

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT: 'ETHICAL CONSUMPTION IN BRAZIL'

'Ethical consumption', i.e. a form of consumption in which consumers use their buying power to effect social and pro-environmental change - now increasingly widespread in income-rich countries - is also spreading in middle income countries such as Brazil, but is negotiated differently in different societies. In Brazil, the term 'conscious consumption' is used as an umbrella term for other terms such as 'ethical consumption', 'responsible consumption' and 'sustainable consumption'.

This is a summary of key findings from the report *Consumo Ético no Brazil* which provides an up-to-date review of academic literature, reports from government institutions and NGOs, as well as legislation and research in the area of 'ethical consumption' in Brazil.

The report offers an overview of the wider context in which 'ethical consumption' discourses and practices in Brazil are embedded, such as the emergence of the so-called 'new middle class', the institutional recognition of solidarity economy enterprises and the growth in Corporate Social Responsibility.

In order to understand 'ethical consumption', the authors identified key organisations in this field and analysed their role in disseminating and consolidating these ideas. The report highlights the central role played by the Brazilian state in promoting 'ethical consumption'. The last three governments have featured traditional Brazilian environmental and social activists in positions of power, and this has certainly contributed to the institutionalisation of many changes demanded by sectors of Brazilian society in terms of social and environmental justice.

In addition to this, Brazilian NGOs have also been instrumental in this trend. Examples include firstly, the consumer advocacy role played by IDEC – Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor and secondly the alternative collective purchasing network of organic food developed by Rede Ecológica in Rio de Janeiro. Further, the Instituto Akatu has played a key role in raising awareness of a range of 'conscious consumption' issues, understanding and researching 'ethical consumers' as well as coining the term 'conscious consumption' which 'does not deny the individual quality of life but recognises the individual as part of a global community'.

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The report also offers an overview of existing research on ‘ethical consumption’ in Brazil, based on existing government and NGO surveys (such as the biennial survey conducted by Instituto Akatu). Overall, there is a lack of information about the size of the market for products and services with social and green added value in Brazil. Furthermore, despite its advances, actions from civil society towards ‘ethical consumption’ are still scattered and so far have only had localised impact.

The percentage of Brazilian consumers that take into consideration the environmental impacts of their purchases is considered to be around 6% (AKATU, 2005). Brazilian consumers are more consistent in expressing values (70% of positive answers) than exhibiting behaviours (58% positive answers) – this is in line with findings from other countries.

However, even the less ‘conscious consumers’ claimed to have incorporated saving behaviours such as: ‘avoid leaving lights on in unoccupied rooms’ (98%) or ‘turning the tap of when brushing the teeth’ (95%) into their everyday practices.

More broadly, the report identifies two main trends in the field of ‘ethical consumption’ in Brazil. The first one emanates from an ‘enlightened business sector’, where some companies promote both corporate social responsibility and social and environmental awareness among Brazilian consumers. The second comes from civil society organisations, some of them linked to political parties, which advocate for consumers’ citizenship and call for a more comprehensive policy response.

The report concludes by highlighting the current limitations of ‘ethical consumption’ studies in Brazil and the need for more academic research in the area. The few academic studies available seem to either focus on the political power of ‘ethical consumption’ or are exploratory studies trying to measure some dimensions of this complex phenomenon. Further empirical work is needed, but also theorizations which reflect the Brazilian experience, cultural context and values.

The full report can be downloaded from the ERSC-DFID Choices website:

<http://sustainablechoices.info>