reduce the social and economic inequality within the country. Specifically, the gap between the North and South of the country is alarming, accentuating the need to revamp poverty in the Northern region of Brazil. Therefore, investments into 'Transnordestina', 'Plano Nacional de Educação no Campo', and 'Programa Bolsa Família' are solid proposals to improve Brazil's economic and social disparity.

Firstly, it is fundamental that your government resumes the construction of the Transnordestina Railway, a project initiated in 2006 that intended to connect the North and Northeast of Brazil, which has been abandoned for almost a decade. The railway's completion would welcome and involve the Northern states to the overall economy by presenting extensive job opportunities, as well as facilitate the trade of goods in the region by lowering transportation times and costs. Furthermore, we also recommend the conclusion of the Plano Nacional de Educação no Campo (PNEC). PNEC offered technical and financial assistance for states to implement political regulations to boost education in rural areas of Brazil, however, lack of funding and will to prioritize rural education over urban education is concerning - we demand a change. Educating people in rural Northern areas is pivotal. A tailored curriculum that covers livestock management, agriculture, and food safety would allow families to optimize their resources and generate further income - uplifting poverty. Finally, we recommend significant reforms to the Bolsa Familia, a program designed to lift Brazilians out of poverty and end the cycle of strife by providing a minimum income for families living under the poverty line. It obliges those living in poverty to invest in their children, as the subsidies granted via the Bolsa Familia are meant to be spent on sending children to school, or healthcare appointments. However, we believe this is not a sustainable method of ending the cycle of poverty, as the guidelines for subsidy grants are too lax. A potential solution would be to require documentation from parents showing that they fulfilled the responsibilities listed above. To incentivize families who provide documentation with a higher amount than they received before. This would ensure that the children are going to school, while ensuring the families have the ability and access to give their children what they need.

Background Introduction

Brazil, the fifth-largest country in the world, has a complex history marked by inequality, political upheavals, and economic challenges. This section of the memo will provide an overview of the historical background of inequality in Brazil, analyze the accomplishments of the Workers' Party and former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) during his previous tenure, and discuss the factors that led to his recent re-election.

I. Historical Background of Inequality in Brazil

Inequality in Brazil has deep historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial period. The Portuguese colonizers established a rigid social hierarchy based on race and class, with indigenous people and enslaved Africans occupying the lowest strata (Skidmore 24). This system continued to evolve after Brazil gained its independence in 1822, and the legacy of colonialism and slavery left a lasting impact on the nation's social structure (Fausto 56).

Despite rapid economic development in the 20th century, Brazil has struggled to address its glaring income disparities. A combination of factors, including unequal land distribution, a regressive tax system, and a lack of investment in education and healthcare, has perpetuated the cycle of poverty and social exclusion (Hochstetler and Keck 71).

II. Lula's Tenure and Re-election: Achievements, Challenges, and Impacts

During Lula's first presidency (2003-2010), his administration implemented a series of social and economic policies aimed at reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion. The Bolsa Família program provided cash transfers to millions of poor families, raising school attendance and reducing child labor by 15.7% (Marinho et al., 207). Lula's policies also focused on increasing the minimum wage by 54% in real terms (IPEA, 2010), expanding credit for low-income households, and investing in education and healthcare infrastructure. As a result, Brazil experienced substantial economic growth, averaging 4.5% per year (World Bank, 2021), and 29 million people were lifted out of poverty (Neri, 132).

However, Lula's presidency faced challenges, including corruption scandals, such as the "Mensalão" and "Operation Car Wash" which led to the arrest and conviction of high-ranking officials, including Lula himself. Despite these scandals, Lula's recent re-election can be attributed to popular support, with a 67% approval rating at the end of his second term (Datafolha, 2010); ongoing economic and social challenges in Brazil, such as an 11.8% unemployment rate (IBGE, 2021); and political fragmentation.

Lula's policies have had both positive and negative lasting impacts on Brazil's economy. On the positive side, his policies reduced income inequality, with the Gini index falling from 0.59 in 2002 to 0.54 in 2010 (World Bank, 2021), contributing to a burgeoning middle class, which grew by 50% during his tenure (Neri, 132). However, some argue that the rapid expansion of social spending, which increased by 2.2% of GDP between 2003 and 2010 (IPEA, 2010), and reliance on commodity exports made the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets (Amann and Baer, 29). Additionally, the corruption scandals associated with Lula's administration have undermined public trust in political institutions. Only 14% of Brazilians expressed confidence in their government in 2019 (Latinobarómetro, 2019), complicating Brazil's path to sustained growth and development.

III. Problems of Inequality between Brazilians:

Nearly 20 million Brazilians were living under the poverty line (defined as \$1.90USD per day) from the eight year period, 1995-2003. Now, that number is nearly halved, sitting at 9.3 million in 2018, according to the World Bank. But yet issues of inequality persist, as the top 1% own over 50% of the wealth in Brazil. Nobody can find a job, and so many skilled workers have left. Nearly 1.2 million have left for America, and hundreds of thousands for Portugal and Europe (France24). The urban environments of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are rife with petty crime, and nobody feels safe. This has caused the more privileged Brazilians to up-and-leave, resulting in a major "brain drain" of skilled workers and potential families leaving for greener pastures. Doctors, lawyers, professors, school teachers, nurses, all skilled professionals who can afford to emigrate have done so out of necessity for their own quality of life. "We can see the possibility to have a family. We have the security. I can see families outside not worried by violence," says a Brazilian migrant living in Quebec, on her experience

living in Canada (France 24). Those that have chosen to stay, cannot find a quality, unskilled job, and because so many skilled workers have left, they cannot find quality universities or doctors to keep them healthy. Those that cannot leave will live in suboptimal conditions, while even the poorest among them will continue to reap very little benefits from Brazil's booming economy. While the economy develops, the poorest are being left behind, while the richest among them are leaving the country behind entirely. In doing so, they cavernous gap between the poor and the richest Brazilians continues to grow. The following paragraphs outline various existing programs and projects that may help improve the quality of life in Brazil and bolster the success of education to provide more skilled workers.

Recommendation I - Transnordestina Railway

The Transnordestina Railway project started 17 years ago, in 2006, during your second mandate. Over R\$6 billion were spent, with the project expected to deliver over 1750 Km of tracks before being completed in 2010. Currently, it is predicted to be delivered in 2027, and it is nowhere near completion, with only 600 km built (Belfort). Linking the Port in Ceará to the Port in Pernambuco is a promise that your government made to Brazil over a decade ago, and we believe it is essential that it is completed to bring economic prosperity to the North and Northeast regions. Some of the advantages that would come if you committed to reinstating construction once again is that thousands of unemployed people in those regions would have the opportunity to secure a job and help their families escape poverty to a certain extent. Pernambuco, one of the states that is dependent on the Transnordestina railway, is suffering from a 14.2% unemployment rate (Globo1), the second largest in the country. Reestablishing the project would drastically improve their unemployment rate, as well as give a boost to the exports of the region. Thousands could start working on the construction sites as well as benefit from the creation of collateral jobs, such as security and cleaning. Moreover, linking the Northern states to these two important ports in Brazil would significantly decrease the transportation and freight costs of agricultural products and would increase the exposure of their products to international markets, as well as national markets in the South. Brazil, being the second largest exporter of grains, needs to increase their presence in the Northern states, who have a lot to offer to the economy,

built in the region would also attract significant investment from the South and Southeast. The potential for agricultural development in the North is immense, especially due to the vast amount of available land. If done correctly, citizens will reap the profits associated with this practice, and as a result we can even hope that illegal deforestation practices in the Amazon will be reduced, as people decide to move towards agriculture.

Nevertheless, you should still be cautious when considering reimplementing the project. Despite the insistence on projects that will restore both social and economic equality, will Brazil manage to commit to delivering their proposed projects? The aforementioned delay in completing Transnordestina, as well as Petrochemical Complex in Rio (R\$40 billion loss), and Angras Nuclear Power Plant (R\$20 billion loss), testifies to Brazil's splurge revolving economic recovery projects (Pierry). Billions of dollars came from public funding, so little by little past governments (as well as yours) are draining away the limited money that is left from people in the North of Brazil. All the corruption involved has resulted in Brazilians taking a huge step back when it comes to trusting the government and how transparent and honest they are. Democratic Backsliding in Brazil occurs a lot due to corruption, and it is inevitable that targeting such a large project - Like the Transnordestina - won't cause uncertainty in the country. Rule of law in the country has been weakened over the scandals of the past years, so regaining Brazilians' trust will be a difficult milestone. Now, even considering the conclusion of the Transnordestina project, substandard railway lines would require a large investment in maintenance (Agencia Bacuri) - one that the Brazilian government would most likely not prioritize (similarly to the construction) - leading to hazards. Additionally, cargo security cannot be undermined. High crime rates in the North region of Brazil insinuate that an even larger investment should be placed to ensure the safety of the goods being transported and could create further controversy for the project. Put simply, the attempt to create a railway that connects the North and Northeast regions of Brazil to important ports has further instigated social inequality in Brazil in the short-term.

However, provided that Transnordestina would connect the North region of Brazil to European markets, even the low-wage jobs generated by the project's construction would be beneficial to "allow a

developing country to break into world markets" (Krugman, 82). This ultimately suggests that the long-term effects of the project's completion could improve infrastructure and the economic benefits for Brazil's North and Northeast region by circulating money and bringing attention to that area.

Recommendation II - Plano Nacional de Educação Rural (PNEC)

Another issue we believe needs to be addressed in order to better Brazil's future is education. Lula, we believe that if you were able to increase the amount of individuals who could obtain a college education it would not only reduce the disparity in wealth that exists between the 1% and 99% of the population - being that Brazil is currently ranked 2nd for countries whose wealth is concentrated primarily in the top 1% of the population (Pimental) - yet also improve the future for the next generations of Brazilians. Education would help create wealth and prosperity for the country through future innovations and stronger problem solving ability. Tackling this issue would not only serve for you to be seen as the president who helped the next generation achieve new academic and innovative heights, but also as a figure who would be indirectly responsible for any incredible creations that come out of this new increase in students and thinking.

The Plano Nacional de Educação no Campo (PNEC) is a great opportunity to achieve the aforementioned. While this project wasn't officially shut down, the rate of progression was significantly slowed by the state, reducing it to a rate where it will likely never be fully completed unless further action is taken on the part of the government (Guimar et al.). Completing this project would be significant in addressing the lack of education in the rural areas of the North-Northeastern parts of Brazil, and in general, would be a necessary step forward in reducing economic and social inequalities. The PNEC's curriculum being tailored to specific communities, educating children in agriculture skills and livestock management would help these communities in advancing their qualities of life as well as social and financial standings (Guimar et al.). This would ultimately allow children that live in rural areas of Brazil, and make a living out of it, to maximize their efficiency in agricultural tasks, hence, reaping the greatest profit possible and reducing the inequality currently seen.

It is clear that investment into education is pivotal for other agents in the economy to work, therefore, to reduce the social and economic disparity between the North and South of Brazil. However, even though PNEC provides ambitious solutions to encourage education, the extent to which it is feasible must be considered. Brazil's public education system is daunting (Jacobs). Underpaid jobs, delayed wages, and students' lack of interest have generated massive scandals in the past decades. In Brazil's rural areas, particularly, teenagers are not incentivized for schooling since rural activities do not require intensive mental effort, and rather physical. Consequently, conforming to Krugman's ideology, parents would often encourage their children to work alongside them on the farm to generate additional income instead of educating them. Furthermore, although "expecting to endure terrible working conditions" and "being paid very little", that "minimum is determined by the other opportunities available to workers" (Krugman, 82). This suggests that rural families lack the ambitious vision to enroll their children in schools in the first place, limiting the extent to which PNEC would be effective in accessing rural children to ultimately educate them.

Acknowledging the adversity of reaching rural children would, therefore, be a first step. Provided that further action is required for the project's success regardless of other external factors, it is imperative that in re-establishing PNEC there is an emphasis on portraying the benefits of education to rural children. Managing to deliver this information, the PNEC may effectively attract the interest of rural families to enroll their children in the project. Consequently, the project's success in engaging a large number of families would ensure that appropriate management is taken, hence, that there is significant investment to teacher's salaries and no payment delays - allowing the project to run smoothly.

Recommendation III - Bolsa Família

The main problem that Bolsa Familia attempted to address was access to quality education and good wages in areas of heavy industrial and subsistence agriculture. However, the unsustainability of funding families to end the cycle of poverty and giving them no real resources outside of that is causing more problems than solving. The unstructured nature of the subsidy is a double edged sword: it allows for a "Universal Basic Income" of Brazil's most impoverished, but it does not solve issues of access and ability. This money allows for families to lean more heavily on government funding without adhering to the entire objective, which is to be able to send their children to school. Families should make enough

money on their own to survive, and the money from the Bolsa Familia program is intended as a supplement.

As stated previously, a more structured subsidy would help to provide a stringent frame through which the government can provide their assistance. Mainly by requiring the people receiving it to prove that they have sent their children to school and therefore only supplement their income with the subsidy, rather than completely relying on it. This helps to close the gaps in uneducated populations by giving children an opportunity to attend school without being at the expense of their livelihood.

There is an inherent danger in having an uneducated workforce. The people relying on lower-than-subsistence wages allows the attraction of companies for the further exploitation of the Brazilian people, as Rudra's Race to the Bottom highlights. In order to allow for Brazil's poor to "catch up" with its booming economy, the following must be addressed. The Bolsa Familia must be restructured more strictly, to limit the most lucrative subsidies only to those willing to send their children to school, providing proof, in order to avoid over-reliance on money from the government subsidies that are meant as a supplement to wages, and to create a more lucrative, educated workforceno matter what areas they decide to work in. To do this, we must first incentivize them to stay, and create an appealing environment worth living in. Many Brazilians cite that their reason for leaving was pervasive violence, "In Brazil, we always go out with the expectation of something bad to happen." (France 24) To incentivize families to stay, we suggest creating a nationwide program to attract skilled professionals to settle, this could be by providing a regulated housing market in urban centers with rent control, and paying for professionals to live in rural areas, helping pay off university debt, subsidizing small businesses and entrepreneurs (both in urban and rural settings). It would also include improving the environment of urban centers such as Rio De Janeiro or São Paulo. This would involve a comprehensive program to help end violent and petty crime, this could be through community cleanup programs, housing the homeless, and consistent non militarized police presence. These are well within reach of the Brazilian economy, which is currently a rising force and the largest in Latin America (France 24). Raising the liveable quality of an environment would inherently incentivize an influx of skilled workers by appealing them to stay. It would allow access to quality jobs that disallow the undercutting of wages, and would allow for quality access to things like healthcare in urban centers, and help to proliferate expertise to rural areas of Brazil and allow for increased access and support to rural people. Think of education as a self-fulfilling cycle, the educated who choose to stay will help train and guide the generation which follows them, and every state should have a vested interest in both educating their youth, and keeping the educated within their borders. It is a regime that sustains itself, when given the proper tools. If inequalities are skyrocketing, then we must provide the poor with a better environment to thrive in, and give them the money and access to succeed.

Although the program managed to uplift poverty in the northeast region of Brazil, having had an investment of R\$14 billion distributed among 21 million families in 2023 (MDS), the validity and sustainability of the project is a double-edged sword. Essentially, beneficiaries became dependent on Bolsa Família's compensation. Provided that the program grants financial assistance indefinitely, families continue to prove their necessity, sacrificing employment opportunities, for instance, in order to receive this income. This has had a counterproductive effect in relation to Bolsa Familía's proposal to revamp poverty in the long term (Plantier). Instead of leveraging this additional income to escape the poverty trap and being incentivized to pursue social improvements, uneducated beneficiary families are being financially sustained by the program. This represents a momentaneous solution to Brazil's poverty issue, hence, improving the social inequality problem at present time. However, the aforementioned dependence insinuates that dissolving the financial assistance of Bolsa Familia will eliminate the progress made in developing social equality. This means that in addition to the large opportunity cost that the project carries, Brazil has become captive of continuously providing Bolsa Familia, ultimately supporting the argument that "bad jobs and wages are better than no jobs" (Krugman, 80). A result of suppressing the incentive to pursue jobs and their creation is limiting the growth of the manufacturing industry which is imperative to create a "ripple effect throughout the economy" (Krugman, 83). Put simply, even though 'Bolsa Familia' has helped erode social inequality in Brazil, its long-term effect and supportability are questionable.

With all these issues in mind, we ultimately believe that these concerns trump the good that the Bolsa Familia provides for Brazil's poor. On top of restructuring the subsidy for more stringent documentation requirements, the Bolsa Familia would be available as a financial supplement to all poor

Brazilians who qualify, regardless of job status. This would effectively mean that adult members of poor families can comfortably take jobs (even bad ones!) without worrying about losing their benefits. In taking these jobs, the positions fill and the economy grows. In gaining this extra money beyond subsistence, it allows for communities to invest in themselves and give back to the economy. It would also produce a higher number of educated Brazilians that bolster the workforce's value. Long term, the economic wealth that this program would produce, if executed correctly, would increase the gains made by the Brazilian government, not hold them captive to it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that you - Mr. President - now have the unique opportunity and responsibility to address Brazil's long standing social and economic inequalities, particularly in the North and Northeast regions. Two viable policy options to consider are: 1) the resumption and completion of the Transnordestina Railway project, which would stimulate economic growth, job creation, and improved trade infrastructure in the underdeveloped regions, and 2) the revitalization and expansion of the Plano Nacional de Educação no Campo (PNEC), focusing on tailored education for rural areas that would empower communities and reduce wealth disparities. Each option has pros and cons; however, they both present significant potential for improving Brazil's overall economic and social landscape.

The Transnordestina Railway would provide much-needed employment opportunities and facilitate trade in the North and Northeast. Nevertheless, the project's feasibility and long-term maintenance must be considered, as well as potential security concerns. On the other hand, the PNEC could significantly impact rural communities by providing relevant and empowering education, but the challenge lies in ensuring access and motivation for families to prioritize education over immediate income generation.

Ultimately, your leadership will be crucial in addressing Brazil's deep-rooted social and economic issues. By carefully evaluating and implementing these policy options, you have the potential to create meaningful, lasting change and strengthen Brazil's future for generations to come.

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