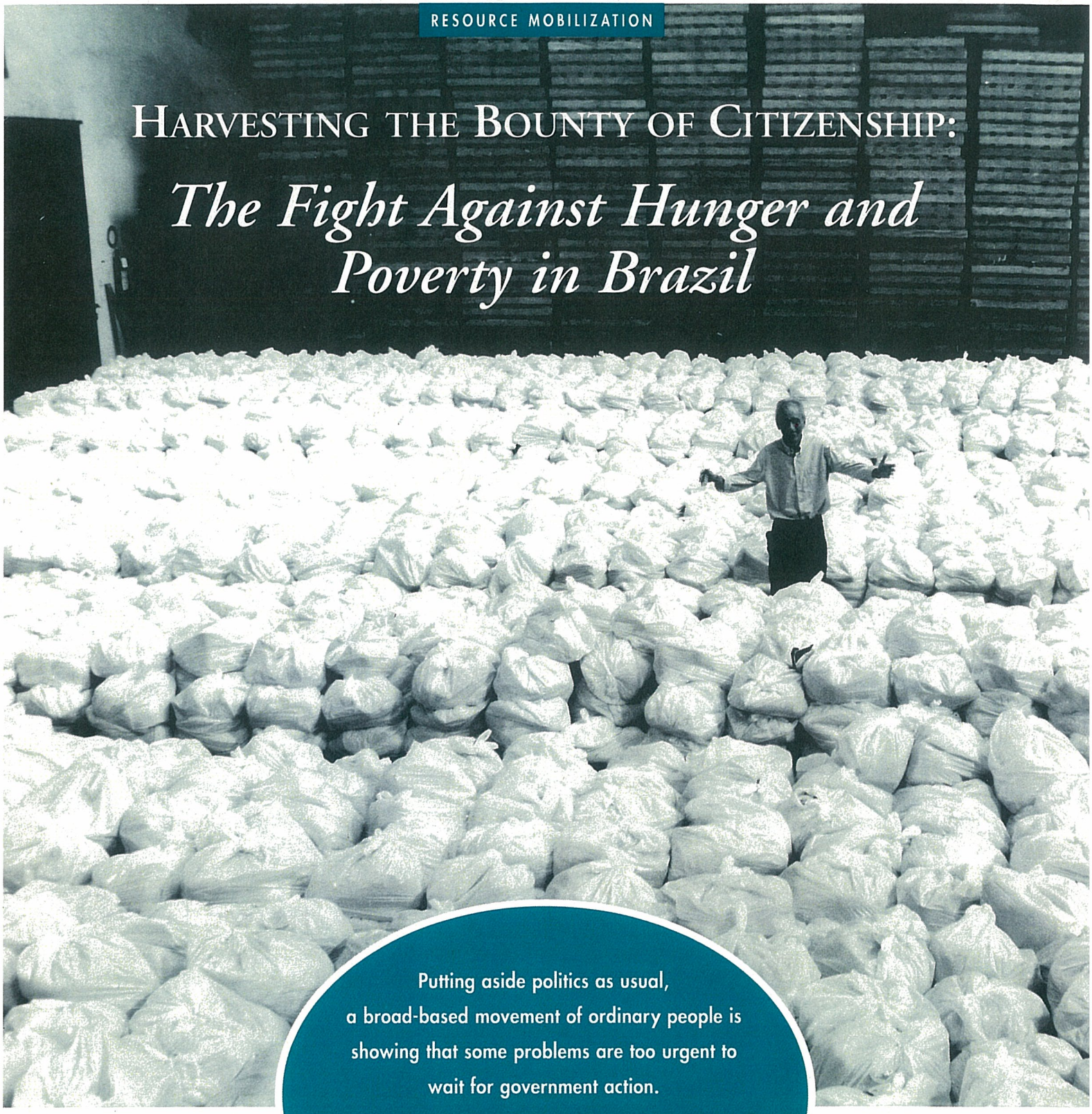
HARVESTING THE BOUNTY OF CITIZENSHIP:

The Fight Against Hunger and Poverty in Brazil



Putting aside politics as usual, a broad-based movement of ordinary people is showing that some problems are too urgent to wait for government action.

JOHN W. GARRISON II AND LEILAH LANDIM

SEVERINO SILVA

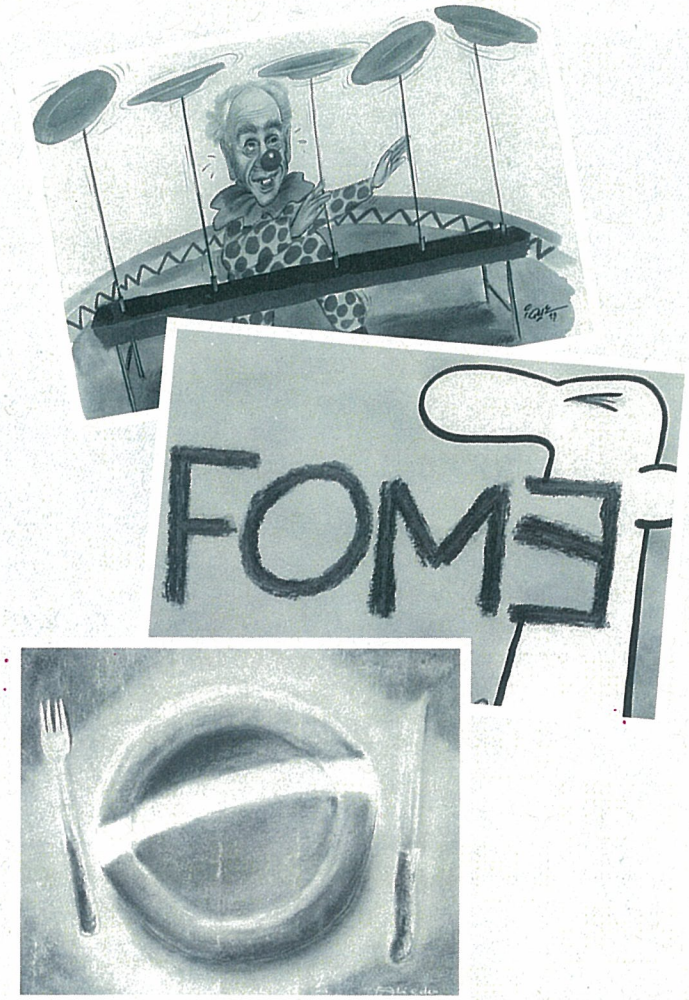
A light flashes red at a downtown intersection, bringing traffic to a halt. The camera zooms in on a man sitting impatiently behind the wheel of his late-model car. From his coat and tie, the way the muscles of his face tense and relax, you can tell that for him time is precious. His mind is full of a thousand thoughts, racing ahead on business, making plans for a dinner party that evening. So why does he seem distracted, as though a stranger's voice is breaking through? What does he see out of the corner of his eye that makes him look down, then anxiously begin rolling up his window?

You begin to see why he is uneasy. The way the sunlight strikes the rising glass turns it into a mirror. As the man, the inside of his car, slowly disappear, a boy in a tattered shirt materializes in the window. His face is smooth but smudged, his clothes look slept in, his eyes stare expectantly. Then his lips tighten and the light in his eyes dims. He braces for the customary, hostile show of indifference. Then he is gone, like a bad dream.

But in his place a silvered moon is tumbling through the air, like a hubcap after a collision, until you see it is an empty tin plate and hear the final clatter of its landing. The letter O falls into place to spell out the word fome, while a voice in the background asks what you will do to end hunger.

The whole thing is over in 30 seconds, a small swell in the sea of images broadcast on Brazilian TV. But the ad is not drowned out; it resonates in people's imaginations, perhaps because it is so novel. The networks rarely run public service spots; leading Rio de Janeiro advertising agencies rarely offer their skills pro bono. Encounters with street children are unavoidable in Rio, São Paulo, Recife, and other cities, yet they, and the poor in general, seldom register in the world of television. But what is truly unusual about the ad is the disquieting question, which is addressed not to the government but to ordinary citizens from all walks of life.

In 1993 and 1994, more than three million volunteers responded to appeals like this one and joined the Ação da Cidadania Contra a Fome, Miséria e Pela Vida, the Citizens' Campaign Against Hunger and Poverty and For Life. They organized local committees to distribute tons of food baskets, supported gardening and water projects, provided basic health care, created jobs, assisted street children, and prodded local and state governments to improve social services to the poor. The breadth and scale of this grassroots Campaign were unprecedented for Brazil, and it was led by civic-minded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offering a new vision of how the country could solve its intractable social and economic problems. This article outlines the origins of the Citizens' Campaign, looks at its methods, and explores some of the lessons it may hold for the future.



Page 38 and 39: *At a warehouse in Rio de Janeiro, Betinho, the leading spokesperson for the Brazilian Citizens' Campaign Against Hunger and Poverty and For Life, wades through thousands of bags of donated food.* Above: *A sampling of some of the postcards created by leading Brazilian artists for the Citizens' Campaign. (The one in the middle spells out hunger.)*

Democracy and the Politics of Ethics

Many of the NGOs in the Citizens' Campaign were also at the forefront of the struggle to rebuild Brazilian democracy during the 1980s after decades of military rule. They helped mobilize public opinion in the writing of a new national Constitution, and they worked hard to defend and consolidate the integrity of the electoral process. When the first popularly elected president in nearly 30 years, Fernando Collor de Mello, became implicated in a widening scandal of political corruption in 1992, some 900 NGOs, professional associations of lawyers and journalists, student associations, church agencies, and community groups joined to form the Movimento Pela Ética na Política, the Movement for Ethics in Politics. The Movimento petitioned Congress to investigate Collor, spawned local committees in towns throughout Brazil to monitor the impeachment process, and organized colorful street demonstrations to keep the pressure on.

In late 1992, President Collor was impeached, and power was peacefully transferred under the Constitution, without military intervention. Leading NGOs organized within the national association of NGOs, the Associação Brasileira de ONGs (ABONG), which had been the behind-the-scenes organizers of the Movement for Ethics in Politics, hoped to build on that success. The Instituto de Estudos Sócio-Econômicos (INESC), the Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE), and other NGOs had worked with community groups throughout the country trying to combat poverty through grassroots projects. They had firsthand experience with the size of the problem. Brazil might have the globe's tenth-largest economy, but according to the World Bank, it also had the third-worst level of income concentration, and more than 60 percent of its people subsisted below the poverty line. A decade-long economic crisis had aggravated conditions, resulting in shrinking government funding for basic education, public health, and transportation services for the poor and the small but increasingly hard-pressed middle class.

Unwilling any longer to tolerate the spreading hunger and abject misery, the NGOs in the Ethics in Politics Movement decided to launch the Citizens' Campaign. Their founding letter made clear the connection:

"Government corruption does not constitute the only form of ethical offense within Brazilian society. Various breaches are committed daily in our country, among them the existence of millions in absolute poverty. [We] propose to Brazilian society a new stage in the struggle for ethical principles in our country, the struggle against abject impoverishment."

A leading spokesperson for the Campaign was Herbert "Betinho" de Souza, executive secretary of IBASE and a national civic leader with uncommon ethical appeal. A hemophiliac who had tested positive for the HIV virus in 1985 and who had lost two brothers to the disease, Betinho had responded to that crisis by enlisting musicians, entertainers, business people, and others to inform the public about AIDS and push for legislation to regulate private blood banks and safeguard the nation's blood supply. Now, he and other NGO leaders pointed to figures from the government research institute IPEA (1993) showing that 32 million Brazilians, or approximately 9 million families, suffered from chronic hunger and said, "We can no longer tell people going hungry to wait for a structural solution to fill their stomachs."

At about the same time, the Workers Party independently proposed an emergency hunger campaign to newly appointed President Itamar Franco. President Franco responded by declaring that Brazil was experiencing a "state of social emergency" and invited Betinho to Brasilia to brief the entire Cabinet about proposals for a nonpartisan antipoverty campaign. Afterwards, Betinho was asked to chair the government's effort and develop an operational plan. On May 13, 1993, the first anniversary of the Movement for Ethics in Politics, President Franco formally established a national food security council—the Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar (CONSEA)—to put the plan into action.

Phase One: Private Philanthropy and Public Policy

This antipoverty program was different from those launched by past governments because it proceeded on two tracks—one pri-

JOÃO ROBERTO RIPPER/IMAGENS DA TERRA

Members of one of the poorest communities in Rio de Janeiro prepare pastries and hors d'oeuvres that they will sell to raise money for the Citizens' Campaign.

vate, the other public. The Citizens' Campaign began as a movement within civil society, spearheaded by NGOs, and it continued to mobilize financial, material, and human resources from the private sector. Campaign organizers also realized, however, that the success of their efforts depended on the pressure civil society could exert on the federal government, especially the executive branch, to use public resources more efficiently. Betinho and other leaders of civil society joined CONSEA to coordinate government activities with the Campaign's, but they also relied on a vast network of private citizens' committees forming throughout the country to make sure that the State followed through on its promises at the local level. This section will examine each track in turn, beginning with the structure and activities of the Citizens' Campaign proper and concluding with a look at what CONSEA was able to accomplish.

From its inception, the Citizens' Campaign was decentralized and nonhierarchical in nature. As one of its early organizing manuals stated: "Anyone can create a committee, they don't need to ask anyone's permission." Nearly 4,700 autonomous committees were formed by individuals and citizen groups in all 27 states. Although large cities and most states eventually created their own coordinating committees, they were informal structures staffed by volunteers.

Minimal coordination was provided at the national level through two important organizational bases of support. First, the executive committee of the Ethics in Politics Movement, which was composed of representatives from seven national organizations, set up a Citizens' Campaign secretariat in Brasilia and appointed NGO leader Maria José Jaime to head it. Salaries for staff were partially defrayed by government agencies, private firms, universities, and international donors, including the Inter-American Foundation.

The secretariat was given a number of responsibilities:

- to serve as a central clearinghouse for gathering information about the Citizens' Campaign;
- to provide logistical and operational information to state committees;
- to convene national planning and organizational meetings;
- to represent the Citizens' Campaign before governmental bodies and help coordinate activities (i.e., food distribution, nutritional surveys, and land reform) with international donor and government agencies;
- to provide close operational and programmatic support to the government's food security council, CONSEA; and
- to brief the press and inform the public about the latest activities of the Citizens' Campaign.

The second pillar of organizational support for the Campaign was provided by IBASE, which ceded office space in Rio de Janeiro to a 12-member staff of food experts, journalists, and organizers. While helping formulate strategy for the movement and documenting activities nationwide, the IBASE staff also published *Primeira e Última*, the major weekly newspaper of the movement, and produced videos and spot ads for airing on network television.

The Campaign based its priorities and strategies on sound scientific research about hunger and poverty. For the first time, private research institutes and public agencies combined forces to map hunger and poverty in the nation and disseminate the results to the public. The previously cited *Mapa da Fome* conducted by IPEA (1993) not only recorded the num-

Citizenship Food Baskets and the Recycling of Lixão

The 450 families in the slum community of Lixão, which is named for the generic term describing the large landfill it borders, can look out from their patchwork houses and see the futuristic skyline of Brasilia's government buildings. Looking down from one of those buildings at Lixão is to gaze back toward the nineteenth century, at a community with no running water, sewage, or electricity whose members eke out a living sifting through other people's trash. When the members of a local citizens' committee, spearheaded by members of the Sindicato de Bancários do Distrito Federal, looked for a community in need, they did not have to look beyond this one, among the most destitute in the city. The committee met with leaders of the community association and asked how they could help. The leaders said they wanted to build a community center where local people could get training and start activities to earn income. The citizens' committee began collecting meal tickets from fellow bank employees, gathered building materials and farm supplies, borrowed a tractor, and raised funds from charitable and nongovernmental organizations. A total of $30,000 was collected locally.

With the materials at hand, 30 residents organized a work detail and built themselves a community center with three large rooms. Nearby, they planted 1,000 square meters as an organic garden. Once the center was open, the citizens' committee arranged for volunteer adult-literacy teachers, handicraft instructors, and agronomists from various governmental rural extension agencies to come out and give courses. In the following months, 30 adults learned to read and write; 20 residents set up a small business making and selling clothes, rugs, and soap; and the organic garden spurred creation of a local produce market on Saturdays. The center also started to experiment with the production of an alternative flour, high in nutrients, composed of garden greens, eggshells, and seeds; and promoted preventive health care by weighing and monitoring children aged 0 to 5 and by offering nutrition classes to expectant mothers.

The most innovative activity, though, was the introduction of *cestas da cidadania*, or citizenship food baskets, which combined food distribution with job creation. The community elected a food distribution council of ten residents. The council then surveyed households to identify 100 of the most destitute. Next the council did some comparison shopping and, with funds and a borrowed truck provided by the Sindicato de Bancários, purchased rice, beans, canned meat, sugar, manioc flour, and other staples. The food was packed in 35-kilo baskets and sold to residents for $20, about 50 percent less than if purchased on the retail market. The 100 neediest families purchased citizenship baskets for $8 each. The $800 generated from this sale was then channeled into minimum salaries for the 11 instructors and workers involved in the community production activities. The idea was to use the $2,000 provided each month from outside donations to purchase supplemental food for 100 families and use it to provide jobs and generate local income.

To expand economic opportunity at the Lixão, the community association also worked to strengthen the local cooperative of trash collectors and implement a recycling program. The Sindicato de Bancários helped members design simple collection equipment, obtain rudimentary safety gear, and market directly the sorted cardboard, glass, and aluminum to avoid the middlemen who usually absorbed most of the profits.

The committee also found the time and resources to expand beyond this one community, offering a preventive health-care program that benefited over 17,000 infants from 7 towns; planting 10 organic vegetable gardens throughout the Federal District; hosting seminars on food security involving citizens' committees of half a dozen of the most important government agencies; and offering a prize, the *Premio Betinho da Cidadania*, for alternative community development projects.

bers of Brazilians suffering from chronic hunger, it also showed where they lived. Over half of the 32 million were in the northeast region; 43 percent of the total lived in the countryside where the nation's food supply was grown, while much of the rest formed an urban underclass living on the streets or in the *favelas,* or shantytowns, of the country's bulging megacities. A second hunger map drawn up by the NGO INESC (1994), showed that some 36,400 Indians, or 28 percent of the nation's indigenous population, suffered from persistent food shortages. Other statistics showed that Brazil produced more than enough to feed itself—2.8 kilos per capita daily. The record 1993 harvest of grains alone yielded 70 million tons of rice, beans, corn, soy, and wheat. One of the problems, a study by the São Paulo State agricultural agency suggested, lay in the $5.3 billion of foodstuffs wasted from problems in handling, storage, and transportation.

With the national spotlight on hunger, local committees formed to tackle the problem in their communities. These committees varied tremendously in composition and focus, reflecting the different constituencies within civil society—including churches, unions, professional associations, businessmen's groups, neighborhood organizations, NGOs, and schools—that set them up. Despite this diversity, a common plan of action evolved for most of them. Committees tended to begin by surveying the level of local need for food, jobs, housing, health care, and environmental clean-up, often with the aid of universities or research centers/NGOs. They then identified local producers and marketers of grains, meats, fruits, and garden produce. Finally, they surveyed existing service providers, including community-based efforts, private religious and secular charities, and public programs. When this profile was complete, committees would establish priorities and support initiatives most likely to

Although the committee's food distribution, training, and job creation activities resemble traditional charity, they incorporate several innovations. First, the efforts mobilized and brought together an impressive number of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The citizens' committee, with a nucleus of 10 members, mobilized more than 500 bank employees, businessmen, community leaders, housewives, and even Scouts to participate in the activities at Lixão. Second, the assistance was locally generated with minimal administrative overhead. Third, the food baskets were sold rather than given away in order to foster financial self-sufficiency through viable productive activities. Last, the activities were carried out with minimal interference from outside promoters and followed a long-term strategy whose goal was to empower the local community and consolidate its leadership.

BILL GARRISON

Members of the Lixão community outside of Brasília demonstrate how to make highly nutritional flour consisting of eggshells, garden greens, and seeds.

reach the poor. The final plan of action varied, but often involved raising funds for an existing private project, prodding local governments to work more effectively, or even designing and implementing a brand-new program for distributing food and creating jobs. The effort of one committee to combat hunger among trash collectors in the capital of Brasilia is profiled in the box on page 42.

Among the most unexpected organizers of committees were the employees of State-run corporations and public agencies. Criticized in the past for their high salaries and perks, large numbers of civil servants from as many as 33 different agencies organized committees to pool their own funds and labor, find new ways of harnessing idle institutional resources, and cut red tape to reach the poor. The two most significant participants were Brazil's largest State bank, Banco do Brasil, with 2,000 employee committees, and the government's savings bank, the Caixa Econômica Federal, with 1,800. Employee committees from these two major banking institutions and their branches raised millions of dollars through fund-raising drives and played a key role in monitoring government financing for local social programs.

Many of these efforts by civil servants led to pathbreaking public/private cooperation. The national petroleum company, PETROBRAS, converted dry oil wells in the drought-stricken northeast into water sources for destitute families. Furnas Centrais Elétricas, a regional utility, used the vast reservoirs of its nine dams as fish farms to feed the hungry and ceded large tracts of lake-side land to small-scale farmers to grow crops. The national agricultural research agency EMBRAPA provided land, staff researchers donated their labor and technical skills, a municipal government loaned tractors, and businessmen donated the seeds to grow 200 tons of rice for distribution in Goiás State. EMBRATEL, the government's communications agency, used one of its fixed-orbital satellites to beam televised training programs to health promoters throughout the country.

Other sectors also rallied around the Campaign. The rectors of Brazil's major universities signed a statement during their annual convention in 1993 pledging institutional support. Business groups, despite initial skepticism, began to pitch in. An association of young socially minded entrepreneurs, Pensamento Nacional da Bases Empresariais, participated actively in the Campaign's national coordinating bodies and helped

launch the nation's first food bank in São Paulo. The American Chambers of Commerce in Brazil, representing some of the country's largest corporations, started an educational drive to support the Campaign and honored Betinho with an award for his compelling leadership role in the Campaign.

Even Brazilians living overseas in the United States, Europe, and Japan started committees. The Washington, D.C. committee, for instance, was formed by several graduate students, the branch manager of Banco do Brasil, a housewife, a Catholic friar, the owner of a small business, a Brazilian air force colonel, and a human rights activist. This committee arranged for 2.5 tons of used clothing to be shipped to Brazil on air force flights; raised more than $3,000 in individual contributions; cosponsored musical benefits to raise other money; and hosted a Washington visit by Betinho to attend high-level meetings at the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

But perhaps the most visible, and arguably the most vital, support came from the Brazilian media and from the country's leading artists and sports figures who helped publicize the Campaign. Advertising agencies designed logos for the Campaign, and produced more than 20 compelling television ads like the one described in the opening of this article. Major newspapers such as *Jornal do Brasil* and *Folha de São Paulo* covered the Campaign in depth. Eight major dailies, with a circulation exceeding two million readers, became directly involved, promoting food donations by including a supermarket bag in their Sunday editions near Christmas. The "Natal Sem Fome" drive, patterned on a similar effort by *The Washington Post,* generated over 1,000 tons of nonperishable foodstuffs and $130,000 in cash donations.

Television, the only medium to reach every corner of the country, was key. Nearly 85 percent of Brazilians responding to a national survey said they first learned of the Citizens' Campaign through TV. Several of the most widely viewed networks, including Globo, Bandeirantes, and Manchete, aired promos and carried extensive news coverage. Globo alone contributed an estimated $5 million worth of free air time during the first six months of the Citizens' Campaign.

Many of those promos featured Brazil's best-known soap-opera actors and pop-music singers and composers, who also donated their time and talents to several televised "superstar galas" promoting the Campaign. The most popular ads were one-minute spots by three internationally acclaimed musicians—Tom Jobim, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil. During the first five months of the Campaign in 1993, more than 500 stage and television actors and musicians participated in the Semana da Arte Contra a Fome, which produced hundreds of benefit plays and shows in Rio de Janeiro theaters. In lieu of tickets, audience members signed "citizenship contracts" pledging a monthly payment to support designated charitable institutions that cared for more than 2,000 poor children. Brazil's soccer stars also kicked in, promoting matches called "Fome de Bola," or Hunger for Football, that charged a canned good or package of dried rice for admission. World Cup-star Romario donated 50 autographed jerseys for auction.

Thanks to this widespread media coverage, the Citizens' Campaign generated an unprecedented level of public interest and support as evidenced by a nationwide survey carried out by IBOPE, one of Brazil's leading polling agencies. IBOPE reported in July 1994 that 68 percent of Brazilians had heard about the Citizens' Campaign and that 90 percent said they felt the initiative was worthwhile. Further, the survey found that a surprising 30 percent or 28 million persons contributed money or supplies to the Campaign and that approximately 3 million persons participated actively in local hunger committees.

While local committees of the Citizens' Campaign were energizing the public, identifying and promoting a groundswell of private philanthropy, leaders of civil society were working with President Franco's national food security council, CONSEA, to coordinate participation by the State. The Council consisted of nine cabinet ministers and 21 prominent citizens, including businessmen, union officials, religious leaders, university rectors, and NGO activists. D. Mauro Morelli, bishop of the Duque de Caxias diocese and one of the country's most socially active Catholic clerics, was appointed executive secretary. CONSEA's daily operations were carried out by an executive secretariat tied directly to the Office of the Presidency.

Ostensibly, CONSEA's role was to coordinate the combined action of 17 government social programs with an annual budget of some $8.4 billion. President Franco requested that each ministry submit concrete plans for how it could integrate its activities with the Citizens' Campaign. During its first year of operations, CONSEA met monthly, and both Betinho and Morelli worked closely with the Ministers of Agriculture, Social Welfare, and Planning to streamline government regulations and give priority to the emergency food relief provided by the agency in charge, CONAB, and by supporting programs from other agencies.

Despite President Franco's frequent public support, CONSEA was inadequately funded, and had to rely on the national secretariat of the Citizens' Campaign for infrastructure support. Programmatic funding also did not always materialize, and when it did, implementation sometimes fell short of expectations. Nonetheless, CONSEA did have an important impact while President Franco was in office. It ensured that several national food and nutrition programs were implemented properly, without the usual waste and fraud. These included:

- Effective decentralization and full funding of the Ministry of Education's Programa Nacional de Merenda Escolar to ensure that school meals fed 10 million children daily in 330 municipalities;
- Modification of a national milk distribution program, Leite e Saúde, by linking it to health services provided by 200 municipal governments working with citizens from newly created community councils, reaching more than one million children and expectant mothers;
- Close consultation with the Ministry of Labor, businesses, labor unions, and other public agencies to design and implement an employee lunch program that was adopted by 45 companies and benefited approximately 8 million workers;
- Reactivation after a five-year hiatus of the land distribution program run by the federal agrarian reform agency INCRA, allowing President Franco to sign 85 decrees giving 552,000 hectares to some 100,000 impoverished farm families; and

MARCELO DE OLIVEIRA/IMAGENS DA TERRA

To generate awareness while raising money for the Citizens' Campaign Against Hunger and Poverty and For Life, members of a cooperative in Jacarepagua, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro, manufactured sandals with the Campaign's logo.

- Overhaul of the emergency-food-relief program PRODEA to the drought-stricken northeast by increasing the *cesta básica*, or basic food basket, from 15 to 25 kilos; having farm products processed locally to cut spoilage and generate jobs; boosting targeted municipalities from 706 to 1,162; and enlisting the army to secure food parcels during transportation and distribution. As a result, 250,000 tons of foodstuffs reached more than 2 million hungry families, more quickly, cheaply, and safely than ever before.

Phase Two: The Drive for Jobs

The first phase of the Citizens' Campaign focused on hunger, and it captured the public's imagination. By early 1994, the Campaign's leadership added a second priority to its banner—Food against Hunger, Jobs against Poverty. Betinho explained the connection succinctly: "People with salaries can feed themselves and begin to exercise their own rights as citizens." He also acknowledged that moving beyond the task of distributing food to address the structural causes of poverty was a larger, more difficult challenge.

Campaign organizers once again worked with government agencies to provide the statistical data to gauge the depth of the problem and plan strategies for attacking it. The State's leading statistical agency, IBGE, prepared a study. Its *Mapa do Mercado de Trabalho* (1994) revealed that 20 million Brazilians (equivalent to the population of Peru) have inadequate employment: three million are jobless, 12 million earn less than $70 per month, and 5 million are children or women who work without wages. The study identified 1.9 million youth between 10 and 13 in the labor market, and found 31 million workers in the informal economy who lack access to social security and government health care.

Drawing up effective short-term strategies to meet this problem was as daunting as predicted. Most local committees found it much harder to create jobs than to gather and distribute food. Nonetheless, a number of them, including the brick-masons of Shangri-la featured in the box on page 46, found ways to create jobs while feeding their community. Other novel and home-grown efforts at job creation and income generation sprouted up throughout Brazil. Most of these adopted one or more of the following five strategies:

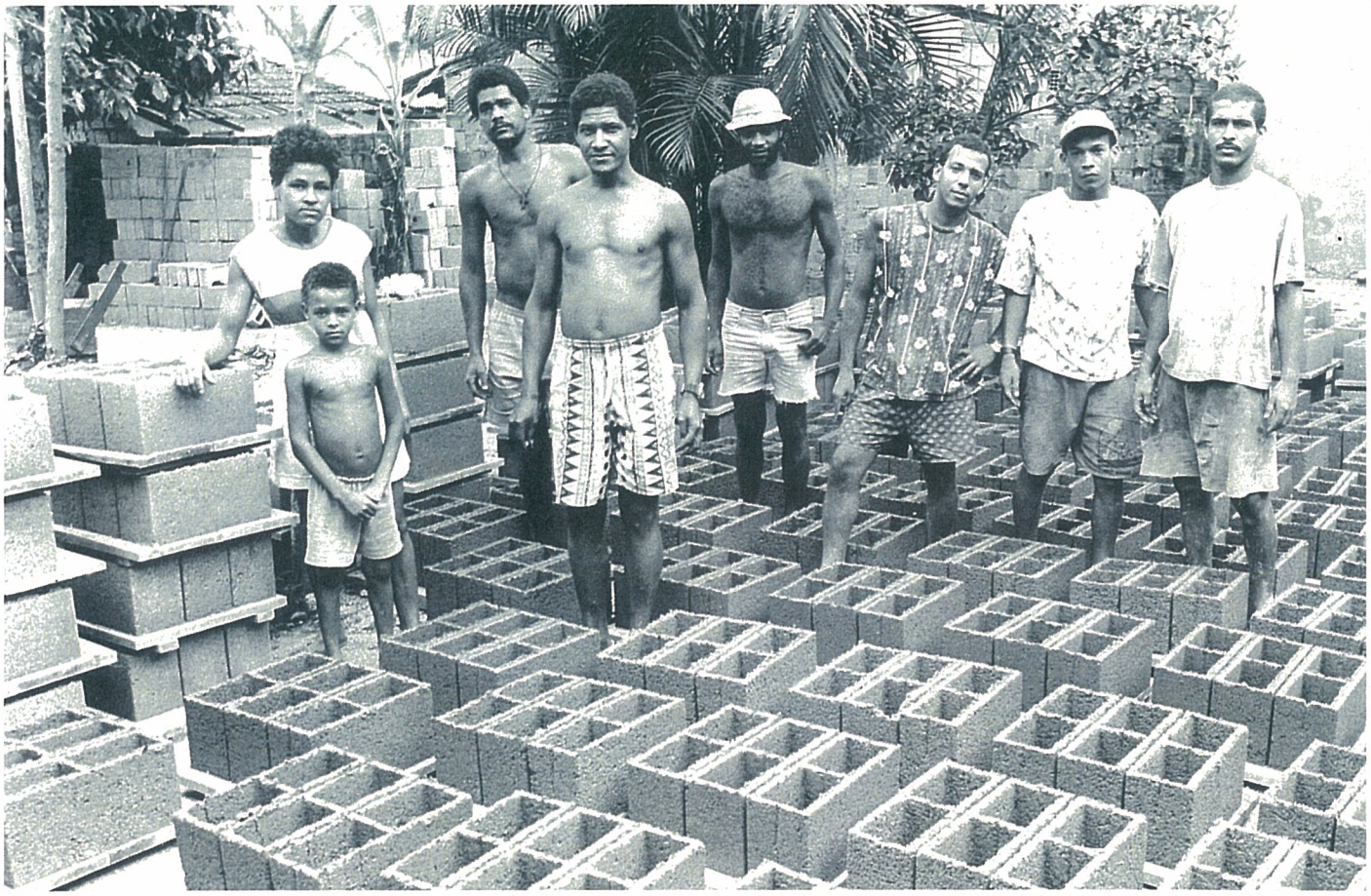
- Private-sector and government vocational programs to provide on-the-job training to youth;
- Establishment of community bakeries, trash recycling centers, and handicraft cooperatives in the favelas;
- Creation of microenterprise credit funds;
- Support for adult literacy classes and cooperative day-care centers; and/or
- Emergency public-works programs and job-information clearinghouses.

Newly elected President Cardoso has disbanded CONSEA, but he is instituting a new social action program and citizens' council, the Comunidade Solidaria, to promote civic action and has named the First Lady, an accomplished anthropologist, as its chair. The Citizens' Campaign and its secretariat continue to operate and have added a third priority—access to land—to their efforts to combat hunger and generate jobs.

The Brickmakers of Shangri-la

Members of the Cooperativa Habitacional Jardim Shangri-la pose with some of the bricks they produced. Residents of this favela, or shantytown, pooled their resources and time to construct homes and renovate the local community center in one of the most successful job-creation and self-help housing initiatives in the second phase of the Citizens' Campaign.

The only resemblance the favela of Jardim Shangri-la has to the fabled utopian city of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* is its name. Like other slum communities in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro, it is a haphazard cluster of small shacks made of scrap lumber and cardboard, with no run-



MARCELO DE OLIVEIRA/IMAGENS DA TERRA

Leadership Role of NGOs

NGOs participated in every facet of the Campaign from providing national leadership and carrying out applied research on food security issues to organizing local Citizens' Action Committees and even raising funds. IBASE, for instance, raised over a million dollars from banks, airlines, and private-sector companies for channeling to local hunger committees and community self-help projects. The Instituto de Estudos da Religião (ISER), which has been conducting innovative research on social philanthropy financed by the IAF and others to broaden the base of development funding, built on the contacts it has made with assistential, church-based charities to help create a small projects fund, the Fundo Inter-Religioso. This truly ecumenical effort brought together the Catholic archdiocese, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and others to channel more than a half million dollars raised through individual contributions into citizens' committees in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro. ISER also produced videos and published studies to help other organizations build on what it is learning.

The Instituto de Estudos, Formação e Assessoria em Políticas Sociais (POLIS), a leading NGO in São Paulo, provided organizational assistance to the State-level Citizens' Action Committee and disseminated a booklet on production of alternative foods. The most visible NGO presence in the Campaign though was the head of IBASE, Herbert "Betinho" de Souza. The Inter-American Foundation granted Betinho a Dante B. Fascell Inter-American Fellowship to disseminate his citizenship message more widely, and former President Itamar Franco nominated Betinho for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994.

The Collor impeachment movement and now the Citizens' Campaign are proof of the NGOs' newfound national civic role. First, NGOs have demonstrated the institutional

ning water or sewage, perched alongside a putrid, garbage-strewn river. Yet it was here that the Citizens' Campaign witnessed one of its most successful job creation and self-help housing initiatives in the second phase of Campaign operations.

Taking advantage of the headway generated by the local Citizens' Committee from the nearby favela of Taquara, 16 families in Jardim Shangri-la banded together to tackle long-standing community problems. For years they had fruitlessly waited for government help, but now they realized that with limited outside help and their own sweat and ingenuity, they could take effective action for themselves. They established the Cooperativa Habitacional Jardim Shangri-la to upgrade their housing and generate much-needed income. Cooperative members began by holding bingos and raffles and pooling their money to buy land for a brick-making factory.

Next, they received a $7,000 grant from the Fundo Inter-Religioso, a small-projects fund operated by an ecumenical coalition of church groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to purchase a simple motor-run press to produce cement bricks and concrete slabs. Eight local residents were hired to work at the factory, which would cover their salaries from the profits of brick sales. Soon the factory was turning out 600 bricks a day. Other members of the community, including women and children, volunteered their labor on weekends to boost production and construct houses in the community. Two houses are nearing completion and will be occupied by the two families who volunteered the most hours. Architectural plans for the houses were provided by an NGO that specializes in working closely with community groups. This NGO also provided legal assistance to draft the bylaws of the cooperative.

The co-op also has used the bricks it makes to renovate the community center where meetings, sewing courses, and catechism classes are held; and residents built a 7,000-liter storage tank that supplies potable water to the community for the first time. Now, the cooperative plans to pool profits from its brick making with a small donation from the Catholic archdiocese's social service center to start a restaurant to feed poorer members of the favela and earn extra, steady income by selling pre-prepared meals to workers of nearby factories.

The experience of Jardim Shangri-la vividly portrays the remarkable accomplishments and potential of the Citizens' Campaign. With only limited outside cash donations, a good deal of volunteer labor, complementary institutional partnerships, and a newfound sense of purpose, 16 families are vitally improving their community.

capability to provide organizational and programmatic leadership on a national scale. Second, NGOs are opting for the first time ever to collaborate closely with the federal government in such a public and intense fashion. Third, the Citizens' Campaign provided NGOs an issue which was constructive and positive. NGOs have for years been stressing the need to address structural poverty while largely ignoring the plight of the hungry, and in the process having only limited impact on poverty and little penetration within society. Rubem César Fernandes, a well-known anthropologist and NGO leader states in his 1994 book *Private but Public: The Third Sector in Latin America:* "The social movements and NGOs suffered a problem of isolation by breaking with traditional forms of self-help and assistance, and creating a nonintentional distance with the impoverished majority...." Paradoxically, the Citizens' Campaign with its food distribution activities provided NGOs with a proactive stance and a universally accepted theme which has gained them growing acceptance and influence in Brazilian society.

Overall, the flexing of political muscle on the national level was unprecedented for NGOs who, up to now, were not considered important actors on the national scene, despite a widespread recognition of their impressive growth at the grassroots level. In fact, analysts have wondered for years why the promising grassroots democratization work carried out by NGOs throughout the country had no apparent impact on politics at the national level. The impeachment movement and antipoverty campaign movements were quite successful and may well have addressed that lingering question.

Shifting Paradigms and the Future of Civic Action

In Brazil, as in Latin America, no one expects poverty to end tomorrow. The Citizens' Campaign and the NGOs who have helped lead it, however, may be changing the terms of the debate. First, the Campaign has helped strengthen the notion of local responsibility. Average citizens were encouraged to form and run their own committees democratically in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. As a Campaign brochure remarked jocosely, turning the centralized logic of traditional left-wing movements on its ear: "There is no central committee; each committee is central." This strategy also had its practical side; it minimized corruption in the handling of funds and the power struggles that often plague partisan, bureaucratically led movements. It also had a long-range benefit in mind. Decentralization encouraged states and municipalities to take a more active role and respond to their local citizenry rather than wait for instructions from far-off Brasilia.

Second, by challenging committees to take the initiative, a host of new ideas and approaches for alleviating hunger and generating jobs surfaced from the local level. It also generated hundreds of millions of dollars in new financial, material, and labor resources that helped put to rest the myth that Brazil is too poor a country to address its underlying social problems or that citizens have to wait for the government before they can act.

Third, by building on the nonpartisan nature of the Ethics in Politics Movement that preceded it, the Citizens' Campaign brought together diverse individuals and organizations to forge unlikely partnerships that would have been barely conceivable a year before—charitable organizations and

NGOs, business groups and labor unions, Catholics and Afro-Brazilian spiritists, students and military officers. An interesting phenomenon—the role of social philanthropy in the forging of political dialogue—thus emerged within the Campaign and could have wider implications for Brazilian society as a whole.

Fourth, the Citizens' Campaign suggests that the reflexive ideological polarization stemming from the Cold War no longer offers solutions to today's pressing problems. Citizens' Campaign leaders were no longer willing to ask the hungry to fill their stomachs with promises of tomorrow's structural solutions. Betinho, among others, is articulating a new social ethics rooted in individual responsibility for community problems. Traditional acts of charity and kindness take on a new perspective. Betinho has said that "the soul of hunger is political," and the best way for society to come to grips with the ethical nature of poverty is for as many people as possible to engage in small but meaningful acts of solidarity. Several million Brazilians now know personally that the poor are not faceless—and a growing number are beginning to realize through firsthand experience that the poor can be active partners in their own and the country's development.

This perspective tries to bring economic and social development into closer balance. As Betinho stated in a recent address to the United Nations, "Economic development only makes sense when it contributes to social well-being." On the other hand, Citizens' Campaign organizers are beginning to question social development theories that stress community empowerment but ignore the role of the market in generating wealth. For this reason, NGO leaders in the Campaign do not see the effort as a compensatory attempt to ease recessionary structural adjustment policies prescribed by multilateral banks, but as part of an economic growth strategy that builds strong communities while lowering inflation and creating jobs.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Citizens' Campaign, though, was in the political arena. The Campaign was credited with bringing to the nation's attention the unmistakable presence of poverty and linking it to the issue of democracy. Fernandes writes in his book on the Third Sector that "The expansion of citizenship to break down the invisible lines of social apartheid [dividing the poor from the rest of society] is the largest challenge facing democracy in the region." In short, unless poverty is dealt with, democracy is constantly threatened.

The Citizens' Campaign further suggests that civil society, which NGOs have struggled for nearly two decades to extend and strengthen, is the key to making democracy work and alleviating poverty. Author Jorge Castaneda (1994), in his survey of Latin America following the Cold War, sees it as part of a much larger tide that includes the surge of grassroots civic movements across the continent from the self-governing *pueblos jóvenes* of Peru to the pro-democracy movements in Chile, Haiti, and Mexico. This renewal of reliance on the power of citizenship to inspire broad-based civic action also echoes proposals by a new generation of African-American intellectuals in the United States. Breaking down old divisions of left and right, thinkers such as Cornell West and Glen Loury advocate "citizen-based commonality as a means of overcoming differences in race and class" to find more effective ways of overcoming poverty. This sense of citizenship is a potent new force in Brazil and offers an antidote to the long-pervasive presence of the State in all facets of daily life. It holds out a vision of self-reliant citizens, vibrant local communities, and a more-responsive government.

Although there are no exact figures due to the very decentralized nature of the Citizens' Action Campaign, it was estimated that 16 million destitute persons received food, clothing, health care, and jobs. The Campaign revealed not only the national leadership role of NGOs, but the enormous reservoir of material and human resources available for poverty alleviation within Brazilian society. Further, the Campaign was inclusive and broad-based in its approach, forging effective partnerships among previously divergent groups.

Whatever the final outcome of the Citizens' Campaign, most analysts agree that after its success it will be much more difficult to pursue social and economic development initiatives in Brazil while ignoring the plight of the nation's 32 million indigent people. Even if the Citizens' Campaign itself does not meet its high expectations, its very existence signifies the awakening of a grassroots civic culture which may finally impel Brazil to adopt broad-based and inclusive development policies. ■

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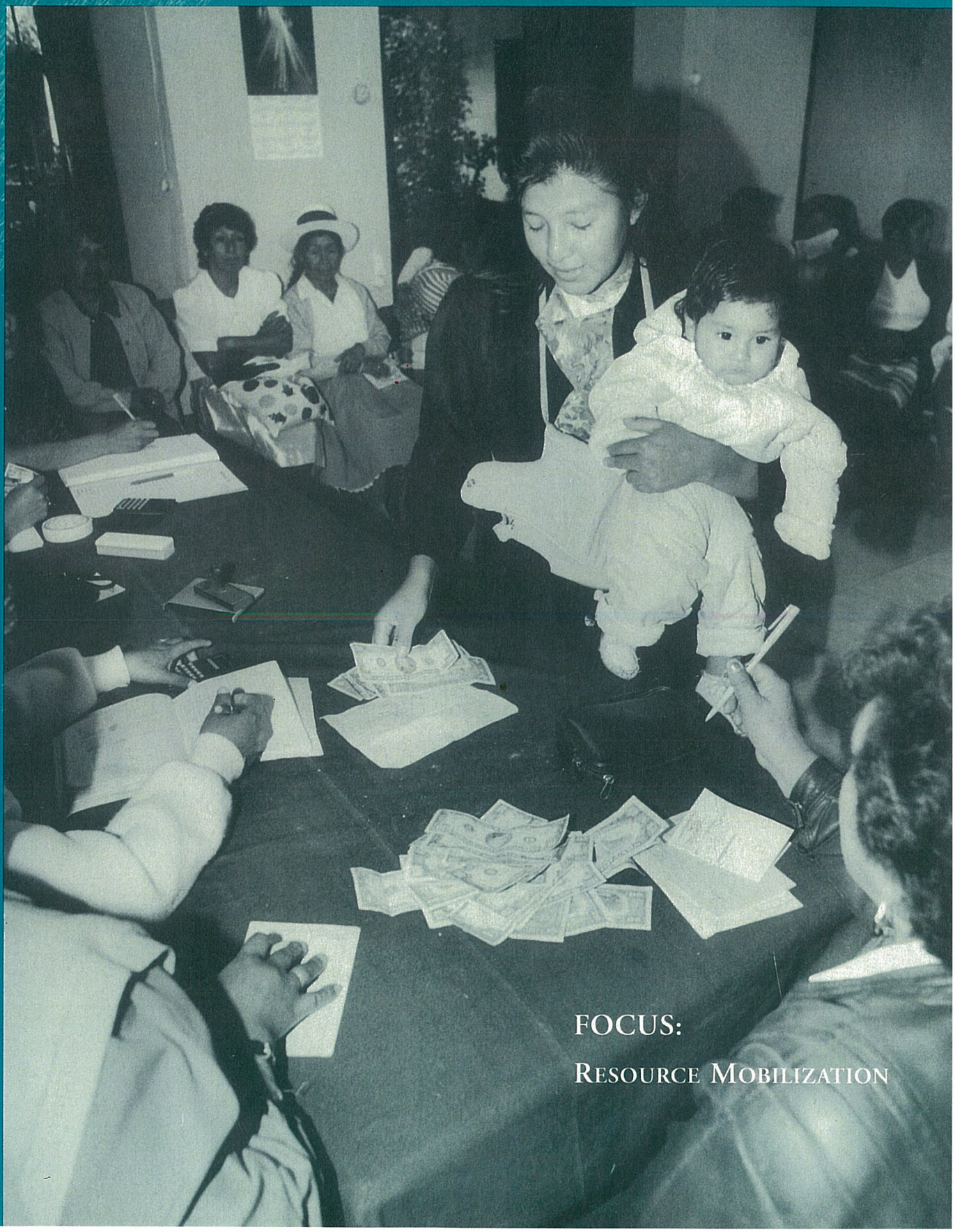

FOCUS:
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The Inter-American Foundation, which was created by the U.S. Government in 1969, provides direct financial support for self-help efforts initiated by poor people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Foundation makes about 200 grants a year to support projects carried out in more than 25 countries. Approximately 80 percent of its funds are appropriated by Congress. The remainder comes from funds derived through the Social Progress Trust Fund.

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