

Change Stories

Belo Horizonte, Brazil



Since the 1990s, Belo Horizonte has implemented innovative policies that have addressed **food insecurity**. The success of these programs can be attributed to the **robust and intersectoral institutionalization of policies** and to **continuous public pressure and social mobilization**. However, despite many successes, these policies have not managed to **overcome historically consolidated inequities** at the intersections of race, class, and gender. This illustrated guide tells the change story of Belo Horizonte's fight for food sovereignty and security.

Meet our guide, Susana

Susana is a mother, grassroots organizer, and educator in her community, a peripheral neighborhood in Belo Horizonte.

Susana is an active member of the **municipal council** as a representative of the school meals council that advises the government on food security.

In her community, she leads **popular education programs** on urban agriculture.

Welcome to
Belo Horizonte!



A "production unit" in Susana's neighborhood



Belo Horizonte and the Serra do Curral Mountain Range



Our city sits at the base of the Serra do Curral mountains.

Belo Horizonte is the **third largest city in Brazil** with 2.3 million residents within the city boundaries and more than 5.7 million residents in the metropolitan area. Belo Horizonte has undergone **significant transformations over the past 30 years**, marked by demographic shifts, socio-economic developments, and political changes.

A central challenge facing Belo Horizonte during these transformations is **food insecurity**.

Over half of the residents are **food insecure**.



Food insecurity is shaped by social inequalities, including **class, race and gender**, and has impacts on **health, wellbeing, and social mobility**.

Food insecurity by gender

63% Women
52% Men

Food insecurity by race

68% Black
57% Brown
51% White

Causes of food insecurity



Poverty



High food prices



Rapid urbanization and inadequate infrastructure



Inequitable access to land tenure



People are creative with where and how they grow food, like on this corner.

However, while we celebrate this, it is also reflective of a system that fails many people.

In the early **1990s**, the **new federal constitution** that emerged from **redemocratization** was paired with **social mobilization**, resulting in the development of **innovative city policies** tackling food insecurity in Belo Horizonte.

The food security policies operate on 3 pillars:

1 Market regulation to supply healthy foods at low cost in all regions of the city through physical spaces (ABC markets and farmer's markets).



ABC supermarkets sell produce at regulated prices

2 Promotion of family and urban agriculture on "production units" that are supported by the municipality. There are 59 registered spaces and 373 registered farmers (60% women).

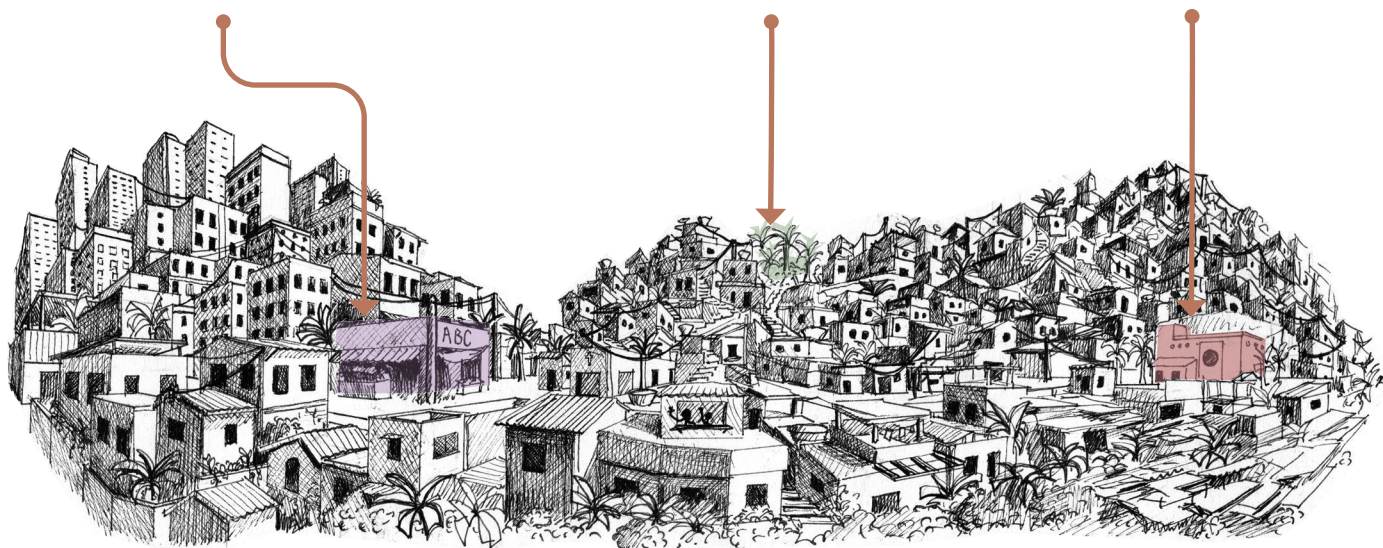


"Production units" are cultivation spaces that aim to produce healthy food, generate income and promote sustainable local development

3 Direct provision of subsidized meals in the "People's Restaurants" (free, municipally-subsidized restaurant), school meals, food assistance and a food bank.



School meals are provided for free



People from **grassroots movements**, like Susana, play a significant role in addressing hunger in their communities and the **municipality's coordination with these groups** is key to the policies' success.



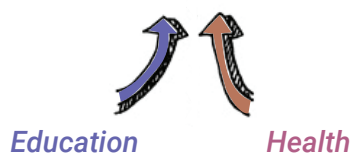
Our gardens also grow food for the schools.

There are **many reasons** for Belo Horizonte's food security policies success, including:

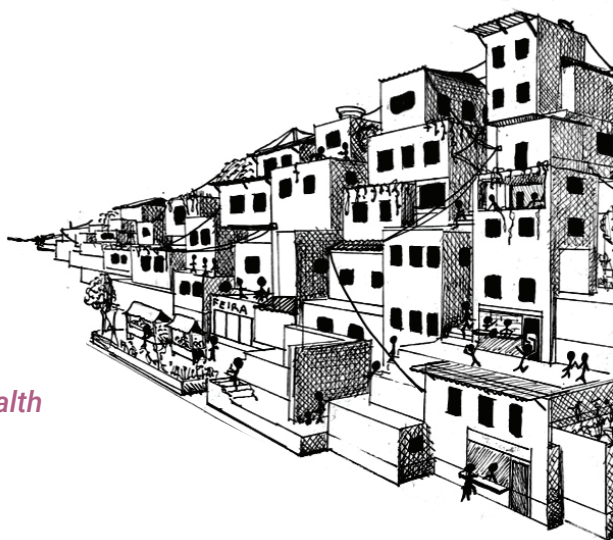


Access to adequate food is recognized as a fundamental right

Food sovereignty



Confluence of political agendas



Public pressure and social mobilization



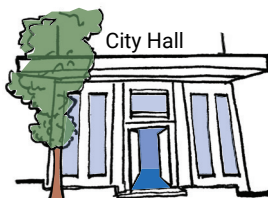
Public education about production and consumption of healthy food



Formal political structures (e.g. municipal council) for public participation in decision-making



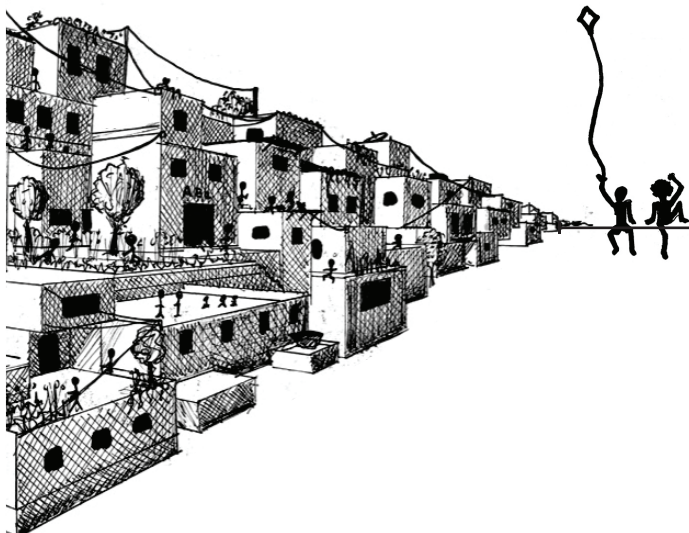
Highly qualified and conscious technical staff at the municipal department



Food security initiatives are predominantly publicly administered, not outsourced



Belo Horizonte's policies inspired the federal "Zero Hunger" policy and other international policies, which in turn helped sustain Belo Horizonte's programs



Belo Horizonte's policies had an impact far beyond our city.

However, despite the policies' widespread success, they are not **distributed equally**. The policies have not overcome **historically consolidated inequities** at the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Class

Extremely vulnerable populations can access resources, but those a little less vulnerable (e.g., working population with a minimum salary) are not sufficiently considered in the policies.

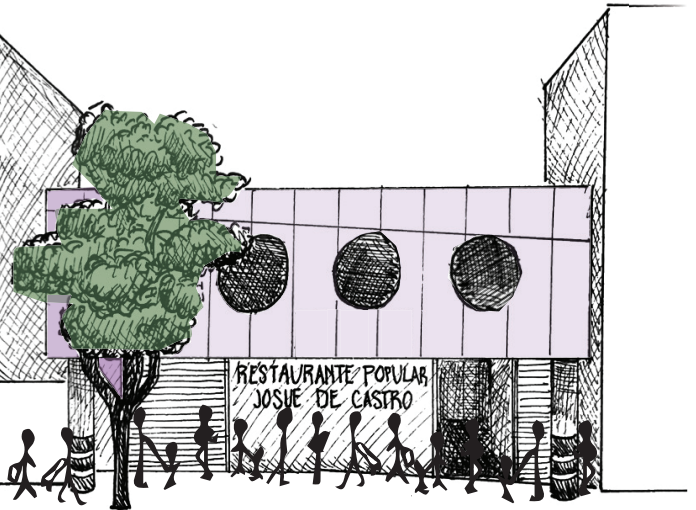
"Who is Hungry is in a Hurry"

Slow implementation of policies and insufficient balance between structural and immediate policy action hurts the most vulnerable residents. *Cozinhas solidarias* (solidarity kitchens) have emerged as a community-driven initiative to fill this gap.



A Solidarity Kitchen in a peripheral neighborhood

The food policies brought Belo Horizonte national and international **recognition** as a pioneer in tackling food insecurity, but instrumental **community actors** have not been **sufficiently recognized**.



While the "People's Restaurant II" has a big impact, it is located in the city center, which can be hard for many peripheral residents to access.

Location

The food security initiatives are primarily located in central areas.



I often have to take a bus and travel far to access many of the services.

Mobility

Subsidized supermarkets are located on traffic intense avenues accessible by car and not necessarily by foot and public transport (which is the predominant transportation of women and the elderly).

Fractured Coordination

Instability (especially on the federal and state levels) hinder political support and there is insufficient integration of social movement demands in municipal public policy.

We must lift up the voices of Black, peripheral women in Belo Horizonte's **Change Story** to understand the full picture of these policies.





CHANGE STORIES

Change Stories is an international research partnership that aims to **spark dialogue and learning** through storytelling about **sustainable urban development**.

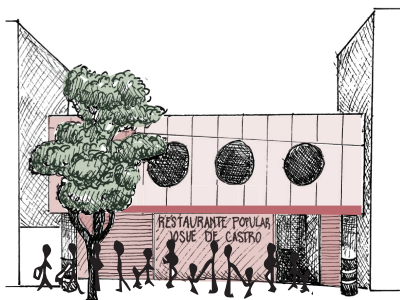


The project's vision is to **shift the paradigm of how we tell stories** about successful **urban change & who tells them**, leading cities to develop deeply contextual solutions that support **health, sustainability, equity & wellbeing**.

Three case study cities demonstrate sustainable urban development that meet the needs of marginalized groups. Using **participatory and ethnographic methods** we are exploring these “**change stories**” and the context in which the transformation occurred.

Belo Horizonte Brazil

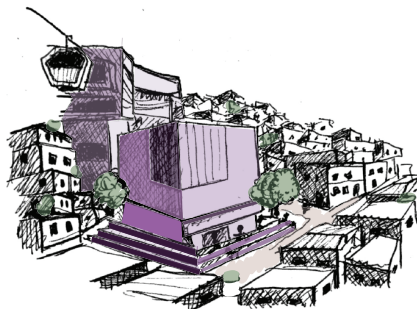
The Belo Horizonte case explores trajectories towards guaranteeing food and nutritional security, analyzing the interactions between urban governance and social mobilization in the development, maintenance and expansion of food security policies in the city.



A “People’s Restaurant” in Belo Horizonte

Bogotá Colombia

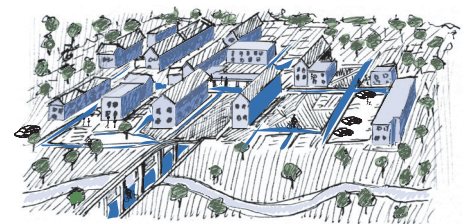
The Bogotá case explores a public care system, which operates mainly through *Manzanas del Cuidado* (Care Blocks) and asks how, in a patriarchal culture, the needs of unpaid female caregivers receive resource priority.



A “Care Block” in Bogotá

Belfast Northern Ireland

The Belfast case focuses on housing and asks how, in the context of recent sectarianism and segregation, have communities in Belfast been successful at bringing about significant change for marginalized residents, despite low input from government.



Plan for social housing in Belfast

Connect with us!



<https://changestories.be.uw.edu/>



@changestories.bsky.social



@change_stories_



@Change Stories



@Change Stories

References

- Belik, Walter (2012). A política brasileira de segurança alimentar e nutricional: concepção e resultados. *Segur Aliment E Nutr.* 19: 94–110.
- Braga, A. S. C. (2019). A política de segurança alimentar e nutricional no município de Belo Horizonte: a inserção do nutricionista em uma política pública local. Belo Horizonte: Fundação João Pinheiro, Administração Pública.
- Ferreira K. M. S. et al. (2024). Interseccionalidade e insegurança alimentar em favelas de Belo Horizonte. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública.* In press.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2024). Censo Brasileiro de 2022. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE.
- PBH (2024). Women are the majority in urban agriculture in Belo Horizonte. <https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/noticias/mulheres-sao-maioria-na-agricultura-urbana-em-belo-horizonte>.
- Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte (2019). Política Municipal de Segurança Alimentar. Belo Horizonte: Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte.
- Rocha, C., Lessa, I. (2009). Urban Governance for Food Security: The Alternative Food System in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. *International Planning Studies*, 14(4): 389-400.
- Salles-Costa, R. et al. (2022). Sistemas alimentares, fome e insegurança alimentar e nutricional no Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FIOCRUZ.
- Teixeira, M. A. et al. (2022). Retrato de situação de segurança alimentar em Belo Horizonte. Food for Justice Working Paper Series - número 6. https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/37247.2/WP_%236.2.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed.

Notes

Race is used in this report instead of ethnicity, consistent with the source used to measure the intersectional effect of food insecurity, Teixeira et al., 2022.

Citation

Haakenstad, M., Collins, L., Borde, E., Carnavalli Rocha, S., Ferreira, K., Teixeira Caiaffa, W., Pineo, H. (2025). *Graphic Summary of the Change Stories in Belo Horizonte*. Seattle, University of Washington: The Change Stories.

Production

Illustrations and Design: Lydia Collins

We are thankful to the community-based organizations we collaborate with and our interviewees from local social movements, civil society, and Belo Horizonte city hall for their experiences and the invaluable information they shared with us.

Partners



This work was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Get to know the project!



**CHANGE
STORIES**

