

# Agricultural development and the role of WFP in Nicaragua: (de)constructing performative narratives

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*To all women and men who are fighting for their freedom in Nicaragua.*

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## Executive summary

Sir, the reality of your world is nothing more than a rotten caricature of great opera<sup>1</sup>.

*Fitzcarraldo*

Within the Western philosophical framework, the Other is often defined by a process of negative differentiation with a reference subjectivity which is portrayed as dominant. In this process, the Other is objectified and situated within a performative discourse aimed at creating and justifying a specific structure of knowledge. Inspired by the teleological moral imperative of universal progress and well-being, international development agencies can be seen as dispositifs (per)formed by thoughts, utterances and actions whose effects result in fictitious portraits of the underdeveloped as the objects of interventions. The objective of this research is to understand the mechanisms through which a fictitious idea of agricultural development is shaped by an international development agency and to explore the performative effects of this specific conceptual mechanism. The research analyses the idea of agricultural development as constructed within the narrative of the World Food Programme operating in Nicaragua. Through the lens of a Foucauldian theoretical framework, complemented by a critical deconstructive approach, the aim is to understand how World Food Programme interventions are institutionalised as organised practices and how these are related to a specific development narrative. The results of the research indicate a significant rupture between the self-referential portrait of the development agency as a system on the one hand, and the real practices of the development agents on the other hand as well as an overlap between these two components. Moving from the need to critically analyse the processes through which an international development agency operate, this research project contributes to rendering such processes visible in order to create a space of possibility to think them otherwise.

Keywords: international development, post-development theory, dispositif, discourse analysis, deconstruction, World Food Programme, Nicaragua.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fitzcarraldo* (Werner Herzog, 1982).

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### 1.1. Problem statement and research questions

Within the Western philosophical framework, the Other is often defined by a process of negative differentiation with a reference subjectivity which is portrayed as dominant (Said, 1995). In this process, the Other is objectified and situated within a performative discourse aimed at creating and justifying a structure of knowledge around that particular object. Such a mechanism can be traced in the Foucauldian concept of *knowledge/power* apparatus intended as the assemblage of discursive and non-discursive practices which determine the essence of knowledge as the interconnection between what is stated and what is visible. In this sense, the performative power of discursive behaviours creates the object of information on which the dynamics of power stretch through performed systems of knowledge.

It is within this process that it is possible to position the discourse about development and its problematization in the Western theoretical framework. Inspired by the teleological moral imperative of universal progress and well-being, the development machine can be seen as a constructed apparatus (per)formed by thoughts, utterances and actions whose effects, far from being neutral, result in fictitious and self-referential portraits of the *underdeveloped* as the objects of interventions. As Ferguson points out, the hegemonic discourse of development operates through processes of homogenization and de-politicization which result in standardized pre-packaged sets of analysis and solutions carried out by development agencies spread all over the world (Ferguson, 1994). In doing so, the development discursive regime performs an ahistorical and impersonal process of rendering technical all the issues and relations that are at stake within a specific context through the *ad hoc* creation of systems of knowledge which reflect a situated exercise of power.

Within the post-development theory, several contributions to the field of the development critique focused their attention on the dynamics of power underpinning the unbalanced relation between the North and the South, particularly through the analysis of processes of racialisation of the Other as a means to the establishment of the Western dominant subject (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 2010; Sousa Santos, 2008). Another crucial contribution to the problematization of the concept of *development* can be found in postcolonial theories and subaltern studies which focus their analysis on the issue of representation of the colonial subject within processes of foreclosure from the

hegemonic Western narratives (Chakrabarty, 2000; Said, 1995; Spivak, 1999; R. Young, 2004). Within the above mentioned theoretical context, it is then possible to situate the contribution of Ferguson to the specific field of *development studies* inspired by an anthropological approach. In his *The Anti-Politics Machine* (Ferguson, 1994), Ferguson traces an archaeology of the *development* discourse in the particular case study of Lesotho, problematizing the processes of power/knowledge (re)production at the basis of development interventions whose failures are to be ascribed in a depoliticizing apparatus which strategically operates within techniques of hegemonic modes of representation. Drawing on a Foucauldian and Gramscian theoretical framework, the more recent contribution of Tania Murray Li presents an accurate attempt to the study of development interventions in Indonesia through the lens of a *governmentality* perspective inspired by the philosophical analysis carried out by the late Foucault (Li Murray, 2007). Recalling Ferguson's work, Li underlines how attempts to improve rural life in Indonesia have resulted in rendering local and specific political issues into broad technical problems which claim for the need of technical solutions to be provided by technical experts thus resulting in an overall depoliticization and bureaucratization of such issues (Li Murray, 2007).

As the contribution above introduced show, crucial to the *development* problematic is therefore an analysis of the processes that underpin the formation of particular structures of knowledge, capable of taking into account the effects of the above mentioned mechanisms intended as assemblages of discursive and non-discursive practices. That is to say, a deconstructive analysis of *development* narratives with the objective of unveiling how they are constituted and therefore what they foreclose as well as which effects they generate.

Moving from the context above presented, the central question of this research will thus be: how is the idea of agricultural development constructed within the narrative of the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Nicaraguan context? The question will be addressed drawing on the following research sub-questions which are directly related to the theoretical framework and research methods of the proposed research: according to WFP, what is the (agricultural) development problem in Nicaragua? According to WFP, what are the necessary *development* interventions and why? And finally, how are these interventions institutionalised as organised practices?

Being the present study positioned in the field of development critical studies, the research objective is to understand the mechanisms through which a particular idea of agricultural development is shaped by an international development agency and to explore the performative effects of this specific *dispositif*. By doing so, the purpose is to give a contribution to the field of rural development studies from the particular point of view of a Foucauldian and post-colonial theoretical approach. Given the increasing importance of the issues above mentioned, attention needs to be given

to the study and implementation of non-hegemonic approaches capable of going beyond the shortcomings of traditional conceptual dominant narratives.

In addition, the purpose of this research is to contribute to bridge an academic gap related to an understudied area in terms of anthropological approach to development issues. Most contribution to scholarship in the field of rural development studies in Nicaragua comes from institutional projects and impact studies reports (FAO, 2015; WFP, 2010, 2015) while academic attention to issues related to the sociological and anthropological dimension of rural development is temporally discontinuous and there is a general lack of attention towards the particular Nicaraguan area (Brown, 2000; Cupples et al., 2007; Dore, 2006).

Finally, given the recent flourishing of new action and participatory oriented research projects especially within the international development agencies (Li Murray, 2007; Méndez et al., 2015), this research can positively contribute to the implementation of renewed forms of cooperation capable of taking into account the unveiled foreclosed dynamics underpinning the development discursive regime thus redirecting practices towards alternative trajectories.

## **1.2. The study case**

The World Food Programme is the leading humanitarian organization of the United Nations and operates in the domain of food assistance and security, emergency assistance, relief and rehabilitation, development aid and nutrition. The mandate of WFP is to achieve zero hunger while strengthening the resilience of rural communities and complying with the 2030 Agenda (WFP, 2017d).

In the Nicaraguan context, WFP is working on three main levels i.e. nutrition, support to local farmers and resilience building. Within the nutrition domain, WFP Nicaragua is active in providing nutritional support to vulnerable groups in communities with high levels of chronic malnutrition supporting the *National School Meal* programme. Beside this, WFP operates in close relation with the national government in supporting smallholder farmers in achieving a sustainable development, namely by improving their income as well as strengthening their connection to formal markets and improving their farming abilities. Furthermore, WFP Nicaragua is involved in helping families to develop more sustainable livelihoods through resilience-building activities and, overall, it complies with its international mandate in supporting the Government with nutrition, education, technical assistance and infrastructure improvement.

WFP has been present in Nicaragua in the last ten years (WFP, 2010, 2015) and is currently working together with 15 small-scale farmers cooperatives with the support of local research

institutes, private companies, national governments and other international development agencies (WFP, 2017a, 2017b).

### **1.2.1. *Purchase for Progress***

The *Purchase for Progress* programme (P4P) started in 2009 as a worldwide pilot programme aimed at strengthening the capacity of farmers' organizations to sell high quality products to local and formal markets as well as to WFP. In Nicaragua, P4P main focus is on providing smallholder farmers with training sessions about specific issues related to agricultural production, adequate farming practices, innovative technologies, opportunities to increase yields and crop quality. Complementary to this, WFP provides farmers' organisations with technological equipment and agricultural inputs i.e. seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals and so on. The overall objective is to develop farmers' capacity and ability for collective marketing. P4P Nicaragua also promotes credit access through the use of revolving funds and by establishing relationships between farmers' organisations and credit institutions. Finally, the programme is aimed at connecting farmers' organisations with other institutional and private buyers i.e. national government, multinational corporations, local supermarkets as an alternative to WFP.

## CHAPTER II

### Theoretical framework

In order to answer the main research questions that underpin the present project, the research draws on a theoretical framework inspired by post-development and post-colonial theories, respectively articulated in the Foucauldian concept of *dispositif* and in the practice of deconstruction of the hegemonic narratives. Despite the intrinsic Eurocentrism often ascribed to Foucault (Spivak, 1999; Young, 1995), the work of the French philosopher has widely inspired the most relevant contributions to colonial and post-development studies, especially through the implementation of the *apparatus* and *governmentality* concepts resulting from the articulation of the reflection around the dynamics of *power/knowledge* and *discourse* creation. Underpinned by reciprocally enforcing dynamics of power and knowledge production, a *dispositif* can be defined as an heterogeneous assemblage of «discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions» that exercise power (Foucault, 1980, p. 194). Intended as such, the *dispositif* concept necessarily refers to the Foucauldian theorisations around *discourse* intended as a system of utterances and meanings as well as practices that constructs an object through a structure of knowledge which ends up to have normative effects on the social domain. Moving from these conceptualisations, Foucault claims for a (post)structural analysis of the discursive regimes aimed at identifying the ways in which a discourse regulates itself (i.e. the identification of subjects, objects, meanings, contexts) as well as the power dimension which can be traced within specific discourses.

Central to the *discourse* concept is the process of *normalization* as described in *Discipline and Punish*, through which a specific *dispositif* (and therefore discourse) establishes itself as a regime of truth. The process stretches itself through different stages, starting from a *hierarchical observation* and *examination* and ending up with the fictitious production of reality in which the effects of power result in disciplined subjectivities whose identities are negatively defined in relation to the «external frontier of the abnormal» (Foucault, 1991, p. 183). Such an established structure of power and knowledge is then institutionalised through the operationalisation of the concept of *governmentality* intended by Foucault as the biopolitical governmental rationality, that is to say the *art of government* comprehensive of all the practices and techniques aimed at directing and shaping the individual conduct (Burchell et al., 1991).

Moving from the concepts above briefly introduced, the present research situates the *development* problematic within the Foucauldian theoretical framework, thus aiming at exploring the dynamics that underpin the establishment of a particular *development* apparatus through the analysis

of the processes of theoretical construction, normalization and governmental institutionalisation of a specific object of development.

Additionally, in order to better address the above mentioned objective, the research draws on the contributions provided by postcolonial theory, intended here as a complementary conceptual framework to the Foucauldian post-development approach. More specifically, the postcolonial framework is intended as an attempt to overcome the limits of the Foucauldian approach consisting in the assumption of the immanent omnipresence of power as the subjugating force that disciplines every aspect of individual bodies and relations (Burchell et al., 1991). In this sense, in assuming that power/knowledge dynamics pervasively produce the subjects and their relations through discursive and non-discursive regimes, Foucault excludes the possibility for the exercise of freedom thus theoretically preventing any form of transformative social agency. As Hartstock points out, the world depicted by Foucault in his works is characterized by the obliteration of the subjects within a pervasive relational framework in which *passivity* and *refusal* are presented as the only possibilities and no room is left for transformation (Hartstock, 1990).

Furthermore, as some postcolonial contributions have noted, it is possible to identify in Foucault's work a naïve form of essentialism which results in the obliteration of the political role of the intellectual in a contradictory process of maintaining the West as the subject while erroneously identifying a fixed, undivided and geopolitically undifferentiated Other. This is particularly the critique advanced by Spivak to a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze in which the two French philosophers engage with the problematic definition of «two monolithic and anonymous subjects-in-revolution» (Spivak, 1999, p. 249) failing to take into account the global contemporary political and economic (re)configuration as well as the postcolonial dislocation of power and interests thus resulting in an unconscious re-establishment of the «Other as the Self's shadow» (Spivak, 1999, p. 266).

With the above mentioned theoretical limits in mind, the value of a postcolonial approach for the purpose of this research is the focus on how to identify the traces of non dominant narratives within the hegemonic power of *development* discourse. That is to say, to find the ruptures through which it is possible to envision alternative futures to come, thus making visible spaces of possibility capable of unfolding the eschatological imminence of the *event of the Other* (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002). Such an unfolding process relies on the practice of deconstruction as intended by the postcolonial scholarship, especially as theorized in the work of Spivak, largely informed by the work of Derrida. Central to the postcolonial approach is the analysis of the processes that have contributed to the marginalisation of the subaltern groups as well as an attempt to trace the presence of such groups through an analysis of the discursive and textual practices that have constituted the hegemonic terms of reference for the Western Subject. In this sense, the work of postcolonial theorists as Spivak

can be seen as an unceasing attempt to elaborate a critical deconstruction of the hegemonic discourses that perform the objects of a particular narrative on the one hand, and the subjects of an individual (or collective) identity on the other hand. In this attempt it is possible to identify a strongly situated political engagement which allows the elaboration of a practice of politics capable of taking into account the transformative agency of subaltern subjectivities.

Drawing on the Derridean concept of *deconstruction* intended as a destructive as well as (re)constructive experience of the (im)possibility (Resta, 2003), Spivak tries to make good use of the *gift of deconstruction* defining it as the practice that allows «to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility» (Spivak, 2006, p. 201). In a Derridean sense, deconstruction is a *différance*, intended as a deferral to, a delay, as well as a difference of meaning which claims for the urgency and the singularity of the event of the absent-Other (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002). Following again Derrida and Spivak, the practice of deconstruction can be intended as a continuous exercise that de-stabilises the texts in the attempt to set up ways of undoing the dominant discourse, thus allowing for the possibility of (political) resistance to be envisaged.

In this sense, the present research project draws on the postcolonial theoretical framework as above described in its attempt to deconstruct the dominant narrative of *development* through an ethical and political engagement with the texts and discourses of hegemonic structures trying to render visible the traces of the exclusions, that is to say the (im)possibility of what is left out. In doing so, the intent is to dwell the text as a space of possibility of and permanent deferral to what is absent from it, that is to say a space of *being-otherwise*. The practice of deconstruction is thus aimed here at identifying the ruptures through which resistance and change can be thought and implemented within the development dispositif intended as the assemblage of knowledge and administrative arrangements that exercise power.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### 3.1. Study site

The qualitative research that underpinned this project was carried out in Nicaragua, within the context of World Food Programme explored in its role of agricultural development agent. Part of the main research activities, consisting in primary sources review, participatory observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, were based in the WFP headquarters in Managua. Beside this, a period of two weeks was spent in the Nicaraguan northern rural areas, more specifically in Jinotega and Ocotal regions taking part in WFP activities i.e. trainings, workshops as well as meetings with farmers' cooperatives.

The WFP headquarters in Managua are located in the *District 1* zone, within a context of international agencies i.e. the World Bank and other NGOs active in the field of international development. Beside the main office in the capital, the research involved two of the four field offices respectively located in Jinotega and Ocotal and the rural area surrounding them.

The choice of the above mentioned study sites was made on the basis of practical, safety as well as logistic reasons. Being the main WFP activities performed in the central headquarters in Managua, it seemed reasonable to focus the majority of the field research in this specific context. Beside this, the regions of Jinotega and Ocotal were chosen due to safety reasons, being the other field offices located in the Caribbean coast which is considered to be a more unstable area and thus would have required safety measures that WFP was unable to guarantee to an external researcher. Moreover, the rationale behind the choice of these two areas was drawn on the fact that, during the time of the field research, several activities was planned by WFP in Jinotega and Ocotal regions so it was easier for the researcher to follow them and this resulted in an overall added value to the research itself.



(WFP, 2017c)

### 3.2. Research methods

The most important research method was constituted by an extensive observation and primary sources review which allowed the researcher to deeply dive into the WFP development apparatus in order to answer the research questions of the project. In this sense, the researcher was an active participant in the everyday life of WFP, this involving the possibility to follow the various processes that underpin the creation of the theoretical construction, normalization and governmental institutionalisation of the WFP specific interventions in terms of agricultural development. More specifically, the researcher participated in several meetings scheduled by WFP *Programme* unit in which the design as well as the implementation of the *Purchase for Progress* interventions were elaborated. Moreover, the researcher took part in meetings aimed at revisioning the *Purchase for Progress* project reports before their publication. Furthermore, the researcher was invited to join a conference held by dr. Mirna Cunningham on the theme of indigenous rights in Nicaragua and organised by WFP in its headquarters. Overall, as the researcher worked in close contact with WFP members, there was the possibility to observe the daily dynamics which underpinned the *Programme* unit working process and to actively engage in explanatory conversations.

Beside this, informal conversations with WFP members i.e. WFP expert meetings, experts' conferences, operational meetings were complementary research methods to the participatory observation and involved different categories of people, namely WFP executive country representatives, programme assistants, consultants, field technicians, drivers, secretary as well as farmers and representatives from the farmers organizations. Such conversations took the form of informal dialogues as they developed in a very unstructured and spontaneous way. The researcher,

according to the research questions and objective, engaged in broad talks with the above mentioned categories of people and engaged in conversations which did not have a fixed structure. On the basis of these informal conversations, which were based on an initial lack of structure, the researcher developed a list of relevant topics to uncover during the semi-structured interviews that were carried out as a complementary research method. Complementary to the above mentioned observation which was basically carried out within WFP main office located in Managua, the research drew on the possibility to follow the WFP technicians in their visits to the cooperatives involved in their agricultural development projects in the areas of Jinotega and Ocotal. This additional observation provided the researcher with meaningful insights regarding the dynamics through which WFP operates as well as the performative real effects of the development apparatus. During these field visits, the researcher maintained her role of observant and engaged in informal conversations with members of the boarding council of the cooperatives as well as with farmers. The researcher actively took part in the meetings between WFP members and cooperatives, benefitting from the possibility to ask for clarifications as well as to pose specific questions during the interaction between the respondents. Furthermore, a series of semi-structured interviews with WFP employees were carried out in an iterative process based on the outcomes resulting from observation and informal conversations.

Beside this, informal conversations were carried out with several UN representatives in Nicaragua i.e. a consultant working for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); an economist employed at the World Bank; a programme assistant employed at FAO and an agronomist involved in agricultural development projects led by international NGOs. These conversations helped the researcher in gaining some meaningful insights about the overall framework in which international development agencies operate in Nicaragua, thus providing a thorough idea of the context as well as the processes through which the idea of agricultural development is elaborated in the country under study.

Additionally, a close reading and discourse analysis of WFP project documents and reports was carried out performing an in-depth review of primary sources with the aim of analysing how the idea of agricultural development is constructed within the narrative of WFP. The choice of texts was based on their relevance for the purpose of the present research so priority was given to country strategic plans, annual and project reports as elaborated by WFP with a specific focus on the *Purchase for Progress* framework, that is to say on the documents related to WFP activities in the field of agricultural development.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The research activities resulted in different kinds of qualitative data, namely fieldnotes, interview transcripts and visual materials i.e. photos. The primary sources review was carried out drawing on a deconstructive discourse analysis aimed at unveiling the power/knowledge production dynamics as well as the traces of what is left out of these situated development discourses. More specifically, the researcher focused on the discursive forms through which subjects and objects were portrayed in the documents, that is to say the specific verbs, adverbs, nouns and other grammar constructions that were used especially to describe and define the smallholder farmers, portrayed as the objects of interventions. Beside this, attention was given to the exercise of questioning the texts, seen as empirical sites through which to identify the traces of what was left out from discursive practices. Through this destabilising act, it was then possible to challenge the dominant discourse and to recognise spaces through which particular forms of knowledge were created.

Moreover, the project and policy documents were analysed through the lens of the following thematic categories: *phenomenon* i.e. what WFP sees as the problem they want to act upon; *context* i.e. what WFP see as the causes of this problem; *action strategies* i.e. the purposeful, goal-oriented activities that WFP performs in response to the phenomenon and *consequences* i.e. the productive effects of the discourses and practices of the action strategies. Beside this, fieldnotes, interview transcripts and visual materials were coded and consequently organised in categories following an iterative process aimed at continuously (re)defining codes. Additionally, fieldnotes as well as interview transcripts were analysed on the basis of the above mentioned thematic categories to thoroughly address the overall research question.

## CHAPTER IV

### *WFP as system*

#### **4.1. The creation of Nicaragua as an object of development**

Moving from the outcomes of the research activities, the following (sub)chapters aim at presenting the narratives about agricultural development issues in Nicaragua as depicted in the project documents and reports as well as within the discourses of WFP members. In doing so, the objective is to provide a clear idea of what I intend as *WFP as system*, that is to say the narratives, temporalities and subjectivities upon which WFP operates and that, at the same time, perform the object of development interventions in a very specific and situated way. More specifically, what is at stake when talking about WFP as *system* is the particular process through which the development *apparatus* reproduces itself within the contemporary neoliberal logical framework, characterised by the dominant temporality of the capitalistic logic and the related synchronising and homogenising tendencies. The analysis of WFP project documents and reports showed a homogenising narrative about the agricultural situation as well as the agricultural obstacles and problems faced by Nicaragua in terms of agricultural development. Overall, despite some relevant differences, also WFP respondents aligned with such narrative, pointing out a synchronising tendency when it comes to the creation of a specific object of development. As the research findings below demonstrate, WFP as *system* operates through standardised and fixed mechanisms aimed at producing a certain knowledge about a specific object and this results in the portrayal of monolithic figures intended as the beneficiary of the interventions, as well as in a strong link between the specific neoliberal logic and the designed interventions.

##### **4.1.1. Producing knowledge**

Moving from what above introduced, the project reports as well as the policy documents demonstrated an overall similar narrative based on a standardized format in which the country under study is depicted on the basis of guidelines provided by WFP on a global level. More specifically, depending on the objectives of the report, there are some specific guidance and formats to be followed when drafting and finalising the monthly, annual or donor reports. The process through which the elaboration of a report is performed starts with a request to the *Programme Unit* to provide some inputs i.e. quantitative data, indicators, evaluations which are used to create the first draft of the document. This stage requires the collaboration and the co-production of knowledge between the main office and the field offices that are asked to provide data and other information. For the monthly

and donor reports there is no fixed structure for the input format, that is to say that, as a respondent explained,

*It can be everything: bullet points, short paragraphs, ideas [...] only for the annual reports we require a specific structure for the inputs we receive. Sometimes inputs come with no or very little background, so we need to create the broader context. In this sense, our work is a bit of everything. WFP1*

After the first draft is created, the different units examine the document to see if all the information contained are correct and to implement them with feedback and changes. A relevant factor in this stage is represented by the language barrier due to the fact that most of the employees are Spanish native speakers without a proficient command of English so, as a respondent said,

*We sit together to see if everyone agrees on the draft and to be sure that everyone is on the same page, especially because all the information is in English and we received inputs in Spanish. WFP1*

Then, the final revision is made by the country representatives who provide further feedback and comments before the document is ready to be published.

As far as the structure of the reports is concerned, the *Standard Project Reports (SPR)* and the *Annual Reports* have a fixed structure which is provided by the international WFP guidelines and each country office has to follow the same guidelines. On the basis of these guidelines, the following scheme can be outlined to clarify the structure of the above mentioned reports:

First section: country level

- Country context and WFP objectives
  - Achievements at country level
  - Country context and response of the government
  - WFP objectives and strategic coordination
- Country resources and results
  - Resource for results
  - Supply chain
  - Implementation of evaluation, recommendations and lessons learned
- Extra section at country and project level

Second section: project level SPR

- Project results
  - Activities and operational partnerships
  - Results
  - Performance monitoring
  - Progress towards gender equality

- Protection and accountability to affected populations
- Extra section at country and project level
- Figures and indicators

As the scheme points out, the structure and the sections are defined in a way that makes it possible to apply such format to every country as well as to every project. In this sense, the attention given to the specificities of a particular country is left to the complete discretion of the single country office that is in charge of elaborating the documents. Differently from the *SPR Reports* and the *Annual Reports*, the monthly and donor reports have a more flexible structure and, as a respondent explained,

*They are created to follow up the implementation and the results of the projects. They can be for internal or external use. The internal ones are meant to be for the executive directors to have a general idea of what is going on. The donor reports also have a flexible structure and this really depends on the donor request. Usually a donor set an amount of money and ask WFP to produce a report about a specific project. WFP1*

As a consequence, when elaborating the donor reports, high attention is given to the outcomes of a particular intervention which is of interest for the donor itself. As underlined during an expert meeting aimed at revisioning the 2016 Country Report commissioned by Canadian government,

*The most important thing is to stress something on which there have been some positive results and not on something in which we did not achieve any result. We need to focus on something we have improved to demonstrate this to Canadian government. WFP3*

As an international development actor, WFP receives funds from private donors, national governments and from other international institutions. In November 2017, the donors were Australia, Canada, European Union, Japan, Nicaragua, Private Donors, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland. In this sense, the will to give a good impression to the donor is a logic consequence of the international development agencies dynamics based on external financial contributions aimed at supporting a specific intervention. However, this can easily have performative effects when it comes to the decision of what to include and, consequently, to exclude from a particular discourse. The above mentioned respondent's words bring together the deliberated intention to exclude some particular factors and, more specifically, the negative ones, in order to adapt to the logic of a specific donor. The will to elaborate a good report of what went well is reflected by the donor's will to hear that its money was properly spent, in a sort of circular self-referential mechanism in which the traces of potential counternarratives are obliterated.

#### 4.1.2. A monolithic figure

Moving from what above introduced, the discourse analysis of the reports showed a uniform and shared narrative concerning the Nicaraguan context, which can be meaningfully summarised as follows:

Nicaragua classifies as a **low middle-income country** with a GDP of US\$1,650 (World Bank, 2012). It remains as one of the three Latin American countries classified by FAO as low-income food deficit country and is currently ranked 129 out of 187 nations in the 2012 Human Development Index (HDI). Although the country's HDI score rose by 30 percent between 1990 and 2012, the benefits of economic development have been largely uneven. It is estimated that 42.5 percent of the population lives **below the national poverty line** and 14.6 percent live on less than US\$1.25 per day<sup>2</sup>.

Agriculture is the primary economic activity in Nicaragua and engages almost 70 percent of the nation's population and contributes to 20 percent of the country's GDP. Basic grains are traditionally grown by subsistence farmers typically working small plots of land. Smallholder farmers grow beans and maize in particular, which are the staple foods of most Nicaraguan households.

**Farming is influenced by climactic conditions** in Nicaragua and is further aggravated by shifting rainfall patterns in the border areas between the humid and dry zones due to deforestation. Too much or too little rain during the agricultural season affects the planting cycle and increases the risks of crops losses. This situation affects the food security situation of the most vulnerable households in Nicaragua.

Subsistence farmers often utilize the surrounding natural resources in **unsustainable ways**, resulting in **environmental degradation** and **deforestation**. These families continue to practice **traditional agricultural methods with low-yield production** of staple grains. In addition, they have **little farm management experience, low technical capacity and considerable financial limitations, which lead to post-harvest losses**. These factors, along with the effects of climate change, increase their vulnerability to natural disasters and other shocks.

According to official data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAGFOR), yields among smallholders' farmers, during the agricultural cycle 2012/2013 were 0.78TM/Ha (for beans) and in the case of maize was 1.49TM/Ha. In addition, smallholder farmers have **null farm management experience and low technical capacity, considerable financial limitations and significant post-harvest losses**. These factors along with the impact of climate change increase their vulnerability to natural disasters and other shocks.

In Nicaragua **food production is largely insufficient due to inefficient use of land and water resources, lack of agricultural inputs and services to the smallholders**, who are the main contributors to the national staple food production. The significant

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<sup>2</sup> Nicaraguan Households Survey on Living Standards (EMNV 2009)

import of staple foods (vegetable oil, wheat flour and rice), along with food aid, compliments the food availability in the country. It is estimated that the per capita food consumption has a **deficit** of 200 kcal per day. In the rural and outskirts areas, more than 65 percent of the food intake is composed of carbohydrates<sup>3</sup>. In addition, food insecurity and under nutrition among the most vulnerable population groups is due to the **lack of access to local markets that results from their lack of income to buy food**.

WFP Project Document, “Country Programme 200434 Component 5”

As the extract underlines, most of the statistical and quantitative data are derived from other UN development agencies, from the World Bank or from the national agricultural census in a process that can be positioned within a *knowledge management* aimed at maintaining the development paradigm through the creation of quantitative data which then promote and legitimise the development interventions (Cornwall & Eade, 2010). Nicaragua is described as an agricultural-based country largely affected by climate change phenomena which directly and negatively impact on the food security situation of the smallholder farmers. These latter are described through a negative definition process which underlines the lack of skills and abilities and the consequent negative effects of traditional farming styles on the levels of self-subsistence. The assumption that smallholder farmers have very little or no farming experiences is at the basis of all the technical trainings that WFP provides to the members of farmer organizations with the objective of bridging the gap between the so-called low technical skills and the optimal and efficient farming practices.

All the documents analysed displayed a monolithic smallholder farmer figure without any specificity nor any particular socio-cultural or political position. When cultural aspects of tradition are taken into account, they are negatively defined and linked to forms of un-development or backwardness. This homogenising logic consequently erases all forms of conflict and flattens the reality through a process of obliteration of all the differences that would require differentiated and politically situated interventions which are not aligned with WFP mandate as it is depicted within the official documents and discourses. In doing so, any qualitative difference is transformed into quantitative delay and, consequently, a mass of written documents is produced to fix the subjects of development and to document such backwardness.

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<sup>3</sup> Policy on Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty from the Rural and Agricultural Sector (MAGFOR). 2009.

#### 4.1.3. The homogenising effect of WFP as system

Looking at WFP documents allows to identify another homogenising tendency specifically related to the objective of the *Purchase for Progress* programme, namely the attempt to strengthen the smallholder farmers' capacities in order to connect them with larger and formal markets. This goal has been pursued especially in the last few years, when trying to link some of the most virtuous farmer organization (i.e. the most productive and competitive in terms of product price) with multinational corporations like Walmart and other agrobusiness companies. As it can be read in one of the P4P reports,

The programme aims at improving the livelihoods and food security of 3,000 smallholder farmers, organised in 15 Farmer Organisations (FO), who have limited productive and business capacities. To do so, WFP and its main partner, the National Institute of Agricultural Technology [...] are working to foster the productivity, quality, and business skills of its assisted farmers, while linking them to formal markets.

What is left out here are the traces of the side effects of these interventions which are likely to change the farming systems of the smallholder farmers in a way that, far from being neutral, can have several (un)intended consequences, mainly related with the attempt to turn farmers into world market entrepreneurs, thus coherently unfolding the neoliberal logic. By stating its aim of connecting smallholder farmers with formal and larger markets, WFP is performing a deliberate subsumption of all the different identities, temporalities and narratives under the neoliberal system dominated by the market logic and characterised by a fast temporality in which there is only one hegemonic narrative which performs the reality in which every action takes place. As one of the respondents asserted,

*We need to focus on the products that have higher exchange value. What the market is asking from the producers is to basically change their way of producing. Then, if they enter the Walmart market, they are safe for all the year. WFP2*

As it can be easily acknowledged here, the language used can be positioned within the capitalist logic framework and can be linked to the quantitative indicators that WFP uses to evaluate the performance of the FOs. In fact, in order to determine if a cooperative is on the path of development, quantitative indicators are used as the implementation of an ongoing observation through which the process of examination sets its boundaries. One of the most important indicators that was pointed out by the respondents when asked how they decide whether a cooperative is improving its performance

was the sales volume, together with the competitiveness of product prices. It is then clear that, within this fast neoliberal logic applied to smallholder farmers, it is easy to lose some relevant and ancestral characteristics that once formed particular subjectivities and narratives. In order to be able to enter the formal markets, a smallholder Nicaraguan farmer who normally cultivates 1 to 5 manzanas of land (approx. 0.7-3.5 ha) needs to align with the changes promoted by international development agencies like WFP. This brings together the performative effect of opening up the possibility to new actors to enter the development apparatus i.e. agrochemical businesses, seed multinationals thus coherently unfolding the neoliberal logic. As the project documents report, during 2016 there was a surge as well as an enforcement of partnerships with relevant actors that have broad experience in access to credit, agricultural supplies (e.g. SAGSA DISAGRO and FORMUNICA), commercialisation and marketing (e.g. Walmart and Café Soluble) (WFP, 2017c).

#### **4.1.4. The *emancipatory* power of technology**

Moving from the performative processes of negative definition above mentioned, which are carried out through self-reproductive dynamics specifically aimed at maintaining the *modus operandi* of development agencies, another performative discourse can be identified within the project reports elaborated by WFP i.e. the narrative around the role and impact of technology on smallholder farmers. If thoroughly analysed, WFP project reports present a neutral portrayal of technology, intended as an emancipatory tool through which smallholder farmers can improve and develop their agricultural practices in order to access formal markets with competitive prices. What is left out from the discourse about technology is the impact that the introduction of technologically innovative tools can have on farmers' cooperatives. There is no trace within WFP reports of the effects that machinery provided by WFP to smallholder farmers have on the sense of community as well on the community cohesion. As a farmer emphasised during an informal conversation,

*Look at this tool. It is used to select different types of beans. Before we received it, we usually gather together with other farmers and we did the selection by hand. Now, this machinery does it for us. We just bring the beans here and this tool selects the seeds on the basis of weight and quality. FAR 1*

On the other hand, looking at WFP reports, one can easily identify an overall positive and neutral narrative about the development potential of technologically advanced machinery. Equipment and tools provided to farmers' cooperatives are portrayed as one of the main reasons for increased yields and competitiveness as these extracts show:

*A lack of adequate capital for technological innovation continues to restrict productivity, limiting yields of maize and beans, let alone aggregation and processing capacity. (WFP, 2014)*

*To reach its high quality standards, WFP is supporting smallholder's farmers, through their farmer's organizations, with technical assistance, storage infrastructure, basic grains processing equipment and agricultural inputs to improve the quality of their harvest. Consequently, it is expected that the smallholder farmers' households will be improving their income and food security, especially when they increase their productivity. WFP Project Document, 2014*

*In 2017, WFP will continue to provide trainings and technical assistance to these smallholder farmers in order to reinforce the adoption of low cost agricultural technologies, which are conducive to higher productivity and a more sustainable use of environmental resources. (WFP, 2017c)*

Despite some differences due to the specific objectives of the different documents, the extracts above mentioned obliterate the discourse about the perception of smallholder farmers towards the introduction of innovative machinery as well as another relevant issue i.e. the processes that regulate the access to technology within farmers' cooperatives. Both these issues draw on power dynamics that are not traceable within WFP discourses, but that arose when talking directly with the farmers. As one farmer stated,

*We didn't receive machinery by WFP. WFP gives machinery only to big cooperatives. We are small so we are not going to receive anything from them. FAR2*

Moreover, no account is given in the project documents to the power dynamics and relationships that underpin the possibility to have access to equipment and tools directly by the farmers members of the cooperatives. In fact, being the farmers' cooperatives intended as autonomous organisations, WFP has little control on the internal dynamics of the cooperatives and, consequently, on the potential exclusive processes at stake when it comes to the actual use of technological machinery. Overall, what lacks in WFP narrative is an in-depth analysis of the integration process of technology within farmers' cooperatives intended as a collective. High attention by WFP is given to the fact that all the equipment provided is properly used and well maintained and strong emphasis is put on checking the *status* of the machinery, during regular field visits.

## 4.2. Defining farmers' needs

Complementary to the narrative depicted in WFP project documents, it is possible to trace the development discourses as portrayed within WFP as a result of the assemblages of different individualities, roles and situated subjectivities. Overall, the respondents agreed on identifying specific problems related to agricultural development in Nicaragua so it can be said that there is a certain analogy between the portrayal of Nicaragua within the reports and the WFP members' narratives. In this sense, based on the results of the research activities, it is possible to include the WFP members' narratives within what has been defined here as WFP as *system*. However, if compared to the discourses presented in the project reports and documents, these narratives are less homogenised and characterised by a slightly larger heterogeneity that can be attributed to different personal backgrounds, roles and activities within WFP and personal attitudes. Most of WFP respondents were born and raised in Nicaragua, with some exceptions related to the country director and the deputy from Europe and a programme consultant from South America. Overall, there was a horizontal agreement within the narrative about the main agricultural development issues in Nicaragua between WFP members whereas the main difference emerged in the discourse about the role of the national government related to WFP and the overall *status quo* of the country.

### 4.2.1. Financial resources

One of the main problems identified as crucial for agricultural development was the lack of financial resources that was considered at the basis of a vicious cycle which leads smallholder farmers to sell their products at low prices in the local markets with no perspective of improvement in terms of quality of the products as well as their livelihoods. This phenomenon can be specifically identified in the role played by the so-called *coyote* who is an intermediary to which smallholder farmers sell their product immediately after the harvest or in advance, through informal forwarded contracts. As a respondent asserted:

*it is really difficult to give those people a valid alternative to the intermediary [the coyote]. He goes to the farm and he has the money immediately available. Producers need money to provide their families with basic needs. I would say that 95% of the farmers does not have any resources and as a consequence they sell to the Coyote. This also because the cooperative pays them later on and not immediately so it is not easy to make them change idea. WFP4*

Similarly, according to another respondent:

*The most common method for a producer is to sell its product directly from the door of his farm or parcels because the trader directly goes to him so there are no transportation costs and no market risks. Well, the beans need to be cleaned from impurity and they are really susceptible to damage so the storage phase is really dangerous and the producer has also to stick to a credit that does not give him margin and possibility to wait a good market price. This is a limit of course in making the producer selling it through an organization. So, the widespread culture is that the coyote buys it as it comes from the field and he only does his own evaluations about the humidity level, the quality and so on. So, the producer on the basis of these evaluations decides if to sell it or not but normally he has to sell it because, for instance, his child is ill. WFP5*

Compared to the first extract, the second text takes into consideration different factors that can actually influence the farmers in their decisions. The difference of these two extracts can be partly ascribed to the different roles of the two respondents within WFP and with the relative amount of time they spend in the field. However, what can be noticed is an overall broad awareness of the context in which farmers operate, characterised by factors that go beyond the lack of resources and encompass the role of the cooperatives, the market prices as well as the credit system and specific farming practices which do not guarantee a high quality product.

The lack of financial resources was also related to the overall lack of investments which do not contribute to the improvement of farmers' condition in terms of productive capacity and crop quality. Some of the respondents underlined the correlation between low financial resources and the lack of organisational structure of some cooperatives. More specifically, as cooperatives need to be legally constituted and recognised, they have to organise periodic meetings with all the boarding members and farmers representatives. This usually implies high organisational and logistic costs that cooperatives with low financial resources are not able to cover. The result is that cooperatives that are not legally registered can not have access to governmental and institutional aid and are forced to leave any development project in which they are involved. As a farmer replied to a WFP member who asked for clarification about their internal organisational problems,

*we had some problems and we were not able to organize an assembly due to lack of resources. We have 150 members so the financial issue is the most important and we lack resources. Just for drinking and lunch we need to pay 25500 Cordobas [approx. 800 USD]. So, if we want to organize an assembly, we need some support from WFP.*

The broader issue at stake here is the imperative to adapt to the contemporary neoliberal system based on high levels of bureaucratisation, fix normative and legal frameworks which serve to

constantly reproduce a specific logic, no matter if it is so detached from the reality in which it operates.

#### 4.2.2. Agricultural and market problems

Another issue related to agricultural development in Nicaragua was identified by all the respondents in the very low outcomes of traditional farming practices, in terms of productivity as well as the possibility to access the market. Based on the informal conversations carried out throughout the research, small-scale agricultural production in Nicaragua is negatively influenced by adverse climate phenomena i.e. rainfalls, droughts, hurricanes, as well as by high prices of fertilizers, post-harvest losses, inefficient storage techniques, non-mechanized agriculture and tradition-based agriculture. As a respondent said:

*Farmers usually cultivate small plots and therefore they have no incentives in doing investments due to the fact that they can not benefit from the scale economics that usually derives from extensive farming systems. In this sense, the huge farms in Brazil, Eastern Europe or China squeeze out the farmers who produce corn and grain in an extremely competitive market. WFP6*

What is more, the access to international and formal markets is very limited, though there are some possibilities to export a small quantity of products to neighbour countries as well as to United State. However, according to the respondents, factors like price fluctuation and prohibitive credit rates do not allow farmers to expand their plots in order to be able to reach a stable link with formal markets. Beside this, as a WFP respondent emphasised when describing the negotiation process between farmers cooperatives and Walmart,

*most of the negotiation success depends on their attitude: sometimes their attitude to negotiate requires a lot of time but this is not the best solution. They need to learn to carry out and organize the negotiation together, and this of course needs to be done according to the market dynamics. It is something that has to do with learning to work as a group and to take decisions very quickly. The decision in a negotiation needs to be rapid. You know, time is important. Market doesn't wait, you have to decide quickly WFP2*

Here, again, we see WFP as *system* producing performative effects on temporality trying to impose a very fast and linear time logic which perfectly adapts to the capitalistic one. In doing so, the

slow and circular temporality of farmers and their farming practices is portrayed as backward and, as such, obliterated as an obstacle to the realisation of the neoliberal dream.

Furthermore, looking at the narrative about P4P project allows to identify some specific characteristics of the overall discourse about WFP self-projection. As a WFP respondent described, P4P was born in 2009 and until 2013 it was in its pilot phase, intended only as a buying programme through which WFP bought beans and corn from farmers' cooperatives to support the *National School Meal Programme*. Continuing with the respondent's words,

*Later on, the programme became a real development programme focusing on the production but also on the selling phase. For a farmer it is more important to know that his product will have a market possibility. So, the second phase 2013-2018 focused on the purchase and access to formal market for the cooperatives. The third phase 2019-2023 will shift the focus on new institutional actors as buyers e.g. big supermarkets etc. Actors of a certain size and relevance, capable of assuring the cooperative a constant access to the market. WFP6*

As underlined in the previous subchapters, the above mentioned words re-assert the overall hegemonic narrative on the basis of which, moving from the identification of a problem i.e. here the market-related problems, technical interventions are elaborated accordingly to the specific neoliberal logic which aims at turning smallholder farmers into market entrepreneurs.

Beside this, as a respondent underlined when asked about the most relevant obstacles to agricultural development in Nicaragua,

*Farmers' abilities in terms of technical skills are very limited. They do the best from the small resources they have but the fact is that the abilities they learned do not allow them to see further, to see other alternatives and options. WFP7*

As the text points out, traditional farming practices are seen as a limit to agricultural development, especially when it comes to productivity levels as well as environmentally friendly and resilient practices. Most of the respondents lamented the fact that farmers do not have adequate information about the impacts of climate change and, consequently, they can not adapt their farming practices to a context which is increasingly different from that they were used to operate in. Furthermore, a lack of awareness about the negative effects of some traditional agricultural activities i.e. the burning of parcels was recognised as a limit to the implementation of effective development interventions.

Related to what above introduced, a complementary obstacle to agricultural development was identified in an overall lack of access to land, more specifically for women. There are a lot of subsistence farmers that have to rent land to survive because the space where they live is limited and does not allow them to produce enough for their livelihoods. Beside this, women condition in terms of access to land is even worse as the land tenure in Nicaragua does not allow them to be land owners. As a respondent explained,

*there is a series of laws that are not being implemented. For instance, the law about the possibility for women to buy land: the law number 717 for the creation of a land fund for rural women. This was an initiative pushed by the Rural Women Group [...] The law was approved but it has not been implemented yet and the fund has not been created yet. WFP9*

Beside this, some of the respondents acknowledged the negative role played by the shift towards more productive crops like tobacco and coffee. More precisely, as far as tobacco is concerned, there has been an overall trend that has been leading Nicaraguan farmers to rent their land to Cubans entrepreneurs as well as multinational corporations who want to expand their tobacco production at lower prices. As a farmer underlined,

*Farmers have debts and are currently selling their cows and so on. A lot of farmers rent their land to tobacco producers that pay well. And with coffee is the same. Now, there is more land for tobacco than for food. FAR3*

However, the issue above mentioned, was not largely mentioned within WFP members' narrative and was completely absent from the narrative about agricultural development problems as depicted within the project documents and reports.

To sum up, the most relevant problems related to agricultural development in Nicaragua as identified by WFP members can be ascribed to the lack of financial resources due to low productivity and difficult access to formal markets that are characterized by price fluctuation and high competitiveness, limited technical skills related to tradition-based farming practices, lack of access to land and credit, especially for women, and climate change impacts which are not managed with adequately resilient methods.

#### 4.2.2. Marketing infrastructure

Beside the above mentioned most acknowledged problems, there were some less frequent obstacles pointed out during the research activities by the respondents. As two of the respondents underlined, the high indebtedness of some cooperatives is a crucial problem as it prevents them to further develop in terms of investments as well as quality and quantity improvements. As stated by one of the respondents,

*due to multiple crisis in the last years, cooperatives have used their own resources and have given credit to the producers. But, due to market price crisis and climate change impacts, the producers went into debt and were not able to pay their debts to the cooperatives. So, the cooperative is actually paying these debts and their financial indicators are not good actually. So, the cooperative itself is not allowed to get capital from a bank and so on. WFP 5*

Furthermore, the lack of adequate organisational structure within some cooperatives was stressed as a negative factor that does not allow development interventions to be effective. For instance, some of the cooperatives supported by WFP do not have a solid structure and this results in a limit when it comes to the implementation of a specific intervention. As emphasised by a respondent, what lacks is a solid hierarchical organisation within the cooperatives which would be capable of guaranteeing an efficient working dynamic, especially given the extended dimensions of the biggest cooperatives. The respondent gave an example of a cooperative which is really well organised saying that

*this cooperative was founded by military people from different parties immediately after the revolution. And, in the end, I think this military discipline and culture taught them and helped them a lot. Because they have a leader and also an administrative council but they have a leader and all what the council does is channelled through the leader. And this helped them a lot in not having too many people that want to rule. And this helped them succeed in the projects. WFP10*

Beside this, another problem emphasised by some of the respondents was the lack of a normative framework that takes into account the quality differences when products enter the local market. Once the farmer gets access to local market, there are no preferential channels for high quality products e.g. organic, with less impurities and, consequently, the prices do not consider such differences. As reported by a respondent,

*The idea is that by selling to WFP, these producers can achieve a better income level because the grain market here in Nicaragua is quite informal and there are no specific brands for beans or corn, so corn is corn and beans are beans and that's it. So, there is no difference for the market. On the contrary, for WFP there is a specific quality standard in the contracts and these standards are far higher than the quality required by the local market. WFP5*

As the quote above underlines, the absence of a specific channel for high quality products is overcome by the establishment of specific WFP quality standards that farmers need to accomplish in order to be able to access better prices guaranteed by WFP itself. However, these standards are globally defined and sometimes they do not fit well with the specific characteristics of the Nicaraguan context, as a farmer pointed out. To overcome this problem, according to what a WFP respondent stated,

*WFP standards are globally established but there can be some exceptions on the basis of some particular geographical or contingent needs. WFP standards for Nicaragua are a bit above the national standards and a bit below the global standards. We were able to negotiate this with WFP and the government. WFP 11*

As it was often emphasised both by WFP respondents and farmers, such standards are high and difficult to achieve and sometimes farmers have to give up trying to sell to WFP because they are not able to meet the quality and quantity requirements. In this sense, it is possible to acknowledge the exclusiveness of these standards in the sense that they facilitate those farmers who have access to adequate means of production and technology through which it is possible to reach the desired standards. What is left out from the narrative above introduced are the effects of such exclusive criteria, which can be perfectly positioned within the self-reproductive mechanism of WFP as a development agent. More specifically, farmers who do not meet the established standards are forced to leave the development game unless they accept further help i.e. trainings aimed at strengthening their productive capacities, more productive agricultural inputs and larger use of technological tools. As it can be easily acknowledged, specific problems that might prevent farmers to actually reach the WFP standards are imagined and represented as mere technical issues and, consequently, they are situated within the domain of particular technical interventions that are to be implemented.

#### **4.2.3. Complying with the mandate**

Finally, the role of national government was highlighted as critical for agricultural development in the country. More specifically, as a respondent stated,

*there are not enough rural assistance programmes capable of giving small producers the kind of assistance they need. And the fact is that the producer who has the highest profit, negotiate for this [assistance] so he pays for this service. For small farmers, the government does not have programmes of technical assistance. And the impact of the programmes that already exist is very low. WFP8*

In support of what above just mentioned, a farmer declared that

*We are abandoned by the government; the technicians do not support us and we feel as we are abandoned. The subsidies they give us are not sufficient. FAR3*

This latter issue can be positioned within an overall critical narrative of WFP respondents about the role of the national government when it comes to evaluate its actions in terms of agricultural development as well as its relation with WFP itself. More specifically, the majority of WFP respondents, though acknowledging some positive actions that the national government is taking in terms of rural development, lamented an obtrusive role when it comes to allowing WFP to qualitatively evaluate its projects and, in general, to access the rural communities. This was often related by WFP respondents to the lack of qualitative data associated with the quantitative indicators of their interventions. Within this process, it is possible to identify what can be intended as a mechanism through which relevant limits are ascribed to external causes, thus avoiding a thorough self-analysis and critique. As one of the respondents declared, agreeing with other colleagues,

*the government is really centralised and is always informed about everything. There is a widespread control by the government and in general they do not want NGOs, UN and so on to have much visibility. We all need to adopt a low profile. We also need, as an international agency, to align with the national guidelines even if there are some limits in them namely the human rights. But we are not in charge of monitoring human rights. As WFP, we are in charge of supporting the government within the food security domain. WFP6*

According to the words above reported, WFP needs to align with its mandate which is to support the local government in topics and interventions related to food security and agricultural development as well as to follow the national guidelines and priorities. What these words bring together is the performative depoliticizing effect through which the development interventions are designed and put in practice in a process that obliterates local and specific political issues turning them into technical problems that are to be solved through technical interventions. In order to do so, quantitative

indicators are elaborated in order to monitor the progress of the objects of interventions i.e. farmers cooperatives by fixing an average and an optimum to which every cooperative must aim. Then, through a process of continuous surveillance and evaluation, ranks as well as hierarchies of more developed and less developed cooperatives are elaborated. During an informal conversation with some WFP respondents, what emerged was the idea to actually create a ranking system in which to position the cooperatives on the basis of some indicators and to consequently award the most virtuous cooperative in terms of progress made towards development. As a respondent stated,

*There was the idea of awarding the best practice cooperative through a graduation ceremony. It is something that we really would like to do and I think we will do it soon.*  
WFP6

So far, no graduation ceremony has been organised but a rank based on the quantitative indicators of the logical framework that underpins the *Purchase for Progress* project was elaborated. In doing so, the aim was, as a respondent declared, to decide what cooperatives to promote to the next stage of the project, that is to say what cooperatives to support in the future five years with new interventions funded by a new flow of donors' money. When asked which indicators they would consider as the most relevant for a hypothetical award, there was almost a unanimous agreement on the following criteria: the sales rate; how the cooperative redistributes the profits to its members; the organizational structure; the gender inclusion at the level of decision making; the development of autonomous negotiation skills; human and social development. When looking at the quantitative indicators of the logical framework of the *Purchase for Progress* project, these are the actual criteria used to evaluate and rank the cooperatives: productive capacity; storage and processing; financial performance; funds for production; funds for commercialisation; credit recover; commercialisation; valorisation.

#### **4.4. Synthesis**

As the research findings above introduced demonstrate, WFP as *system* operates through performative effects in terms of production of narratives, subjectivities and temporalities, in a process that draws on fixed mechanisms aimed at objectifying specific beneficiaries of development interventions. This dynamic can be identified in the elaboration process of the official project reports and documents that are informed by a depoliticised reduction of the reality to numbers on the basis of which different categories of subjects and countries can be listed, compared and ranked. This can also be found within the narratives of WFP members that generally aligns with the one presented in

the reports. Complementary to this, what emerged is a parallel *reductio ad unum* of different subjectivities i.e. the farmers that are defined through a negative differentiation with a reference abstract ideal farmer. In this process, farmers are defined in relation to what they lack thus underlining the need to provide them with interventions aimed at bridging the gap between their backwardness and the optimum and ideal level. Furthermore, by reducing farmers to a monolithic totality, all specific differences which bring together socio-political and cultural particularities are silenced and obliterated. Beside this, two other main issues were identified as closely related to the dynamics of WFP as *system*, namely the strong link between development interventions and the neoliberal logic on the one hand, and the impact of what can be intended as a technological turn on the basis of which most of such interventions are designed and implemented on the other hand. As far as the former is concerned, what emerged is the predominance of a capitalistic logic which has performative effects on the temporality involved in the interventions. In this sense, drawing on Harvey's works on neoliberalism (Harvey, 2003, 2007), WFP as *system* can be seen as trying to unfold sets of practices aimed at liberating smallholder farmers' entrepreneurial freedom and abilities, within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2007). By pursuing the objective to link farmers with formal markets, WFP operates a subsumption of different ancestral and slow temporalities under a modern and fast one, in which market rules determine the (high) speed of the processes at stake. When looking at the technological turn issue, what can be stressed is the neutral way in which technology is portrayed and introduced to farmers cooperatives as a mere tool to meet the market requirements as well as to overcome their limits in terms of lack of resources, inputs and expertise.

Overall, the standardised and fixed mechanisms through which WFP as *system* operates are aimed at producing a specific knowledge about a particular object which is negatively portrayed as a monolithic figure coherently inserted within a capitalistic logic characterised by technocratic interventions and obliteration of differences.

## CHAPTER V

### WFP as *practices*

#### 5.1. Giving voice to the silenced

Drawing on the outcomes of the research activities, the following (sub)chapters are intended as an account of how WFP development interventions are institutionalised as organised practices i.e. how they are put in practice in the reality in which they operate. In doing so, the aim is to depict a clear portrayal of what I intend as WFP as *practices*, that is to say, in analogy with WFP as *system*, the different narratives, temporalities and subjectivities that can be identified in the actual reality in which such interventions take place.

More specifically, as the research findings below demonstrate, WFP as *practices* is characterised by a large heterogeneity that is mirrored in coexisting narratives, slow temporalities and conflicting and differentiated subjectivities. In this sense, WFP as *practices* can be defined as related to different cultures, traditions and experiences that together form a narrative of words which continuously try to resist as a counter narrative to WFP as *system* in a perpetual effort to give voice to the silenced. However, as the findings below underline, WFP as *practices* is not totally detached from and in contrast to WFP as *system* and, in this sense, some overlaps between the two can be identified.

##### 5.1.1. Defining development

On the basis of the outcomes of the research activities, a strong link between personal ideas about the concept of *development* and the approach of WFP members in the field was identified. More specifically, when asked about defining what *development* means to them, most of the respondents referred to a holistic theorisation of the concept, thus performing a narrative that is distant from the homogenised idea of neoliberal development as portrayed in the official project reports. The fact that in the previous (sub)chapters WFP members' narrative was portrayed as aligned with the narrative of the reports can be referred to what I call the *schizophrenia of the development agent* that is to say the substantial gap between the personal attitudes, beliefs and backgrounds of WFP members intended as *individualities* on the one hand, and the opinions and discourses of WFP members intended as embedded in the *system* on the other hand.

As a respondent said about his idea of development,

*one can not intend development as only related to economic development as there are also other aspects which need to be taken into account. One should look at how people feel as to say for example if people feel safe. This holistic view of development is unfortunately not yet present within WFP as there are sometimes lobbies that prevent these indicators to be recognized and legitimized. If you say something in this sense, you are thought to be naïve. But they are said to be naïve as they are not in line with the capitalistic and mercantilist logic. But, you know, when the biggest donors are linked to international lobbies, there is very little to do. There are sometimes interests that do not allow some paths to be thinkable. WFP6*

What is astonishing in these words is the language shift towards terms that are far from being assimilable to the neoliberal framework and thus can be referred to a counter narrative that is produced from within the *system* itself. Similarly to this definition of development, most of WFP respondents emphasised the importance of taking into account a broad and holistic approach to such concept and this was considered one of the main factors that can potentially make a project more efficient as well as more focused on the real needs of the beneficiaries. To say this with the words of two respondents,

*For me development means that one can have access to her human rights as they are internationally recognized. Then, it means that one is autonomous and independent from international cooperation and also economically self-subsistent. WFP12*

And,

*When we talk about development a lot of things are involved, not only economic factors. You can not talk about agricultural development if you do not talk about social and human development within the community. If the community does not have access to basic services, if people can not satisfy their basic needs and so on. WFP9*

Again here, personal attitudes and values can be seen as trying to affirm themselves in a process of positive differentiation with the hegemonic narrative as depicted in the previous (sub)chapters. The performative potential of such affirmation was identified also within the practices of WFP field technicians that were largely based on a genuine interest towards the implementation of the above mentioned holistic understanding of development.

### **5.1.2. Making differences visible**

Moving from the participatory observation conducted during the implementation of trainings and workshops in the rural communities, a lot of emphasis was given by WFP field technicians to

inclusive and participatory methodologies on the basis of which workshops, roundtables, demonstrative sessions and trainings were carried out. Overall, the idea was to give space, time and voice to the farmers who were asked to share their experiences as well as their knowledge and expectations. As a WFP respondent reported during an informal conversation about a recent workshop, with the support of pictures and videos as to demonstrate the truthfulness of their words, being climate change the focus of that workshop, farmers were first asked about their perceptions about different seasons. Then, on the basis of that, a calendar for a typical year was jointly created underlining all the different perceptions about specific seasons, characteristics and changes. In this sense, the idea was to unveil (dis)similarities between farmers' perceptions and to foster a discussion about it. However, as the respondent pointed out,

*activities like these are very time demanding and they can require up to 20 hours of presentation, discussion and so on. Furthermore, one has to take into account the farmers' necessities as well. For instance, if they are in the productive season and they are working in the field, even the most interesting workshop is not likely to have a good response. The problem is that we as WFP sometimes have little time to carry out these activities. WFP13*

Again, a rupture between the *system* and the *practices* can be recognised in the words above mentioned, especially related to a clash between two different temporalities at stake within the process of a specific intervention i.e. the fast temporality that dominates the *system* opposed to the slow temporality that characterises the *practices*. Another meaningful example of this clash can be traced in the so-called *tùnel del tiempo* exercise in which farmers were asked to position the most relevant climatic events on a timeline relating such events to their personal lives or to the life of their communities. As the respondent underlined,

*there are sometimes cases in which people remember things better if they relate them with personal life events or community events. Usually these moments are also moments in which a lot of emotions emerge. I've noticed that this is really helpful. It can be difficult for me as a facilitator because sometimes I have 750 years of history to examine. WFP13*

As a result of the activities above described, farmers emerge in their heterogeneity which is composed of different identities and traditions as well as co-existing perceptions about similar events. In this sense, WFP as *practices*, far from erasing the differences and thus flattening the reality in an undifferentiated way, gives space to conflict intended as an intrinsic element of the reality as well as

a positive process through which individualities can establish specific ways of being together in the world.

Complementary to this, WFP as *practices* expresses itself through a narrative of words and through what the French historian Jacques Le Goffe referred to as the *church time* intended as opposed to the *merchant time* (Le Goff, 1970). The *church time* can be translated, in the specific context of this research, in the time of the village which corresponds to the temporality of the farmers as expressed by their practices and values. This temporality is slower if compared to the *merchant time* as to say to the market rules that impose fast decisions and non-mediated processes. During the implementations of training sessions and workshops, high attention was given by WFP field technicians to farmers' temporality, especially through *ad hoc* methodologies and an overall high context-related approach as exemplified by the picture below, taken during a workshop organised by WFP in the community of San Dionisio (Jinotega):



As the picture shows, participants were asked to draw a poster in which to portray the ideal situation in terms of commercialisation of their products. During the activity, all farmers took an active role and large space was left for their ideas to be heard and exchanged. Beside this, WFP field technician stepped back and allow the participants to be fully in charge of the activity process. In this occasion, conflicting opinions and visions, as well as different experiences, arose and were well

managed by the participants who were able to end the workshop with a common vision about how to face some problems they have within their community.

Analysing another training organised by WFP allows to underline an additional characteristic of WFP as *practices* i.e. the high awareness and context-related knowledge demonstrated by all WFP field technicians. All field technicians that I followed during their field visits come from the specific region in which they usually operate and demonstrated a strong sense of belonging to that particular place, and, overall, to the country in general. As a respondent stressed,

*I am happy to do something for my country. Doing what I do makes me feel that I am helping these people and contributing to the life of their communities. I was born and raised in Jinotega, so I know very well what challenges these farmers are facing.*  
WFP7

Furthermore, during an informal conversation carried out while participating in a training organised specifically for women coming from the community of San Ramón (Jinotega), a WFP respondent stressed a high awareness about the challenges women might face when taking part in these trainings:

*These women live really far away from here and for this reason they did not bring any book or pen. And the reason why we should finish the meeting by 2 pm is that 2 pm is the last chance for them to take a bus and go back safe to their communities. Otherwise they need to walk more than 3 hours (most of them are from Pueblo Viejo, 130 Cordobas so 4 USD more or less) and everything can happen to them, even bad things like rapes. Or they have to spend the night here but it is not possible because they have families and kids.* WFP14

Knowing the socio-cultural and spatial context in which one operates helps in designing and implementing trainings and workshops in a proper way, capable of taking into account the actual needs of people. Beside this and more specifically, a strong sense of connection with women invited to the training was shown by the WFP technician as the following words point out:

*I always try to tell them that I fully understand them as I am a woman, a mother, a daughter and a wife, just like them. I put myself in their shoes because it is really like this. I feel very close to those women although the lives we live are completely different. But when I am with them, I completely disconnect myself from the world outside. I am with them and for them. Full stop. Then I really love being in the field. It is something completely different from being in the office. When I am in the field doing training the world outside does not exist anymore. And sometimes I have the same problems of these women e.g. where to leave my children and so on.* WFP14

However, as most of the respondents emphasised, though their high commitment to the communities that they support, they have to face significant obstacles in terms of time availability and areas to cover and this often results in an overall lack of sufficient amount of time and energies to dedicate to a specific community. The shortage of human resources was identified as one of the main problems which prevents WFP field offices to design and implement a thorough project, with an adequate allocation of time and resources. Beside this, as underlined by some of the respondents, the lack of coordination between the field offices and the headquarters in the capital negatively contributes to the overall outcome of the projects.

Moving from the findings above presented, WFP as *practices* can be further identified in the attempt to give voice to counter narratives in a process that is aimed at co-producing a specific form of knowledge about issues, strategies and experiences shared between WFP technicians and farmers. More specifically, during their field visits, WFP technicians demonstrated an overall interest in farmers' narratives about specific topics related to agricultural development e.g. the impacts of climate change, the implementation of sustainable farming practices and this was exemplified by the possibility that was given to farmers to present their activities as well as to share their experiences or to present their findings about a particular topic.

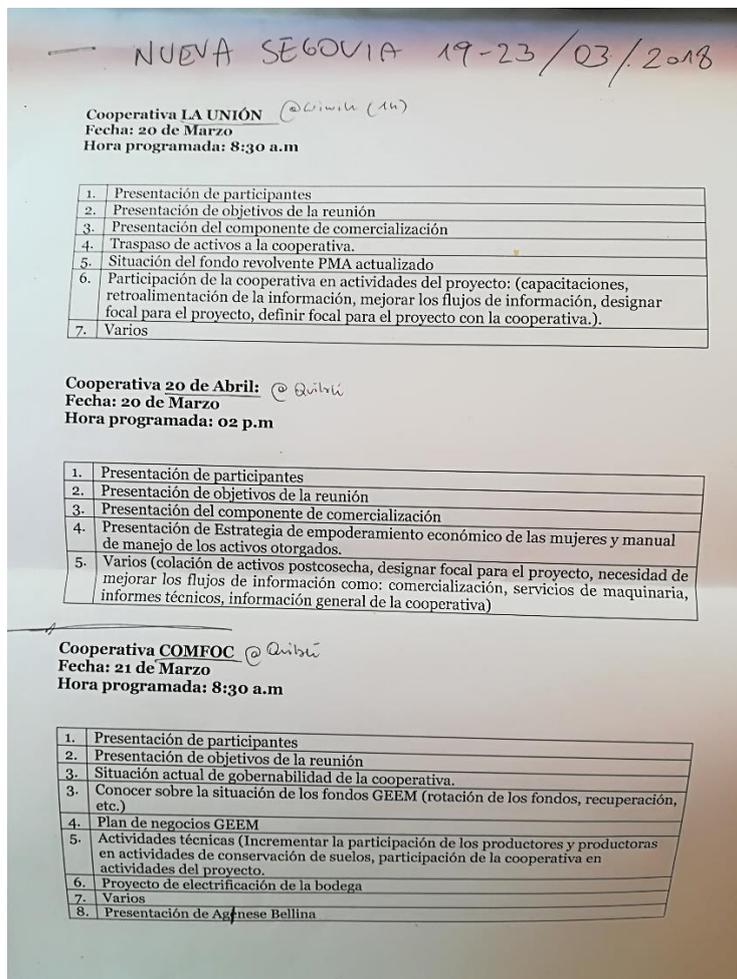
### **5.1.3. The *system-practices* tension**

Throughout the process of field research, a hybrid space where WFP as *system* overlaps with WFP as *practices* was identified and defined as an ongoing tension between the two main components of WFP itself. More specifically, this hybridity can be related to what I referred above as the *schizophrenia* of the development agents who are constantly stretched between their intimate feelings and ideas about *development* and the need to adapt to the dominant system.

Such tension was explicitly recognised during a specific type of field visit i.e. the periodic field missions conducted by people who are in charge of the *Programme Unit*, that is to say those who are in charge of WFP specific development project (i.e. programme assistants). To be clearer, we are talking about WFP employees who work in the headquarters in Managua who, periodically, organise one or two weeks of field mission aimed at checking the implementation of the projects as well as the progresses and the pitfalls. Beside this, these field missions are intended as an opportunity to meet the members of the farmers cooperatives to discuss the current status of the cooperative itself as well as to plan future activities.

Before the field missions, WFP programme assistants, in collaboration with the field technicians, elaborate a detailed schedule of meetings with the cooperatives and invite the cooperative

representatives as well as farmers to participate. Time managing is a crucial issue here as usually the cooperatives are spread throughout a large area and the conditions of the roads in the rural areas do not contribute to fast transfers from one cooperative to another. For these reasons, during the field mission in which I took part, the following activities format was elaborated:



As it can be seen, two meetings were scheduled each day and the same agenda structure underpinned most of the meetings, with some differences related to particular topics to be discussed with specific cooperatives. Overall, time availability was the most limiting factor as above mentioned, also due to the fact that people came from remote places so it was not always possible to stick to the agenda as above formulated. This resulted in fast meetings in which WFP programme assistants, after asking for an update about the current status of the cooperative, moved on to present the future trajectories of the specific development project. This latter topic was closely related to the fact that new donors were willing to fund the *Purchase for Progress* project and, in this sense, WFP felt the need to act on two different levels, i.e. the evaluation of the cooperatives in terms of performance on

the one hand and the commitment of the cooperative to maintain their (good) performances in order to guarantee the success of the project itself on the other hand.

In this sense, during the meetings, high attention was given to the quantitative indicators (as depicted in chapter IV) on the basis of which the cooperative was evaluated and, consequently, its possibility to continue to be involved in the project was determined. The tension between the *system* and the *practices* here was easily recognisable, also due to the co-presence of the WFP programme assistants and the field technicians whose relation was generally characterised by a field-related knowledge and experience gap. As a respondent asserted,

*I think the main problem is in communication between Managua and field offices. And there is also an overall elitism mood. Also, the organizational issue should be improved. Sometimes the programme manager doesn't even know what his colleagues are doing. For example, do you know that XXX was here last week? And do you know to do what? [addressing the colleagues present] WFP15*

However, as another respondent stated, in response to the words above mentioned,

*A lot has changed. Before, the country representatives did not consider the field technicians that much. Since 1999, when I started working for WFP, a lot has changed and now we are taken into consideration. The fact is that we as technicians are the face of WFP. The future of the projects and the perception of them depend on what we do. People and farmers see the technicians more than the ones that stay in Managua. WFP16*

Related to what above introduced, the need to establish future trajectories for the project was translated in the attempt to present the market logic as the only option to pursue in order to achieve high performance indicators. Again, the temporality as well as the narrative of the neoliberal logic as a specific characteristic of WFP as *system* comes back and overlaps with the heterogeneity of narratives which characterises WFP as *practices*. The attention given to different identities as well as to the slow temporalities of the farmers during the trainings and workshops was challenged and displaced by the hegemonic force of the *system* in its attempt to subsume all the qualitative differences under an undifferentiated framework. As a respondent declared when presenting the future donors' priorities to the cooperative representatives,

*the jump will be quantitative and qualitative. But also technical as the Russians are willing to give us machinery. So, technology, training and assistance, equipment and*

*a constant flow of technology. We think we can work well with cooperatives in this but you have to be committed. WFP17*

As it can be easily deduced from the words above reported, the commitment at stake here is closely related to the extent to which each cooperative devotes itself to the neoliberal dream characterised by homogenised farmers-entrepreneurs, high productivity, fast temporality and advanced technology, as described in chapter IV. What is problematic here is the unbalanced tension between the *system* and the *practices* and the possibility for the latter to emerge as an alternative to the former. Most of WFP members were aware of such gap and demonstrated a high interest in finding solutions to this tension, as the words below exemplify:

*We do think that there is a disconnection between the reports and the practices but we have not been able to solve this. There is a lack of information of the actual practices in the reports. They are so standardized but not all of them so maybe we can act on those that are not standardized. I think it's time to abandon all this focus on the quantitative data, numbers, outputs, indicators and to focus more on the qualitative part. In general, UN lacks this holistic and sociological approach. WFP12*

Coming from a non-field technician perspective, these words stress exactly the inner *system-practice* tension from within and consciously bring together a rupture through which alternative trajectories can be envisioned.

## **5.2. Synthesis**

As the research findings above introduced demonstrate, WFP development interventions are institutionalised as organised practices through what has been referred to WFP as *practices* as to mean the heterogenous narratives, subjectivities and temporalities that are made visible within the reality in which such interventions are performed.

A close link was identified between the actual practices and the idea of the concept of *development* that WFP members expressed as related to their personal feelings and values and such link was associated with the effort made, especially by WFP field technicians, to render visible all the different narratives as well as subjectivities, always taking into account the conflicting temporalities at stake when operating in the field. In doing so, their practices contributed to unveil the heterogeneity of farmers' reality thus positioning such practices as an inner counter narrative to the homogenous surface performed by WFP as *system*. However, as the research outcomes above presented point out, an ongoing tension between the *system* and the *practices* was identified within

WFP as *practices* as the expression of the overlap between these two components that, by co-existing, arise the question about the possibility for WFP as *practices* to challenge the hegemonic forces of WFP as *system*.

## CHAPTER VI

### Discussion and conclusion

#### 6.1. Discussion

The present research project was aimed at understanding the mechanisms through which a particular idea of agricultural development is shaped by an international development agency and to explore the performative effects of the consequent processes of objectification. In order to do so, the main research question was intended to address the ways through which the idea of agricultural development is constructed within the narrative of the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Nicaraguan context. Furthermore, three research sub-questions were elaborated and answered to allow the researcher to better address the main research question. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and describe the significance of the research findings against the backgrounds of existing works about the research problem under study. Moreover, the aim is to present and explain new insights about the research problem, in connection to the introduction as well as to the research (sub)questions and theoretical framework that underpinned the project. Moving from new insights and understandings, the overall objective is to highlight the contribution and relevance of the present study in terms of theoretical conceptualisations as well as societal impact.

Before the main research question is discussed, each of the three research sub-questions is critically reviewed as follows:

- a) *According to WFP, what is the agricultural development problem in Nicaragua?*
- b) *According to WFP, what are the necessary development interventions and why?*

As the findings presented in the previous chapters show, several problems were identified as related to and relevant for agricultural development in Nicaragua by WFP respondents. Overall, the problems were ascribed to a general lack of financial resources as well as to limited access to formal markets and low outcomes deriving from traditional farming practices which do not allow smallholders farmer to improve the quality and the quantity of their products. Moreover, high levels of indebtment and inadequate organisational structure and normative framework were underlined as complementary obstacles, beside insufficient agricultural subsidies. More precisely, the main problem related to agricultural development was identified *in* the smallholder farmers and *in* their farming practices characterised by an inadequate backwardness which can be repaired through technological and market fix, within a process of objectification of the farmers themselves.

The above mentioned obstacles were consequently identified as the phenomena upon which to intervene in order to bridge the gap between a condition defined as *backward* and an ideal optimum

level characterised by higher outcomes and stronger relations with formal markets as well as innovative farming practices and better organisational structure and more favourable normative frameworks.

The emphasis on such operational and technical problems is consistent with existing works regarding the processes through which development interventions objectify the subjects involved in their projects thus focusing on obliterating all socio-cultural and political issues which would require a specific and politically situated intervention (Ferguson, 1994; Li Murray, 2007). Furthermore, the focus on the objectification of the Other through mechanisms of negative differentiation which have performative effects further contributes to and aligns with post-development theory and the attempt to trace the processes of obliteration, subsumption as well as emergence of non-hegemonic narratives (Escobar, 1995; Sousa Santos, 2008). The mechanisms just presented can then be read through the lens of Foucauldian concepts of hierarchical observation, normalization and examination as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* which are responsible for the production of the apolitical, ahistorical and homogenised figure of the objects of interventions that are defined and fixed in a negative differentiation with an ideal reference subjectivity (Foucault, 1991). In the specific case under study, WFP objectifies the beneficiaries of the projects through the creation of quantitative indicators that are supposed to be met by smallholder farmers in order to overcome a backward condition. In order to overcome such backwardness, farmers are reduced to monolithic figures and defined in relation to what they lack thus underlining the need to provide them with interventions aimed at bridging the gap between their backwardness and the optimum and ideal level. Furthermore, by reducing farmers to a monolithic totality, all specific differences which bring together socio-political and cultural particularities are silenced and the focus shifts on blind and hierarchical examinations aimed at normalizing all the anomalies identified.

*c) How are these interventions institutionalised as organised practices?*

According to the research findings, WFP development interventions under study are institutionalised as organised practices through an overlapping dynamic between what has been referred in the previous chapters to WFP as *practices* and WFP as *system* or, to put it more clearly, through the *system-practices* tension. Whereas WFP as *system* can be related to the overall depoliticising *reduction ad unum* of subjectivities, narratives and temporalities at stake when addressing the development issue, WFP as *practices* is characterised by heterogenous narratives, conflicting subjectivities and co-existing temporalities that are made visible within the reality in which development interventions are performed. However, as the research outcomes point out, an ongoing tension between the *system* and the *practices* can be identified as the expression of the

overlap between these two components in the institutionalisation of interventions as organised practices.

The research outcomes are consistent with existing studies about the Foucauldian concept of *governmentality* as the assemblage of practices and techniques aimed at directing and shaping the individual conduct and the consequent system through which such practices are carried out (Ferguson, 1994; Li Murray, 2007; Ove, 2013). However, the emphasis put by this study on the hybrid space between the *system* and the *practices* highlights an issue that was rarely explored by previous studies and that will be specifically addressed in the following paragraphs.

By focusing on the relation between WFP as *system* and WFP as *practices* and on the consequent hybrid dynamics operating when it comes to the institutionalisation of development interventions, this study allowed the researcher to thoroughly address the main research question that inspired the project, i.e. *how is the idea of agricultural development constructed within the narrative of the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Nicaraguan context?*.

Based on the research findings, the following table aims at providing an analytical guide to the dynamics at stake within the construction of the idea of agricultural development as performed by WFP:

WFP as <i>system</i>	WFP as <i>practices</i>	<i>System-practices</i> tension
Homogeneous narratives	Heterogeneous narratives	Hybrid narratives
Undifferentiated subjectivities	Multiple subjectivities	Conflicting subjectivities
Synchronised temporalities	Co-existing temporalities	Kairotic temporalities

As the table points out, the idea of agricultural development in the context under study is constructed through the continuous tension between the *system* and the *practices* components which results in a rupture between the dominant performative narrative (i.e. WFP as *system*) and the counter-narratives (i.e. WFP as *practices*). Such rupture is interpreted as a rift characterised by hybrid dynamics in which the hegemonic forces of the *system* try to challenge and displace the possibility for the *practices* to emerge and be visible.

If we read the above mentioned research findings through the lens of the theoretical framework presented in chapter II, this study can be seen as an attempt to overcome the limits of the Foucauldian

approach consisting in the assumption of the immanent omnipresence of power as the subjugating force that disciplines every aspect of individual bodies and relations (Burchell et al., 1991). As mentioned in chapter II, in assuming that power/knowledge dynamics pervasively produce the subjects and their relations through discursive and non-discursive regimes, Foucault has often been accused of excluding the possibility for the exercise of individual freedom thus theoretically preventing any form of transformative social agency (Hartstock, 1990).

At the same time, moving from this, the contribution of the present study can be intended as a way to challenge the above mentioned critiques often moved to Foucault. More precisely, by intending the overlap between WFP as *system* and WFP as *practices* as a rupture within the *system* itself, the hybrid space can be seen as a rift for the *practices* to emerge as an alternative to the *system*. If we then intend the *practices* as a form of transformative agency, then it can be concluded that there is indeed the possibility, within the immanent omnipresence of power, to identify specific cracks which represent spaces of possibility for alternative trajectories.

In this sense, what this study also highlights is the complementarity between a Foucauldian approach to the issues under study and the deconstructive postcolonial theorizations. More specifically, drawing on a postcolonial approach, informed by the practice of deconstruction, allowed the researcher to identify the traces of these alternative trajectories within the hegemonic power of *development* discourse intended here as WFP as *system*. Focusing on the counter-narratives emerging from WFP as *practices* pointed out the ruptures through which it is possible to unfold alternative futures to come. Beside this, through a Foucauldian deconstructive process, it is possible to develop a situated political engagement which allows the elaboration of an affirmative practice of politics.

## **6.2. Reflection on methods**

This research drew on a qualitative research design and implementation and was underpinned by several qualitative research methods i.e. participatory observation, primary sources review, informal conversation and semi-structured interviews. Considering the significant number of WFP members involved in this research, the sample can be intended as representative of the target category of this project. Moreover, as the researcher tried to include different categories of people within the broad category represented by WFP members, this research can be seen as a thoroughly attempt to take into account different perspectives, values and opinions thus providing a broad and deep understanding of the problem under study.

All research methods underwent through a continuous iterative process that allowed the researcher to fine-tune the topics under study as well as to adjust the questions for the semi-structured

interviews. As far as these latter are concerned, the researcher consciously chose to focus more on informal conversations considering the opportunity to gain far more relevant insights from a non-fixed structure interaction, characterised by no time limitations and by a high attention to the whole narrative process. However, at the same time, this intentional choice required a high degree of attention as none of the informal conversations were recorded. The researcher relied on fieldnotes and on the rigorous activity of transcribing in the most accurate way all the meaningful aspects. Although some personal biases might have been introduced, the researcher tried to maintain as much as possible a high level of objectivity when reporting the informal conversations. No language barrier was faced by the researcher as all the interactions with the respondents were fluently carried out in their Spanish native language, except for one conversation that, based on a mutual agreement, was carried out in English.

As far as the participatory observation is concerned, overall it constituted a valuable method to deeply address the research questions, despite some limitations related to contextual factors. More specifically, the researcher had to face several safety rules especially during the field missions which resulted in an overall restricted possibility to freely interact with farmers. However, given the main objective of this research, this obstacle can be considered as a side limitation which is unlikely to negatively impact on the reliability of the results. On the contrary, participatory observation carried out within the WFP headquarters, did not face any particular limitation.

Beside this, when engaging in the discourse analysis carried out during the primary sources review, the researcher was aware of the risks of text (re)appropriation deriving from the use of discourse analysis. In order to overcome this potential obstacle, high attention was given to a constant process of reflexivity aimed at reducing the effects of the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions when approaching the texts. Furthermore, the intrinsic interminable essence of discourse analysis required an accurate and rigorous evaluation by the researcher when determining the end of the analysis process.

In addition to this, the researcher might have brought to the project her own personal bias specifically related to theoretical *apriori* conceptualisations. However, this was mitigated by a shift during the initial research phase to an approach grounded on the data gathered throughout the research activities. This helped the researcher to take a step back from the theory and to fully engage with a field-based approach.

### 6.3. Conclusion

Moving from the need to critically analyse the processes through which an international development agency operate, the overall objective of this research project was to make such processes visible in order to create a space of possibility to think them otherwise.

Being the present study positioned in the field of development critical studies, the research contributed to the understanding of the mechanisms through which a particular idea of development is shaped, exploring the performative effects of this specific conceptual *dispositif*. In doing so through the particular point of view of a Foucauldian and post-colonial theoretical approach, the research positions itself within existing works aimed at problematising and rethinking the study and implementation of non-hegemonic approaches capable of going beyond the shortcomings of traditional conceptual dominant narratives (Alt, 2016).

Furthermore, due to its specific focus on the Nicaraguan context, this project can be seen as a step to bridge an academic gap related to an understudied area in terms of anthropological approach to *development* issues. Most contribution to scholarship in the field of rural development studies in Nicaragua comes from institutional projects and impact studies reports (FAO, 2015; WFP, 2010, 2015) while academic attention to issues related to the sociological and anthropological dimension of rural development is temporally discontinuous and there is a general lack of attention towards the particular Nicaraguan area (Brown, 2000; Cupples et al., 2007).

Finally, given the recent flourishing of new action and participatory oriented research projects especially within the international development agencies (Li Murray, 2007; Méndez et al., 2015), this research can positively contribute to the implementation of renewed forms of cooperation capable of taking into account the unveiled foreclosed dynamics underpinning the development discursive regime thus redirecting practices towards alternative trajectories. As the research findings point out, the hybrid space within which the *system* and the *practices* challenge themselves can be seen as a rupture that opens up to infinite future possibilities, a *kairos* that unfolds the possibility for another direction to take place and for another story to be told and heard.

If the present research had to be further developed, a deep analysis of the counter-narratives as portrayed by smallholders farmers involved in development intervention merits further study. Focusing on such non dominant narratives could allow for an in depth theorization about the interaction between the two main subjects involved in development projects and can thus be seen as an opportunity to further explore the hybrid dynamics that together can lead to a critical problematisation of the development discursive and non discursive practices.

The challenge to render the kairotic moment visible stands out clearly before us, requiring us to develop new forms of human relationships which have to be differentiated from an ethical and

qualitative point of view, through the reopening of the possibility of authentic relationships built on a shared ground. This is the issue at stake within contemporary forms of development: the ever conflicting and questionable (im)possible encounter with the Other.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview prompts

The researcher carried out semi-structured interviews as stated in chapter III. The questions below were used only as guidelines, that is to say that not every respondent underwent all questions, and other questions arose during the interviews to allow the researcher to follow interesting insights through the conversation. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the interviews were carried out in Spanish, so the questions listed below are presented in the translated version.

- What is your educational background?
- What is your role within WFP?
- How long have you been working for WFP?
- How did it come that you started working for WFP?
- What are the agricultural developments problems in Nicaragua?
- What do you think are the most necessary interventions and why?
- What does agricultural development mean to you?
- What idea of agricultural development do you have?
- Do you consider Nicaragua an (un)developed country and why?
- How would you describe the agricultural situation in Nicaragua? How did it change in the last years?
- What is your vision about Nicaraguan agricultural development in the future?
- What do you think about agricultural modernization? i.e. mechanization, use of pesticides and so on? Do you think it is sustainable in the long term?
- Do you consider WFP development interventions effective and why (not)?
- Do you think your interventions generate a dependency culture?
- How do you choose the target cooperatives?
- How do you design your interventions?
  - How are, for example, the indicators selected?
  - Whose expertise do you use?
- What is the role of the producers in this stage?
- How do you implement your interventions?
  - How do the training and workshop work? By whom are they carried out? Whose expertise do you use?
- With whom do you collaborate (e.g. universities, NGOs...)?

- What is the role of the government and your relation to it?
- Do you think there are some political issues that should be addressed before implementing a project? Which ones?
- How do targeting cooperatives react to your projects? Have you ever experienced negative reactions or hostility?
- What are the needs of the cooperatives in terms of agricultural development?
- Do you think your projects and interventions well address the development desires of the cooperatives?
- Do you think WFP projects take into account the socio-cultural context in which they are implemented?

**About *Purchase for Progress* project**

- Can you tell a bit about the history of this project?
- Can you define what you mean with *Farmers Organisation* (FO)?
- Which type of farming practices do the target cooperatives use?
  - Do you think these practices as efficient? Why (not)?
- Do you think P4P interventions are likely to change such practices? To what extent?
- Is WFP the only actor who buys the products from the cooperative or are there other buyers?
- How often do you visit the cooperatives?
  - Do you think you have enough time to understand all the cooperatives' needs?
- What does *strengthening the production and quality skills* mean?
  - How to you pursue this in practice?
- How does WFP establish the quality standards?
  - Are these standards easy to reach? Do you think these standards are exclusive?
- What do you think are the benefits of a formal market?
- Are there any alternative ways of exchanging products between the farmers?
- Can you explain how the forward contracts work?
- What is the normative framework related to the seed issue?