

Designing Holistic Food Systems with Citizen Participation

Maria Teresa Nogales

CMSAs adopt participatory methodologies to incorporate different voices into policy and investment proposals on people's right to food.
Photo by Fundación Alternativas.

Ensuring food and nutrition security is a complex task that depends on many factors and actors. Since 2013, Fundación Alternativas has been leading the creation of multidisciplinary and multisectoral working groups known as Municipal Committees for Food Security (CMSAs, *Comités Municipales de Seguridad Alimentaria*) in Bolivia.

Since the 1950s, Latin America has been undergoing a significant process of rural-urban migration and today it is the most urbanised region in the developing world: close to 80 % live in urban areas (1, 2). This percentage is expected to continue growing over the next few years. Accelerated urbanisation entails continuous changes in governance, planning and investment and generates a profound impact on food security and the ability to ensure the human right to food.

Rural migration trends affect domestic food production patterns, as farmers leave the countryside, leading to a loss of ancestral knowledge on traditional food. This transition has also given way to the adoption of monocultures driven by agribusiness and, as such, the deterioration of the environment and the capacity to produce local food to adequately feed and nourish people. The standardisation of food systems has been detrimental to traditional and native

diets worldwide; it has also negatively impacted the environment and global public health (7). Approximately twenty years ago, small-scale local agriculture in Bolivia provided around 75 % of the food consumed in the country (3). Today, Bolivia is increasingly depending on imported food (4). In 2018, processed and basic foods imported specifically for household consumption in Bolivia were estimated at an approximate value of 488 million US dollars. Between 2006 and 2018, food imports increased by 172 %.

In an effort to ensure food security, actions must focus on fostering local, sustainable food systems capable of guaranteeing that all people have reliable access to fresh, healthy and nutritious food. To this end, it is necessary to direct investment to family and indigenous farmers who produce food basket products while caring for the environment. In addition, investments must be geared towards developing infrastructure and communication services that allow better interconnectivity between urban and rural areas and generate market opportunities as a result of efficient supply chains.

Subnational governments, civil society, the private sector and citizens must work together and become involved in designing innovative solutions collaboratively. The Municipal Committees for Food Security (CMSAs) meet on a monthly basis to develop policy and investment proposals to improve food security, and function as advisory bodies to public and private institutions. They bring together a variety

of actors, including representatives from civil society organisations, academia, farmer's associations, traders, food entrepreneurs, civil servants and municipal and departmental officials.

Currently, CMSAs function in La Paz (2013), Sucre (2015) and El Alto (2018). Examples of their efforts include the formulation of laws including the Municipal Autonomous Law 105 on Food Security (La Paz, adopted in 2014), the Municipal Autonomous Law 129 on Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty (Sucre, adopted in 2018) and the Municipal Autonomous Law 321 for the Promotion of Urban Food Gardens in the Municipality of La Paz (La Paz, adopted in 2018). Likewise, a number of policy and investment proposals have been developed, including: Food Security for the Metropolitan Region of La Paz (2015), Food Distribution Centres for the Metropolitan Region of La Paz (2016), National Urban Agenda for Food Security (2017), and Strengthening and Integrating the Local Food Systems of the Metropolitan Region of La Paz (2019).

In Bolivia, CMSAs are promoting and spearheading the country's first urban dialogues on food security and are consolidating themselves as non-partisan, multidisciplinary advisors on food policy and strategy. Their proposals receive public attention and have served to inform government planning documents and agendas including The National Urban Agenda, The National City Policy, The La Paz Departmental Territorial Planning Strategy and The Development Strategy of the Metropolitan Region of the Department of La Paz.

The work conducted by the CMSAs is possible thanks to the continuous participation of the many people and institutions (more than 30 institutions per municipality) that make up each entity. Over the years, members have demonstrated consistency, commitment and responsibility; all of which have fostered increasing public recognition. Working groups such as the CMSAs are a mechanism to bring different actors together to engage in dialogue and conduct analyses in real time about the food systems we want to generate for the future. Importantly, they are designed to ensure the genuine representation and participation of small, medium and large actors, public and private. Likewise, over the years, they have been able to leverage the participation of national and subnational actors who now come together to work collectively, identify shared goals and invest in complimentary strategies.

Importantly, committee member selection has been a critical element from the onset. Genuine engagement from the right mix of stakeholders has proven to be essential to the success of debates and proposals put forth by the committees; likewise, multi-stakeholder representation has increased the credibility of the work conducted. For those looking to engage in similar work, expectations must be set from the beginning: for example, in Bolivia, it was decided that committees would meet on a monthly basis and work collaboratively whereas subcommittees would be organised to address specific issues or challenges. It was also decided

that different levels of government would be invited to participate, through a variety of agencies, but the committees would function as non-government initiatives and would function as non-partisan entities. Undoubtedly, a key factor of the success of the committees has been the continuous support they receive from *Fundación Alternativas*. In this regard, each committee has dedicated staff that plans and organises meetings, guides group analysis and moderates discussions, conducts continuous research on key issues and, among other things, organises advocacy events that take place over the course of each year.

Certainly, there is no single model to improve existing food systems. On the contrary, ensuring they are sustainable and accessible to all people will be the result of the implementation of a myriad of ideas, initiatives and investments. This will require the involvement and collaboration of multiple institutions and citizens.

**The work of Fundación Alternativas and CMSAs is supported by HIVOS, the Belgian Development Cooperation, Louvain Cooperation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.*

Maria Teresa Nogales

Founder and Executive Director - *Fundación Alternativas*
 mtnogales@alternativascc.org
 www.alternativascc.org

References

1. CEPAL (agosto, 2012). La urbanización presenta oportunidades y desafíos para avanzar hacia el desarrollo sostenible. Notas de la CEPAL, No. 73. www.cepal.org/notas/73/Titulares2.html
2. Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2015). Censo de Población y Vivienda 2012: Bolivia - Características de la población. Report. Plurinational State of Bolivia. www.bolivia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Caracteristicas_de_Poblacion_2012.pdf
3. Cabitza, Mattia (julio 20, 2011). Will Bolivia make the breakthrough on food security and the environment? *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jun/20/bolivia-food-security-prices-agriculture
4. Fundación Tierra (2017). Foro andino amazónico en Bolivia desvela deterioro de la actividad agrícola campesina. Conference Minutes. Bolivia. www.ftierra.org/index.php/tierra-medios/786-foro-andino-amazonico-en-bolivia-desvela-deterioro-de-la-actividad-agricola-campesina
5. Soliz, Lorenzo (2016). Cambios, persistencias y desafíos del mundo rural. *Revista Umbrales* No. 30. CIDES-UMSA. Bolivia. www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/FAO-countries/Bolivia/docs/FAO_Umbrales_30_1_.pdf
6. Fundación Jubileo (2019). El 2018 se importaron alimentos por \$us 675 millones. News Brief. La Paz, Bolivia. [www.jubileobolivia.com/Publicaciones/Art%C3%ADculos/El-2018-se-importaron-alimentos-por-\\$us-675-millones](http://www.jubileobolivia.com/Publicaciones/Art%C3%ADculos/El-2018-se-importaron-alimentos-por-$us-675-millones)
7. FAO (2005). Building on Gender, Agrobiodiversity and Local Knowledge: What is happening to agrobiodiversity? www.fao.org/3/a-y5956e.pdf
8. FAO, IFAD & WFP (2015). Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress: The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Rome. www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf