



# Christian Aid Brazil: three decades working with social movements

An exit learning review

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Research  
& Evidence

### Acknowledgements:

This research report was written by Kas Sempere, with contributions and recommendations by the Christian Aid Brazil team and from Kate Newman, Karen Brock and Suzanne Fisher-Murray, who are all members of Christian Aid's Research, Evidence and Learning team.

## Christian Aid Brazil staff



Former staff at a meeting in Salvador de Bahia (2007). From left to right: Thomas Dunmore, Alexandre Menezes, Mara Luz, Domingos Armani, Alonso Roberts and Andy Croggon. Domingos Armani, Mara Luz, Alexandre Menzes and Thomas Dunmore coordinated the Brazil programme from London from 1984-2007. Mara, Alexandre (and Paulo Barasioli and Sarah Roure) were the country managers based in Brazil between 2007 and 2020. Alonso Roberts, Wendy Tindale, Carolyn Williams, Andy Croggon and Mara Luz all managed the Christian Aid Latin American regional programme at different times until 2020.



Current and former staff at the Christian Aid Brazil closure event (March 2020). From left to right: Marcos Lopes (Senior Economic Justice Advisor Latin America), Helda Abumansur (former Regional Assistant for Christian Aid in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)), Christina Takatsu Winnischofer (Brazil Finance Officer), Sarah Roure (Brazil Country Manager), Mara Luz (former Head of Division LAC), Leonardo Godoy (Project Assistant LAC), Rosana Miranda (Brazil Programme Officer), Sheila Tanaka (Brazil Programme Officer), Marta Rodrigues da Silva (Cleaner) and Leonardo Martins (former Regional Assistant LAC).

Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. We are a global movement of people, churches and local organisations who passionately champion dignity, equality and justice worldwide. We are the changemakers, the peacemakers, the mighty of heart.

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**Cover:** Communities marching to demand compensation after a dam near Brumadinho in Minas Gerais state collapsed on 25 January 2019 killing 270 people and destroying homes and farmland. Christian Aid worked with partners to provide food and clean water to affected families and to support them to negotiate compensation from Vale, the Brazilian multinational corporation which owned the dam. Photo credit: Christian Aid/Rodrigo Zaim Rua Foto Coletivo.

## List of abbreviations, acronyms and partner organisations cited in the report

CEDLA	Center of Studies for Labour and Agricultural Development
CONIC	National Council of Christian Churches
CPI	Pro-Indigenous Commission of São Paulo
DFID	UK Department for International Development (renamed in 2020 as FCDO: the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office)
IEAB	Episcopal Anglican Church
INESC	Institute for Socioeconomic Studies
Koinonia	Koinonia Ecumenic Presence and Service
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MAB	Movement of People Affected by Hydroelectric Dams
MST	Landless People's Movement
SOF	Sempreviva Organização Feminista (Sempreviva Feminist Organisation)

## Executive summary

Christian Aid started working in Brazil, a middle-income country with stark inequalities, in 1984. It aimed to transform the root causes of inequality by working with civil society partners, including human rights organisations, faith-based organisations, and social movements.

Christian Aid Brazil closed in 2020, as part of a wider restructure of Christian Aid. This review seeks to celebrate the programme's 36 years of work, to capture learning and to share its legacy with partners, other Christian Aid programmes, and the development sector. It is one of five reviews (which also include Angola, Ghana, the Philippines and South Africa), which will be published on the research, evidence and learning section of Christian Aid's website.

This learning review explores how Christian Aid Brazil has operated within the changing social and political context of the country, briefly outlined in the Introduction. Section 1 analyses Christian Aid Brazil's partnerships with social and ecumenical movements. Section 2 introduces the operational model that Christian Aid Brazil developed, and how it contributed to the work of partners. Section 3 reflects on the challenges related to exiting the country and developing a more regional focus in the future. An analysis of Christian Aid's solidarity network, or the types of partnerships and networks that it developed with groups from around the globe, follows in the Insights and Learning section.

## Introduction: the Brazilian context and history of Christian Aid in Brazil

With 209 million people,<sup>1</sup> Brazil has the largest population of any country in the Latin American and Caribbean region. As one of the world's largest exporters of many commodities (such as coffee, soybeans and beef), Brazil is a middle-income country with stark economic inequalities. During a period of economic and social progress between 2003 and 2014, more than 29 million people were lifted out of poverty.<sup>2</sup> However, the pace of poverty reduction has stagnated since 2015.

The election of populist right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 took place in a moment of deep instability and uncertainty, which had prevailed since 2015 when a corruption crisis engulfed the government and triggered mass protests. The domestic policies of the Bolsonaro government – radical cuts in social programmes and basic services, and disregard for environmental legislation that threatens the Amazon region in particular – are severely affecting Brazil's most vulnerable groups. These groups include indigenous people, black people and Afro-descendant *quilombolas*, those displaced by dams, landless people, smallholders, the urban poor and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Bolsonaro's election

and subsequent actions have raised concerns not only in Brazil, but across the region and the world, as they have an impact on the global dynamics of conservatism, austerity and climate change.

Christian Aid started working in Brazil<sup>3</sup> in 1984 during the unsettled years that followed the end of a 21-year-long authoritarian military dictatorship (1964-1985). It didn't establish its office until 2007, during a period of relatively progressive policies of social inclusion (2002-2018). During these 36 years, Christian Aid Brazil's main objective was to transform the root causes of inequality, working with civil society partners that included human rights and faith-based organisations, and social movements.

Brazil's civil society is vibrant and well-organised, and includes a progressive ecumenical movement influenced by the Liberation Theology, a religious movement rooted in the Latin American social struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, which sought to help the poor and oppressed through involvement in political and civic affairs. However, under the current government, human rights defenders have been under attack, and the progressive ecumenical movement has been rocked by waves of social and religious ultra-conservatism.<sup>4</sup>

## Methodology

The review is based on a reading of country programme documents and online interviews by Christian Aid's research, evidence and learning adviser Dr Kas Sempere. No country visit was made due to travel restrictions caused by COVID-19.

Documents reviewed included annual reports, internal documents, programme evaluations, and webpages of Christian Aid Brazil and partners.

Interviews were carried out with five of the programme's nine final partners, and with Christian Aid Brazil staff, past and present.<sup>5</sup> The interviews were carried out at the end of April and beginning of May 2020 and had an average length of an hour. All respondents gave their informed and voluntary verbal consent to participate in the review, and for their comments to be shared publicly.

## 1. Working with social and ecumenical movements

Christian Aid Brazil is known for its outstanding and original work with Brazilian social and ecumenical movements. In this section we outline the organisation's main partners and the different challenges that they worked to tackle with Christian Aid Brazil's support.

Christian Aid Brazil worked with several Brazilian social movements and organisations:

- The Movement of People Affected by Hydroelectric Dams (MAB)
- The Landless People's Movement (MST)
- The Sempreviva Feminist Organisation (SOF)
- The Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Centre, an ecumenical, non-governmental organisation working with low-income people who are part of the housing movement, aiming to secure decent and affordable housing options for its members.

- The Pro-Indigenous Commission of São Paulo (CPI), an NGO directly involved with indigenous and *quilombola* community movements. *Quilombola* is the Brazilian word for residents living in a *quilombo*, a settlement founded by people of African origin, who were often escaped slaves.
- The National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC) and Koinonia Ecumenic Presence and Service, which are part of Brazil's ecumenical movement.

Table 1 classifies Christian Aid Brazil's partners when the programme closed in 2020. Christian Aid Brazil engaged in lengthy partnerships with mature partners, including partnerships of over 30 years with the Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Centre and the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC) and over 35 years with MST and Koinonia.

**Table 1:** Evolution of Christian Aid's 2020 portfolio of partners

Partners		Year it was founded	Year a partnership with Christian Aid Brazil was established
<b>Human rights organisations</b>	Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Centre	1988	1990
	Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC)	1979	1988-2020
<b>Social movements</b>	Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB)	Late 1970s	1995-2000 2008-2020
	Landless People's Movement (MST)	1984	1984-2020
	Sempreviva Feminist Organisation (SOF)	1980s	1997-2020
	Pro-Indigenous Commission of São Paulo (CPI)	1978	2008
<b>Faith-based organisations</b>	National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC)	1982	>20 years ago
	Episcopal Anglican Church (IEAB)	1982	2011-2020
	Koinonia Ecumenic Presence and Service (previously CEDI)	1994 (1974)	1981 <sup>6</sup> -2015 2019-2020

Source: Websites and interviews



## 1.1 Working with social movements

Many social movements in Brazil are strong, with hundreds of thousands of members. For Christian Aid Brazil, choosing to support and partner with social movements was a political and strategic decision. Developing partnerships with the movements was logistically possible as the movements Christian Aid Brazil worked with have developed organisational structures or formalised secretariats that allow them to manage projects and funds.

For instance, the Landless People's Movement (MST) represents 350,000 families across Brazil that fight to secure land rights, improve economic resilience and influence the public policies of local authorities. The Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) has also learned to respond to environmental and humanitarian emergencies in the country, such as the Amazon fires and the Brumadinho dam collapse. (See Box below for further information. For similar work on the localisation of humanitarian work, see also the Philippines exit review.)

Christian Aid Brazil's staff reflected that working with social movements brought the enormous benefit of working with larger groups of people who are pushing for structural changes to their society.

Movements require more accompaniment than NGOs, which have a clearer structure. But the added value is the mobilisation [of people] that can be generated. (Former Brazil country manager)

Working with social movements is different, neither better nor worse. It symbolises what we like to talk about around attacking the root causes [of poverty and inequality]. This work takes time, but creates profound changes... It is not that NGOs do not do this, but that their relationship

with specific populations is different. A reason why social movements are related to structural changes is that movement members become agents of change. In Brazil, poor people are poor, but have agency. (Brazil programme officer)

Despite the benefits, collaborating with social movements, which frequently had poor organisational capacity and decision-making processes, presented Christian Aid Brazil with several challenges.

We could not continue [to work] with some movements because they did not manage [projects] well. It also has to do with the demands of the donor system. We supported local indigenous organisations for a long time with church funds. They did not return the right documents to ask for a second funding tranche. Even [working with] NGOs related to movements that have some [management] structures in place is hard [for us] in comparison to traditional NGOs. They are also NGOs, but they are different. Some do not want to create hierarchies within their organisation, they do not have levels of specialisation, whereas traditional NGOs do. (Brazil country manager)

[Working with movements] has several material and logistical difficulties. They are quite fluid. There is also the difficulty of who is the partner organisation, which is not the movement, but an entity created for the movement to be sustained. The innovation capacity in movements is a bit slower. It has a larger base and the decisions are horizontal. They take time to respond. The focal points are in the communities. Changes take longer to happen; it is not a decision made by the national directorship. NGOs work more dynamically in that respect. (Brazil programme officer)

## Emergencies and social movements: a powerful mixture

When a disaster happens, emergency resources are usually channelled through humanitarian partners. Christian Aid Brazil did not have an existing humanitarian partner so it decided to work with their existing social movements to respond to two emergencies, as it recognised that this could strengthen their partner's capacity in other areas.

### 2019 Brumadinho dam collapse: emergency funds provide immediate humanitarian support and partners strengthen a social movement

In 2019 a tailings dam in Brazil suffered a catastrophic failure, leading to the death of 270 people. ACT Alliance, Christian Aid Brazil, the Koinonia Ecumenic Presence and Service and the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) worked together to offer support to 3,800 affected families. The programme provided food and 26,000 litres of clean water to affected families, as well as crucial psycho-social support. 20,000 GBP was collected through Christian Aid, and 100,000 USD from ACT Alliance was channelled through Koinonia. After the emergency, Christian Aid's continued support to MAB in the region helped ensure that the affected communities were able to participate in discussions around the emergency response, and to negotiate for compensation from Vale, the Brazilian multinational corporation that owned the dam.

## 2019 Amazon fires: emergency appeal focused on both advocacy and fundraising

The number of fires raging through the Amazon in 2019 was the highest number seen since 2010, and a 76% increase on the same period in 2018, according to National Institute for Space Research (INPE).<sup>7</sup> The fires destroyed swathes of jungle in Brazil and Bolivia, a country that also borders the Amazon rainforest. Christian Aid Brazil worked with Christian Aid Bolivia on an emergency appeal, which included both advocacy and fundraising. The appeal, which attracted over 3,500 signatures, urged the UK government to ensure that any trade and investment talks with Bolivia and Brazil safeguarded communities' rights and ecosystems.<sup>8</sup> The appeal also raised nearly 14,000 GBP, which funded MAB's activities.

However, MAB didn't approach humanitarian distribution in the same way as a typical NGO, given its history as a social movement. 'Historically, emergency funds are for family distribution. We used these resources to do that, but in a different way', said a MAB representative. '...The movement itself organised the distribution. Youth acted in communities, organising families in groups.'

As a social movement, MAB has proven that it can both mobilise people to manage emergency responses themselves, but also to develop advocacy responses to bring about greater positive changes to help communities rebuild after a disaster. Overall, working with social movements in emergency situations can add value beyond the provision of immediate humanitarian relief.

Source: Interviews

## 1.2 Working with ecumenical movements

Conservative religious groups, including the Roman Catholic church, play an important role in Brazilian politics, as do the growing Pentecostal and New Pentecostal churches. Religious conservatives have played a decisive role in shifting the Brazilian political agenda towards conservatism. Their leadership role in Bolsonaro's government has been directly related to setbacks in inclusive policies and foreign affairs, which have concerned many civil society groups and churches.<sup>9</sup>

The progressive ecumenical movement and those ascribing to liberation theology, which helped create and support popular movements during the dictatorship period, have once again become an important force to counterbalance this movement towards religious fundamentalism. Christian Aid Brazil has a long history of working with the progressive ecumenical movements (see Box below):

Our relationship with the local ecumenical forum existed before the ACT Alliance existed. We did campaigns together. Later, the ecumenical forum became the ACT Alliance forum, and Christian Aid became a member; in 2017, a Brazilian became ACT's General Secretary. In 2016, Brazil had a coup [*sic*] [when President Dilma Rousseff was impeached and replaced by the Vice President]. We wanted to demonstrate globally that there had been a coup, not a simple change

of roles, but without affecting Christian Aid politically. So, ACT became a fundamental player in advocating about this. (Brazil country manager)

The emergence of the MAB as a popular movement [owes much to the] fundamental support from the church in the 1980s. The oldest leaders have that base. We kept the faith aspect with lots of zeal, because families had ... feelings of faith, [even if they came from] different religions. It strengthened people in the movement. At that moment, the relationship with the church was very intrinsic, it helped unite a lot. (MAB representative)

In short, ecumenical movements in Brazil have historically cooperated – and continue to collaborate – with other social movements to fight for equality and human rights. Christian Aid has supported building those bridges between partners during its time in Brazil:

The solidarity model offers an opportunity for partners to... help produce things together, and to work with the ecumenical movement in the area of religious fundamentalisms. (Brazil programme officer)

Christian Aid helped us to have a stronger relationship with the more protestant ecumenical movement. This complemented the relationship that we already had with liberation theology since the 1970s. (SOF representative)<sup>10</sup>

## Ecumenical movements in an era of religious fundamentalisms

Since Jair Bolsonaro's election in 2018, Brazil's ecumenical movement has been concerned about his strong opposition to human rights defenders in Brazil today. The ecumenical movement, in collaboration with Christian Aid, has shown that it stands with and defends the most deprived and vulnerable communities in Brazil.



Deacon Elineide Ferreira de Oliveira is a coordinator of a local safe house for women living with the threat of domestic violence in the city of Ariquemes in Brazil. Photo: Christian Aid/Tom Price.

### Fighting gender-based violence and other gender inequalities

Anglican churches in Brazil are becoming safer spaces, supporting women living with violence. According to the General Secretary of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, fighting gender-based violence had not been part of the Anglican church agenda, but now it is.<sup>11</sup> It is now discussed during Sunday sermons, prayer meetings and pastoral visits, and is part of regular conversations within the church. In 2011, Christian Aid's partner, Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development, set up a safe house in the city of Ariquemes – the first of its kind in the area – for women living with the threat of domestic violence.

Christian Aid's Brazil partner, the Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development, is also working beyond the country's borders to share its message on ending gender-based violence. It produced a booklet on biblical studies and gender-based violence in several languages to be used by both Anglican parishes in Brazil and church supporters in Scotland.<sup>12</sup>

### Defending religious freedom and diversity

The National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC) works to defend religious diversity and to establish bridges between different black *quilombolas*, African immigrants, and indigenous movements through faith. Ecumenical missions with the Guarani people, who are affected by human rights violations, aim to gather cases on rights violations, namely the grabbing of Guarani lands by agribusinesses, and make them known nationally and internationally.<sup>13</sup>

## Securing water for all

Ecumenical missions have become very important for highlighting local community struggles to access clean water and other natural resources. Ecumenical missions are often started when conflicts over resources occur between communities and business enterprises, or when land is privatised, or its ownership is concentrated in the hand of a few. CONIC organises ecumenical missions, which aim to gather local faith leaders and public audiences with key governmental decision makers, and to provide them with legal support. CONIC notes how communities now tell them: 'We need an ecumenical mission here'. This work started with the Alternative Forum for Water, which was a worldwide forum attended by academics, movements, unions and other civil society groups held in Brazil in 2018 to discuss how to resist the commodification of water in the world. The forum had constituted an important inter-religious space. In turn, MAB, SOF and CPI produced content about the important role ecumenical organisations and churches could play in advocating for water provision at the local and national level.

## Taking action to protect the Amazon

'We are the Amazon' was a global Amazon solidarity action engaging churches, councils and faith-based organisations, which made commitments for the protection of the Amazon and its inhabitants, ahead of the Amazon Synod of the Catholic Church, which met in October 2019.<sup>14</sup> The Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC) in Brazil and the Center of Studies for Labour and Agricultural Development (CEDLA) in Bolivia produced a study that analysed the potential impact of economic investments in the area on local communities and on sustainable development. Faith-based organisations and networks, such as CONIC, mobilised faith communities and churches in the Amazon, as well as others in Ireland, Spain and the UK, to defend human rights. A joint letter was read in the official space of the Synod, in the San Pedro Square in the Vatican, stating the importance of the Amazon for the planet. According to CONIC, a key contribution of the campaign was a call for ecumenism to fight fundamentalisms in all religions.

**Source:** Interviews and literature review

## 2. How Christian Aid Brazil supported its partners

There are several ways in which Christian Aid Brazil supported partners throughout its history. It helped stabilise civil society organisations through small but strategic organisational funds; created international and ecumenical links; helped partners leverage and access new funds; and provided political solidarity.

### 2.1 Supporting organisational development of partners through small and strategic funds

Partners appreciated the small but strategic organisational support that Christian Aid provided through flexible funds, which did not have to be spent on a specific project. Partners talked about how this provided stability and helped them grow:

We trained specialised staff throughout the years thanks to the stability that Christian Aid provided through institutional strengthening and a long-term partnership, even if the funds were reduced. Today, we manage 500,000 dollars [of funding] annually. (Koinonia representative)

Christian Aid was one of the first organisations that supported us. It gave us ten years of substantial funding until 2000. This catapulted INESC to rethink itself institutionally and to professionalise in a context of re-democratisation... Christian Aid's exit is a loss. Even if it was a small amount, it strengthened us because it did not come prisoner of a project, but as flexible funds for operations. (INESC representative)

In the nineties, we could not get funding to carry out research on the indigenous peoples in Brazil who are currently suffering from hunger, as part of a wider campaign. Funding for that project came from institutional funds from Christian Aid. We managed to carry out research throughout Brazil, and that document was eventually used by the Lula and Dilma governments as evidence for the importance of providing families with a basic food basket. (INESC representative)

We used flexible funds for office maintenance and training of community leaders. Christian Aid disseminated our human rights actions internationally... When we resumed the partnership in 2008, that was a crucial moment for us [as we faced] financial difficulty due to the crisis. Christian Aid supported us to define a new economic model... [It was] a small but important partnership. (MAB representative)

We started as a neighbourhood organisation. Christian Aid's support in the nineties helped us become a more internationally oriented organisation; and to build that concept of organisational development... We learnt a lot with Christian Aid. (SOF representative)

### 2.2 Helping partners leverage and access new funds

In 1997, Christian Aid Brazil had the second largest Christian Aid programme budget after India, and a portfolio of European Union projects, as noted by former country manager Mara Luz when she joined Christian Aid as a senior programme officer. However, changing attitudes to Brazil's middle-income status and robust civil society, together with the availability of public funds from the progressive government of the early 2000s, signalled a change in the funding landscape. Many donors and development agencies left the country, and those willing to provide support wanted to channel resources directly to local work.

Christian Aid Brazil adapted to the funding decreases by looking for other forms of funding, such as from foundations, and for research funding. Secondly, it began to fund fewer partner projects, and encouraged partners to directly fundraise for their own projects instead. Partners were still encouraged to call on Christian Aid for co-funding or for support with networking or technical expertise.

Funding secured from the Newton Fund – a UK government research fund to middle-income countries – is an example of this funding evolution. In Christian Aid Brazil's first two projects, both Christian Aid and the partner contributed resources to match funding from the Newton Fund. However during the third stage of funding, the partner provided most of the match-funding required while Christian Aid added value through the research, evidence and learning team in London, which, together with Coventry University, met the Newton Fund's requirement for UK counterparts to provide thematic and research expertise.

By 2016, Christian Aid Brazil had become dependent on allocations of unrestricted funding raised by Christian Aid from its supporters and was closing its last two EU programmes (Brazil country manager).

Despite these challenges, the Brazil programme increased its revenue between 2016 and 2019 by securing funding from the UK's Newton Fund and the

Dutch foundation Porticos. By the time it closed in 2020, the Brazil office had secured two new sources of funding from the Newton Fund and the Sage Fund, and a substantial individual donation had also been secured by Christian Aid's fundraising department in the UK.

The funding of Brazil's final portfolio of projects thus represented a new pattern of funding for Christian Aid country programmes: high-net-worth individuals, foundations, research funders, and funding sources directed at middle-income countries.

### 2.3 Helping partners to create international and ecumenical links

Christian Aid Brazil collaborated with other parts of Christian Aid, sharing its expertise with other country programmes, like Angola and South Africa; other Christian Aid country programmes in the Latin American region; Inspiration Spain and US, Christian Aid's sister charities; and other departments and teams of Christian Aid in the UK, such as the Research, Evidence and Learning team and the Policy and Public Affairs department. It also built relationships with many overseas churches including the UK and Irish Methodist churches and the Episcopal church in Scotland.

These international and ecumenical relationships contributed to building a feeling of solidarity on campaigns and political actions with its national partners. For example, the Brazil country manager Sarah Roure and programme officer Rosana Miranda reflected on how their collaboration with Inspiration Spain provided an international partner who could scrutinise business deals and add international support to Brazilian partners' initiatives:

In 2019, the Bolsonaro's government was developing large energy projects that had had no previous consultation [with civil society and those living in the areas affected]. Our partner Pro-Indigenous Commission found out that an important shareholder in construction work in an area where they were working was a Spanish enterprise. Inspiration Spain requested information to which the enterprise had to respond. As a result, the subsidiary in Brazil became more active in scrutinising processes, and construction in the area was eventually halted. It was costly for the enterprise and, in a way, a victory for us. For that local community, our work was not just a funded project, but also the relationships [developed with organisations] in other countries to be able to put pressure on the enterprise.

In the Amazon region, Christian Aid Brazil supported MAB to work with civil society groups in Bolivia. MAB now regularly works with Bolivian organisations, acting as a broker between local organisations, without any support from Christian Aid. It has come to view its work as regional.

We [MAB] have already done joint actions with Bolivia. We are starting to debate how to advance a Latin American movement. This was already on course with support from Christian Aid; Amazon actions cannot be only Brazilian. Energy issues involve wider action. So, it is very important to keep that partnership. (MAB representative)

Historically, Christian Aid Brazil played a role in incubating South-South relationships beyond the region:

South-South exchange was the brand of Christian Aid Brazil... For example, in 2000, staff from Brazil, Bolivia, Mozambique and the Philippines met to discuss World Bank policies on agrarian reform. We also worked on introducing new rice technologies to Ghana through a relationship with DFID. (Former Brazil country manager)

### 2.4 Providing political solidarity

Christian Aid Brazil built political solidarity with its partners by ensuring their financial sustainability, supporting progressive social movements and human rights organisations in their struggles and linking them to international and ecumenical networks with a shared political vision.

A key area of success was Christian Aid Brazil's role in advocating for changes to public policies,<sup>15</sup> achieved in collaboration with human rights organisations and social movements.

- Working with CPI and INESC, Christian Aid Brazil achieved a huge victory for Afro-descendant *quilombola* communities, who became exempt from paying Rural Land Tax. *Quilombolas* had faced large tax charges once their land was titled, because it was legally viewed as 'unproductive'. Given that they are among the poorest people in Brazil, and descendants of Afro-Brazilian slaves, these taxes seemed unfair and unreasonable. Following support from Christian Aid, *pro bono* assistance from a law firm, and engagement with the Public Prosecution Department, the tax was deemed unconstitutional and *quilombolas* were exempted. This benefited more than 3,000 communities – approximately 1.17 million people – across Brazil.<sup>16</sup>

- The agroecological logbook project enabled 200 women to record and calculate the amount of food their work on their smallholder and family farm contributed to their family. Christian Aid and SOF, a feminist agricultural organisation, supported the project through the Newton Fund. The project helped the women value their contribution to their farms and the wider economy and has helped them benefit from government policies, such as financing for family farming and school meals. It has also changed how census data on agricultural labour is recorded in Brazil, as the 2017 Agricultural Census included data on the gender of agricultural producers. This change resulted in the number of establishments being run by women rising to 18.6 per cent, thus recognising the important role women play in agriculture. This important work was also highlighted by the UN's 2019 report Progress of the World's Women.<sup>17</sup>

Staff and partners agreed that Christian Aid's knowledge of the Brazilian context and its large regional and international network of ecumenical and other relationships was important for providing political solidarity. They also highlighted Christian Aid's willingness to adopt a political stance and to listen to and respect partners' knowledge.

Christian Aid acts as an agent of international cooperation but it equally has a political role, of developing a narrative ... It helps a collective of organisations to speak the same language and strengthen their narrative. (INESC representative)

It was both a financial and a political support. Christian Aid brought solidarity and a global dimension... The Latin America network of women in the economy... The campaign against

the debt was an inspiration. It was work connected to the UK, but linked to people, and their experiences, from all over the world. (SOF representative)

For the Sage Fund, the important thing [for securing funding] was that we had an office in-country, capacity for a rapid response, and the added value of doing in-depth context analyses. (Brazil programme officer)

Christian Aid is connected to its partners, allowing for an exchange of original knowledge... Theology in Bolivia, ethnic minority rights in Colombia, this was Christian Aid's regional capacity. Beyond the region, [there was] Christian Aid Philippines information on emergency support. (Koinonia representative)

Funding from ACT Alliance (of which Christian Aid is part) and the churches Christian Aid works with also played an important role in supporting overtly political or controversial work:

ACT Alliance gave us a platform to do politics beyond partner relationships... Money from the churches allowed us to support the most important agendas, the political processes. These flexible funds were fundamental in the first steps. A few years back, we had a small project of 10,000 GBP with partner MST to support their LGBT collective to meet and bring LGBT people from different states together. That was possible because we had those flexible funds. It would have been difficult to start this with an external funder. But after that, MST secured 300,000 EUR from the *Diputación Gipuzkoa* [Basque-Spanish public funds] and now they have LGBT collectives. (Brazil country manager)

### 3. Challenges and next steps

In 2020, Christian Aid Brazil closed as part of a wider organisational restructure. The Brazil programme secured new funding in 2019, and Christian Aid exits the country leaving three new ongoing contracts, which will be managed by Christian Aid's new regional Latin America and Caribbean division, located in Managua.

Christian Aid partners expressed worries about the future, with some expressing a desire for Christian Aid to remain in the region as part of other membership organisations, such as the ACT Alliance.

The exit happens at a very delicate moment for Brazil. What happens here gets reflected for the whole of Latin America. It is with very great sadness that we hear about the closing [of Christian Aid] in São Paulo. We lose someone who knows Brazil and Latin America in depth. (CONIC representative)

We don't like Christian Aid leaving. Christian Aid could remain as a member of the ACT Alliance regardless of whether it has any funding to give. (Koinonia representative)

The exit took us by surprise, but we also understand the dynamics. Christian Aid contributed a lot. The project with women strengthened the whole movement [of People Affected by Dams]. (MAB representative)

There are plans to establish a Christian Aid Latin America regional hub, with some partners continuing to work under this new structure. However, partners such as CONIC, CPI, MAB and SOF<sup>18</sup> had received little information about the plans when they were interviewed.

We do not know what will happen beyond the current project that we have with the British Council. In the recent past, we have been working together on the World Women's March, [the role of] transnationals, and a feminist economic model, but we don't have a clear idea of what is next. (SOF representative)

Partners had many suggestions about areas that the new Christian Aid Latin American regional hub could focus on:

Keep the ecumenical forum and regional engagement with ACT Alliance. Keep ecumenism strong in face of fundamentalisms. (CONIC representative)

Recover strategies to protect indigenous rights, environmental rights in the Amazon, and the Amazon's capacity as an energy producer. (INESC representative)

The democratic question and gender, race and class discriminations, in face of the tense political right-wing situation in the region, with Bolsonaro and Trump. (INESC representative)

Christian Aid staff members feel proud that Brazil has started along the path towards carrying out work with a greater regional focus. But this pride is mixed with valid concerns about what a small regional office will be able to achieve within Latin America.

Brazil started to write projects with Bolivia about the Amazon in 2017. Our discussions about the [solidarity] model in 2016-17 have become more linked to the region since then – on how to make the programme more sustainable, how to create proposals. (Brazil country manager)

I'm not very optimistic [about the new regional office]. We always had more relationships in-country, and with London or Madrid, but the Latin America regional level never developed [into] much. Today, there is a regional programme with little capacity, rather closer to the sum of several country programmes. (Brazil programme officer)



## Insights and learning

Christian Aid Brazil's work with influential social movements fighting for systemic change has helped achieve significant examples of positive social impact. Its work with both Brazilian and international partners has helped bring about public policy changes to benefit some of the most vulnerable and deprived communities in the country.

Christian Aid Brazil has developed different approaches and ways of working in order to partner with these social movements, which have included communities affected by the construction of hydroelectric dams, and ecumenical, landless, feminist and *quilombola* and housing movements.

Christian Aid Brazil showed solidarity with progressive social movements and human rights organisations by developing a shared political vision and action, providing funding to help these organisations develop financial sustainability, and by acting as an organisational 'broker': creating links to relevant international and ecumenical networks to give voice to their struggles. As shown through the quotes cited in this report, partners recognised the value of this support. They said it helped them build stronger organisations and social networks, and improved people's lives.

Christian Aid Brazil could not have achieved this impact alone. It happened by carefully nurturing and developing a solidarity network, which not only crossed Brazil and Bolivia, but which spanned the globe. It leveraged strength and support through its global partnerships and networks, which helped shine a spotlight on local Brazilian crises and emergencies that otherwise may have been overlooked and ignored. This solidarity network is set out below.

### Christian Aid Brazil's work with Brazilian and Bolivian partners

This included both organisational and political support, including the development of communications and advocacy strategies and campaign narratives for networks to coalesce behind. It provided practical support, through unrestricted funding and because the partnership provided leverage to enable partners to access new funding. It also provided organisational support to help build the capacity of local organisations. This support, in turn,

also helped groups of organisations bring their own skills and expertise around specific causes, such as reforms to the Brazilian Rural Land Tax bill. This eventually led *quilombola* communities to become exempt from paying Rural Land Tax – an important achievement that could have a positive lasting impact for one of the poorest communities in Brazil.

### Christian Aid Brazil's links to Northern/European global organisations

Christian Aid Brazil was able to leverage its global ties, in particular with Inspiraction Spain, in order to shine a spotlight on practices carried out by a Spanish transnational corporation in Brazil. Its international ecumenical ties to northern churches also allowed it to raise funds to support both humanitarian work and campaigns.

### Christian Aid Brazil's work with other Christian Aid offices located in the South

Christian Aid Brazil shared its knowledge and learning around agrarian reform and agricultural policies with other Christian Aid programmes located in the South. Christian Aid Brazil met with Christian Aid staff from Bolivia, Mozambique and the Philippines in 2000 to develop a joint advocacy and policy response to World Bank policies on agrarian reform. They also shared their skills and knowledge around agricultural practices, such as the introduction of new rice technologies, with the Ghana Christian Aid programme, through DFID funding. Together these South-South collaborations achieved far more than they could have working alone.

Christian Aid Brazil staff and partners leave the programme with mixed feelings. Certainly, the Bolsonaro era is not an ideal time to exit the country, and there are worries about what a small Latin America team will be able to achieve regionally. However, these concerns are tempered with pride. The team knows it has made a real difference in Brazil, and hopes that ongoing projects, partner organisations and social movements will continue to advocate for their own rights long after the country programme closes

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> World Bank estimate for 2018

<sup>2</sup> [www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview#1](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview#1)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/brazil>

<sup>4</sup> <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2019/05/13/jair-bolsonaros-first-100-days-office/>

<sup>5</sup> This included interviews with representatives from partners CONIC, INESC, Koinonia, MAB and SOF; with the country manager and the programme officer of Christian Aid Brazil, Sarah Roure and Rosana Miranda; and with former country manager Mara Luz. Thanks to Sarah Roure for helping organise the interviews.

<sup>6</sup> Although Christian Aid Brazil started operating in Brazil in 1984, Christian Aid began supporting Koinonia (called CEDI at the time) in 1981, along with other ecumenical agencies.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-49433767>

<sup>8</sup> <https://mediacentre.christianaid.org.uk/rainforest-fires-put-amazonian-peoples-rights-first-says-christian-aid-petition/>

<sup>9</sup> [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/the-evangelical-takeover-of-brazilian-politics/551423/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/the-evangelical-takeover-of-brazilian-politics/551423/) [www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/forget-the-germans-this-is-where-the-protestant-reformation-debates-are-happening-now/2017/10/29/7723af30-b807-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb\\_story.html?ex\\_cid=SigDig](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/forget-the-germans-this-is-where-the-protestant-reformation-debates-are-happening-now/2017/10/29/7723af30-b807-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb_story.html?ex_cid=SigDig)

<sup>10</sup> The ecumenical movement fights for the unity of Christian churches. Some locate the origins of the liberation movement in the Catholic churches, others in the Protestant churches, and still others say their origins were already ecumenical. What seems clear is that, nowadays, the liberation theology has influenced many Christian churches, being ecumenical in nature. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4740516>

<sup>11</sup> Christian Aid Brazil (2018) Brazil deep dive, presentation to the Board of Trustees, internal document.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Aid Brazil (2018) Brazil DBM presentation, internal document.

<sup>13</sup> [www.conic.org.br/portal/noticias/1615-por-que-boicotar-o-agronegocio-do-mato-grosso-do-sul](http://www.conic.org.br/portal/noticias/1615-por-que-boicotar-o-agronegocio-do-mato-grosso-do-sul)

<sup>14</sup> [https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CartaSomosLaAmazonia\\_eng.pdf](https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CartaSomosLaAmazonia_eng.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Christian Aid Brazil (2018) Main impacts of the Brazil programme – 2011-2017, internal document.

<sup>16</sup> [www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/21088](http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/21088)

<sup>17</sup> [www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/6/feature-story-of-change-revolution-for-brazil-family-farmers](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/6/feature-story-of-change-revolution-for-brazil-family-farmers)

<sup>18</sup> Koinonia will stay as part of an ecumenical project in Brazil

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