



The BNDES Platform in Brazil

Brazil's development bank, the *Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social* (BNDES), is a private company that is publicly owned. It receives public funds but does not follow the same transparency rules as other government agencies. BNDES has a bigger budget than the World Bank. Its budget is usually more than three times the investments into Brazil's ordinary investment budget.

In 2005 *Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas* (Ibase) began a new program that aimed to provide information about BNDES to help civil society influence the Bank to use its money to address social and economic inequalities. Ibase had previously done work on government budgets, but this was the first time it was working on budgets of state-owned enterprises, such as BNDES.

In 2005 BNDES did not provide the public regular information about its investments, programs, and projects. Information was available only through occasional announcements, press clippings, ministerial comments, and annual accounts.

Ibase started producing an electronic bulletin with information about the Bank. Ibase and other organizations also met with BNDES decision makers and technical staff. In 2006 the Bank's president created an internal working group to produce an information policy. He said this was necessary because of pressure from civil society and research groups, as well as parliament and other government agencies. However, work on the policy stopped when the president of BNDES changed.

In 2007 Ibase's budget team and *Rede Brasil* (Brazil Network) wrote a letter to the Federal Prosecutors Office saying that BNDES needed to follow the example of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, both of which had information policies.

Also in 2007, 25 organizations and networks came together to form the BNDES Platform. The Platform issued a 20-page policy document that was widely distributed. It also made a formal request for a meeting with the new BNDES president, at which the Platform representatives handed over the policy document. The president attended the next month's meeting of Rede Brasil. He also agreed to make public information about the 50 largest private project loans in each of the main work areas and to introduce clauses in the Bank's contracts on slave labor, and racial and gender discrimination.

In February 2009 BNDES published a list with details of all investment loans for the previous year. Ibase used the information to create an interactive map showing where BNDES-supported projects were located. However, dialogue and meetings stopped.

Some of the Platform members then started more open challenges to BNDES, including through the Federal Vice Prosecutor's Office. Other Platform members did not support these explicit attacks. All members had concerns about BNDES, but their concerns, as well as their favored tactics, differed.

However, by this time many other actors, including the media and academics, were asking questions about BNDES and its funding decisions. In May 2012 Brazil got a new freedom of information law. This will be a new weapon for civil society and others in fighting for transparency about BNDES funding.