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Food and Nutrition Sovereignty from the perspective of a Territorial Observatory

La Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional desde la perspectiva de un Observatorio Territorial

A Soberania Alimentar e Nutricional desde a perspectiva dum Observatório Territorial

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ABSTRACT

Latin America and the Caribbean are the regions that have made the most progress in including food sovereignty in legislation, public policies and regional instruments; but despite this progress, the latest available data on hunger and malnutrition in the region is not favorable. Today's reality demands more than ever a joint effort to reverse the regression, return to the path of progress and ensure the full realization of the right to food. In line with this demand and the circumstances in which Cuba finds itself, the country's highest leadership has elaborated, and indicated the urgent priority of developing, a Plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education, one of its objectives being the construction of an Observatory. This study aims to find out the main characteristics that should be considered in the construction of an Observatory that supports this national projection, but with a local focus. It uses theoretical and empirical methods for document review and knowledge systematization. Among its results, the main characteristics that distinguish it from governance and local management, from infocommunication and from value chains, are highlighted. The research warns that its development cannot be seen as a new state assignment or as just another task. There must be sensitivity to the need for it and the shortcomings in this regard, which limit the ability to resolve and predict many problems in a territory.

Keywords: Plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education; food and nutritional sovereignty; local food systems; monitoring of food and nutritional sovereignty systems; communication for development; food and nutritional sovereignty observatories

Translated from the original in Spanish

RESUMEN

América Latina y el Caribe son las regiones que más han avanzado en la inclusión de la soberanía alimentaria, en legislaciones, políticas públicas e instrumentos regionales; pero, a pesar de estos progresos, los últimos datos disponibles en relación con el hambre y la malnutrición de la región no son favorables. La realidad de hoy exige más que nunca esfuerzo conjunto para revertir el retroceso, retornar al camino del progreso y asegurar la plena realización del derecho a la alimentación. Alineado a este reclamo y a las circunstancias que vive Cuba, la máxima dirección del país elaboró, e indicó la urgente prioridad, de desarrollar un Plan para la Soberanía Alimentaria y la Educación Nutricional, donde uno de sus objetivos es la construcción de un Observatorio. El presente estudio tiene el propósito de indagar en las principales características que debe contemplar la construcción de un Observatorio que respalde esta proyección nacional, pero con un enfoque local. Utiliza métodos teóricos y empíricos para la revisión documental y la sistematización de conocimientos. Se destacan, dentro de sus resultados, las principales características que lo distinguen desde la gobernanza y la gestión local, desde lo infocomunicacional y desde las cadenas de valor. La investigación alerta que su desarrollo no puede ser visto como un nuevo encargo estatal o como una tarea más. Tiene que existir sensibilidad sobre su necesidad y sobre las insuficiencias que se tienen al respecto, que limitan la capacidad de resolución y predicción de muchos problemas en un territorio.

Palabras clave: Plan para la Soberanía Alimentaria y la Educación Nutricional; soberanía alimentaria y nutricional; sistemas alimentarios locales; monitoreo de los sistemas de soberanía alimentaria y nutricional; comunicación para el desarrollo; observatorios de soberanía alimentaria y nutricional

RESUMO

A América Latina e as Caraíbas é uma das regiões que fizeram maiores progressos na inclusão da soberania alimentar na legislação, nas políticas públicas e nos instrumentos regionais; mas apesar destes progressos, os últimos dados disponíveis sobre a fome e a subnutrição na região não são favoráveis. A realidade atual exige mais do que nunca um esforço conjunto para inverter o declínio, regressar ao caminho do progresso e assegurar a plena realização do direito à alimentação. De acordo com esta exigência e as circunstâncias em Cuba, a mais alta liderança do país elaborou, e indicou a prioridade urgente de desenvolver, um Plano de Soberania Alimentar e Educação Nutricional, cujo um dos objetivos é a construção de um Observatório. Este estudo visa investigar as principais características que devem ser consideradas na construção de um Observatório para apoiar esta projeção nacional, mas com um enfoque local. Utiliza métodos teóricos e empíricos para a revisão documental e a sistematização do conhecimento. Dentro dos seus resultados, destacam-se as principais características que o distinguem da governação e da gestão local, da infocomunicação e das cadeias de valor. A investigação adverte que o seu desenvolvimento não pode ser visto como uma nova missão estatal ou como apenas mais uma tarefa. Tem de haver sensibilidade sobre a sua necessidade e sobre as insuficiências a este respeito, que limitam a capacidade de resolução e previsão de muitos problemas num território.

Palavras-chave: Plano de Soberania Alimentar e Educação Nutricional; soberania alimentar e nutricional; sistemas alimentares locais; monitorização dos sistemas de soberania alimentar e nutricional; comunicação para o desenvolvimento; observatórios de soberania alimentar e nutricional

INTRODUCTION

Latin America and the Caribbean (LA & C) are the regions that have made the most progress in the inclusion of Food Sovereignty in legislation, public policies and regional and international instruments, according to the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in LA & C (2016). This source informs that the first time that the proposal of "Food Sovereignty" was presented in the multilateral sphere was by peasant unions and civil society in 1996, at the "World Food Summit" in Rome. This was followed by the Food Summit, held in 2002, where legislative processes were set in motion that incorporated Food Sovereignty as state policy, and where a first official approach to the concept of "Food Sovereignty" was identified in the Organic Law on Food and Agricultural Security and Sovereignty, passed in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2008), followed by the "Law on Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security", passed in the Republic of Nicaragua (2009). These countries and this law constitute a reference for the subsequent processes of formulating legislation on the subject in the Central American and Caribbean region.

Latin America, according to the Panorama of Food Insecurity (FAO, 2015b), was the subregion that had made the greatest progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets, reducing its prevalence of undernourishment from 14.4% in 1990/92 to 5.1% in 2012/14, as well as the most ambitious target of the 1996 World Food Summit, where the total number of people suffering from hunger was reduced from 60.3 million to 29.5 million in the same period.

But, the latest available data on hunger and malnutrition are not these, it is not a good thing. In the 2018 report, LA & C is moving away from the zero-hunger goal. The number of undernourished people increased for the third consecutive year, reaching 39.3, or 6.1% of the population. The 8.4% of women are severely food insecure, compared to 6.9% of men. In ten countries, 20% of the poorest children suffer three times more from chronic malnutrition. Indigenous populations suffer greater food insecurity than non-indigenous populations and rural populations more than urban populations (FAO, OPS, WFP & UNICEF, 2018).

Today's reality demands more than ever a joint effort to reverse the decline, return to the path of progress and ensure the full realization of the right to food.

Since its creation in December 2011, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC in Spanish), an intergovernmental mechanism for political consultation that includes the thirty-three countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, has contributed to deepening the respectful dialogue among all countries in the region. In this regard, it has assumed the commitment to guarantee Food and Nutritional Security, through a strategy to eradicate hunger and poverty in the member states. This commitment was made by the countries of the region in 2005, through the Hunger-Free

Latin America and Caribbean Initiative, which remains in force as indicated in the two Declarations of Heads of State and Government of CELAC, corresponding to the years 2013 and 2014. Both have been endorsed by the Presidents and Heads of State in Havana, where the elaboration and organization of the proposals was guided by the four pillars of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty (FNS): availability, access, utilization and stability.

In this context, support was requested from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), together with the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI in Spanish), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Latin American Parliament, for the preparation of a FNS Plan. All in collaboration with the Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative. It is necessary to "achieve concrete results that translate into significant improvements in the quality of life of our people. These improvements must be aimed at eradicating poverty, especially extreme poverty, so that they guarantee food security and nutrition, with a gender perspective and respecting the diversity of food habits in order to face the challenges of food security and nutrition, with a view to eradicating hunger and enjoying the right to food, especially for all sectors in a situation of vulnerability" (CELAC, 2015).

All these alliances and strategies have the advantage of having a wide range of documentation and scientific literature that has seen the evolution of three important concepts that have defined the public policies of the States in the field of the human right to food. An exhaustive study carried out by the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean, published in 2016, identifies the main concepts associated to this issue: Food and Nutritional Security (FNS), Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and Food Sovereignty (SOBAL in Spanish). It refers to the fact that each one has had different dynamics in its evolution; Food Sovereignty is the least developed in public contexts; in turn, over the last 20 years, Food and Nutritional Security has fluctuated towards the Right to Adequate Food and, more recently, the oscillation of the Right to Adequate Food at the end of Food Sovereignty.

This research inferred that the scientific and legislative evolution of this issue has been possible because the political and economic panorama of Latin America in the last 15 years has been very favorable in this regard. This has stimulated the implementation of public policies for poverty reduction and the promotion of food and nutritional security.

As a result of all these policies, the scientific evolution in research on these issues, the positioning of innovation as a central element in the development of peoples and, mainly, to strengthen the impact of this issue, some countries of LA & C implemented State Systems for Monitoring Food and Nutritional Security, which were also developed in some FNS Observatories (FAO, 2015a).

One of the most innovative initiatives was developed by CELAC, which requested support from FAO and ALADI to create the Platform for Food and Nutritional Security (PFNS). This consists of an information system on public policies and indicators that make it possible to characterize the elements that have contributed to progress in LA & C in eradicating hunger. This platform provides a regional overview of the process of hunger and poverty eradication in the region, both with respect to the achievement of the MDG

and in the framework of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDA), ratified by all the countries of the world in 2015.

The PFNS displays the latest information available from all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on the state of FNS through the main socio-economic, nutritional and productive indicators that characterize the countries of the region.

Since then, this type of system has not ceased to be the object of attention, mainly because of the challenges it imposes: sustainable financing, specialized human resources, and strategies that agree on intersectoral and inter-institutional actions, just to mention the most controversial issues.

Cuba is not exempt from these challenges; one can even say that its challenge is even greater because it does not even have a system that monitors at the national level, and in a comprehensive manner, the different indicators that the region's FNS Plan analyzes. What is evident in the outdated data that PFNS publishes on the country is that it is from 2018. The same is true of the public information shown by the FAO, whose statistical data on the country cite sources from 2016.

Taking these elements into consideration, it could be thought that there is a certain disarticulation of the different bodies that provide data on the country's different FNS indicators. This influences an outdated image of the national scenario, as seen from the international platforms specialized in surveillance and monitoring of the issue.

But it should also be taken into account that, although Latin America and the Caribbean has come a long way in this area, as mentioned above, and several countries are at the vanguard in the construction of indicators, monitoring and surveillance systems, and even in the development of observatories. Cuba recently indicated the elaboration of the bases for the design and construction of Observatories that support the National Plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education (FSNE), with a municipal approach to FNS that not only includes food production for the development of Local Food Systems (LFS).

Although since the last decade there are important projects and researches that have promoted local development and have left as a balance different models, procedures, strategies and good practices on its action, the reality is that never before it had been projected as it is perceived now by means of the FNS. Never before has a national follow-up been projected on this issue, nor has the construction of Observatories been guided by information platforms that support the management of information, knowledge and innovation in a holistic, dynamic, integral and interoperable manner, with all the policies of the state, its actors and the territories.

Until now, mostly only research had been developed, now there is a demand for more innovations, aimed at solving problems in the social practice of each locality, accompanied by information tools that complement the documentation of actions for better decision making, along with analytical tools that allow monitoring, control and evaluation of the progress of the different processes and issues prioritized, visualized in a platform that integrates the Observatories as a major project of the country.

Starting from this threshold, this research aims to find out the main characteristics that should be contemplated in the construction of an Observatory that supports a national projection in terms of the FSEN, with an FNS approach, where all the necessary actors intervene to promote LFS.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research applied, among the methods of theoretical level, the historical-logical one to work the recovery of information, related to the subject of study, together with its analysis through time, in a retrospective way; the modeling method to conceptually analyze all the characteristics, dimensions and variables that an observatory must contain, together with the structural systemic one that allows the harmonic articulation of all its components, from a holistic vision of its operation at a territorial level. And, as methods of the empirical level, direct observation was used to understand circumstantial elements of this research, in addition to sharing experiences from participatory action research to understand the entire domain of analysis of this topic, at the territorial level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The region's priority is to strengthen the systems for measuring and monitoring the state of FNS as reliable instruments to support the design and implementation of certain public intervention strategies and, in addition, to promote the development of Observatories as platforms where work is done, in an intersectoral and multi-stakeholder manner, on the integration of knowledge and good practices that connect knowledge management and innovation with local productive structures and their governments.

The standard UNE 166006 (2018), regarding the Observatories, refers that these formalize the activity of surveillance and intelligence as an ethical and systematic process of collection and analysis of information about the environment, competitors' businesses and the organization itself and communication of its meaning and implications, aimed at decision making.

In addition to these elements, to introduce the topic of the Observatories it must be taken into account that this field of knowledge has certain peculiarities, where access, availability and updating of reliable sources of scientific-technical information and innovation is one of the most important challenges, but it does not mean that it is the only one.

In this sense, this research highlights the need to work in parallel, and in a complementary manner, with other aspects that also characterize the proper functioning of a FNS Observatory.

Governance and local management

The literature review on the subject revealed that the few FNS monitoring systems in the region, despite showing progress in relation to other initiatives, lack strong links with national policies. All this leads to a fragile relationship between the institutions that dictate policy, those that implement it, the sectors directly linked to production and the monitoring systems; there is a divorce between many of these instances. Another difficulty identified is that the systems that exist in the region have not been designed to manage, themselves, the follow-up, control and evaluation of the different FNS programs, goals and results and, in their great majority, are disjointed from the productive bases at the local level.

Based on this regional scenario and the abundant experiences in the country related to local development (Núñez Jover et al., 2017; Torres Páez et al., 2018), this research relates below a group of characteristics that, in the context of public and local management, should identify a FNS Observatory in the country:

- Strategic relationship between FNS management, its territorial measurement and monitoring system, with the management of state policies and the municipal development strategies of local governments
- Integration of instruments and tools that support decision-making in the field of FNS from the institutional, multisectoral and governance standpoints
- Definition of calculation systems and reliable statistical sources that allow to contrast the information generated by the country up to the local level
- Involve in each program and priority all internal and external variables that may influence the fulfillment of its goals, including the adequacy of their respective measurement systems
- Definition of complementary local indicators that allow to investigate the causes and consequences of food insecurity, associated to different socio-demographic variables: regions, race, age, sex, religion, diseases, among others, of national interest

Human factor

Added to these characteristics are the people who manage the different processes. In this context, the human factor could become the main obstacle. The way of thinking "knowledge" and the exercise of the profession "know-how" of the people do not always evolve as fast as the technologies.

Changing human routines is more difficult than teaching a new skill, a new technological practice. From this premise, in the FNS Observatories, information has to be as important as its communication.

Information and communication

The adequate management of LFS, from an Observatory, requires a good use of the information, as well as appropriate communication channels that facilitate access to it and facilitate its consultation for strategic decision-making. Effective governance cannot

be exercised without timely and reliable information that flows harmoniously among all actors and instances of public and popular intervention.

Currently, there is no concept of decision making that is not based on information from state agencies and entities and from the citizenry.

The characteristics associated with the quality of information for decision making gravitate mainly around its veracity, authenticity, integrity, uniqueness, adequate format, simplicity, objectivity, timeliness, accessibility and usability (Linares Columbié & Mena Mugica, 2015; Ponjuán Dante, 1998, 2008).

This research also highlights that the information managed in this context of LFS should have:

- *meaningful*, decision making is not conceived, the data that compose the communicative message have to transmit a new value for the receiver, since information is the raw material and people's knowledge is the mental resource through which value is added
- *reliability*, the data has to come from official sources that can be verified. Its essence is to enrich and corroborate the interpretations made of the results obtained and of the situations associated with certain contexts
- *relevance*, the new information obtained from the data must be relevant to the needs of the territorial governments, to their prioritized programs, to the basic productive structures and, in particular, to the localities
- *actuality,* the data must be made available in real time so that it can mobilize the attention of the different actors and increase their capacity for timely decision making
- *quantity-quality*, this relationship is also essential because of the theory of the limited rationality of people and their cognitive restrictions to process large amounts of information. A FNS Observatory has the challenge of achieving averaging[1] among all the available information that turns out to be necessary and meets the optimal qualities for decision making

FNS systems require accurate, timely, and valuable information to manage their production capabilities. You cannot innovate without information and knowledge. Consequently, the main challenge for the actors of a FNS Observatory is not only to know how to make optimal use of its different value-added services, but also to create new innovation capacities from them, from the recombination and identification of new uses of existing knowledge according to local realities.

Other characteristics that a FNS-oriented Observatory must contemplate are its capacity for interaction, flexibility and integration with its different actors through a single flow of information that uses different communication channels.

[1] This event is evident when there is a lot of information that does not have the quality required for a correct analysis, or the reverse when there is quality information, but it is not enough to justify or document the decision making.

The communication strategy for development should be conceived for a FNS Observatory as a subsystem that has as a communication model the dialogue and the social participation, through which the different actors add value of use to the information that they generate, transmit and share.

Moreover, as communication has the peculiarity of being able to influence the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the different actors and user public, through the communicative interaction of its different actors, it is possible to work within the Observatory as a process of social construction of meaning. A process that facilitates the construction of shared meanings for a region, significantly empowering, in this way, the infocommunication component of the territories.

From the point of view of this research, another of the characteristics that a FNS Observatory has to fulfill is the inclusion of the infocommunication component as a transversal LFS subsystem within the FNS Observatory, since there is no social behavior without some kind of communication. Information management and communication management must be closely related because there is no communication without any type of information support, nor can it be informed without the act of communicating.

In this way, the Observatory will have a mediating body between the different actors, between the actors and their user publics, between the internal and external environment, as well as between the local and territorial governments with their public citizen and administrative environment.

Agricultural extensionism is another example in the context of FNS that illustrates the pertinent articulation that must exist between information management and communication to strengthen interaction among producers, level the dialogue between farmers and other economic, social and political actors, stimulate experimentation, and achieve a better understanding among scientists, academics and farmers through the dialogue of shared knowledge and experiences.

Both management processes coincide in certain principles (Portal Moreno et al., 2017, p. 209), for example:

- information and communication management are strategic processes that are developed in connection with governance systems
- both processes must be defined, planned and controlled through objectives and indicators that contribute to the continuous improvement of information-communication infrastructures suitable for the management of governments and public policies such as FNS
- must be developed from their own structure that allows the implementation of the different resources, processes, products and services involved in the management of governments in terms of FNS

The essence is to manage, in an adequate manner, the information and communication in a FNS Observatory, with a view to turning them into strategic resources of social management that articulate actors, decentralize processes and favor transparency and open innovation that promote horizontal relations in the public debate, which stimulates the exchange of knowledge for the collective solution of problems in local contexts.

Value and supply chains

From the point of view defended by this research and taking into account the serious problems presented by the value and supply chains at this time, product to its incipient recognition, gears and limited uses, it is considered that the FNS Observatory must be the ideal platform to provide all the information and legal documentation required, in terms of procedures, for its proper regulatory and legal operation.

The FNS Observatory must also be capable of synchronizing all requirements, demands, products or assortments coming from the programs, with a view to standardizing the value standards of these chains and their supply logics, in accordance with the increase in their productivity and efficiency.

Another fundamental characteristic that a FNS Observatory must assume in this area is the predictive and warning capacity that the information it manages must have.

A FNS Observatory has to develop value-added services, which strengthen early warning systems, timely diagnosis and rapid response to possible problems, risks, vulnerabilities and sudden changes in the environment that any of the prioritized programs may present. Aspects that not only affect their performance and projection, but also have an impact on the productivity of the supply chains, on the productive chains, even, depending on their intensity and little prevention capacity, affecting the National Security of the FSNE Plan of a country.

In summary, the analysis that required the development of this research generated a group of important elements that must be taken into account, when identifying the different processes that must intervene for the proper functioning of a FNS Observatory, as well as the main characteristics that distinguish it from other types of Observatories.

The design, development and sustainability of the FNS Observatories in each province require the participation, integration and reconciliation of multiple actors and public and social instances, ranging from the highest level of state administration to the end point of the production chain, where the focus is on people.

This research recommends that, in order to achieve the true purposes and functions that a FNS Observatory must exercise, it cannot be developed as just another task to be carried out. It cannot be seen as a new state commission; there must be sensitivity to its need. Both decision-makers and producers must recognize its shortcomings, as well as the inadequacies in this regard, which limit the capacity to resolve and predict FNS problems in a territory.

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The authors have participated in the writing of the paper and the analysis of the documents.