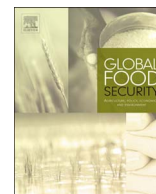




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Food security governance in Mexico: How can it be improved?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to identify, describe and analyze elements of food security governance in Mexico.

As in other emerging nations, tension in Mexico is mounting between the imperatives of obtaining food security – now consecrated by the constitution as a fundamental human right – and the formal governance structure of the agricultural sector. The logic of government (and of power) is markedly vertical. However, this clearly contradicts the inherently horizontal and cross-cutting nature of food policies or, more accurately stated, the imperative of satisfying food security needs.

In Mexico, the diverse food, nutrition and public health issues are handled separately by different agencies with highly unequal capacities for action and political power. Fragmentation creates confusion and, we hypothesize, is largely responsible for the extremely weak state of food security governance in Mexico. Additionally, the food and marketing industry is gaining ground and is now a larger contributor to Mexico's GDP than agriculture. Mexico's agro-industrial sector is undergoing acute oligopoly problems that threaten the entire agro-industrial chain and food security as a whole.

Conclusion: Mexico currently lacks a national food and nutrition strategies that ensure food security for the Mexican people. The time has come to consider implementing either permanent or long-term strategies that will make it possible to evaluate and reflect upon what does/not work in the area of food and nutrition governance.

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, in Mexico 3140 kcal of food have been available per inhabitant per day (a sufficient amount to satisfy the energy consumption needs of the population) (Flores, 2013). Nevertheless 13.6% of children under five suffer chronic undernutrition (Rivera-Dommarco et al., 2009) and nearly 35 thousand have lost their lives because of this problem (Fernández and Viguri, 2010). According to official records, 45.2% of Mexicans live in poverty, and of these, slightly over half (23.3%) experience food insecurity (FI) either because the quantity or quality of the food they are accustomed to eating has diminished or, in the worst of cases, because they have not eaten for an entire day owing to insufficient income (CONEVAL, 2015a).

In addition to food insecurity and undernutrition, Mexico is witnessing a rapidly growing epidemic of overweight and obesity, which forms part of the double burden of malnutrition experienced in the vast majority of middle- and low-income countries. The overweight/obesity epidemic has permeated the lowest income strata of the population and has spread to more than 70% of the country's adult population (Rivera-Dommarco, 2014. *Op cit*).

A recent analysis of the burden of disease in Mexico showed that, since 1990, the impact of chronic conditions such as diabetes, ischemic heart disease and chronic kidney failure has surpassed that of undernutrition and common childhood infectious diseases, characteristics of the nutrition transition (Gómez-Dantés et al., 2016).

For nearly two centuries, Mexico has been implementing policies and programs to improve the food supply, eating habits and nutritional status of its vulnerable population (CONEVAL, 2009). Notwithstanding, the food and nutrition problems mentioned above persist and are now aggravated by emerging ones. The increasingly complex challenges of food security – both in Mexico and around the world – are drawing the attention of a wide range of institutions (Paarlberg, 2002).

Because food security encompasses various dimensions including the availability, access and utilization of food, its strategies must necessarily involve government, non-government, civil society and private-sector organizations (Kropff et al., 2013).

Food security governance “is the formal and informal interactions across scales between public and/or private entities ultimately aiming at the realization of food availability, food access, and food utilization, and their stability over time (Candel, 2014).

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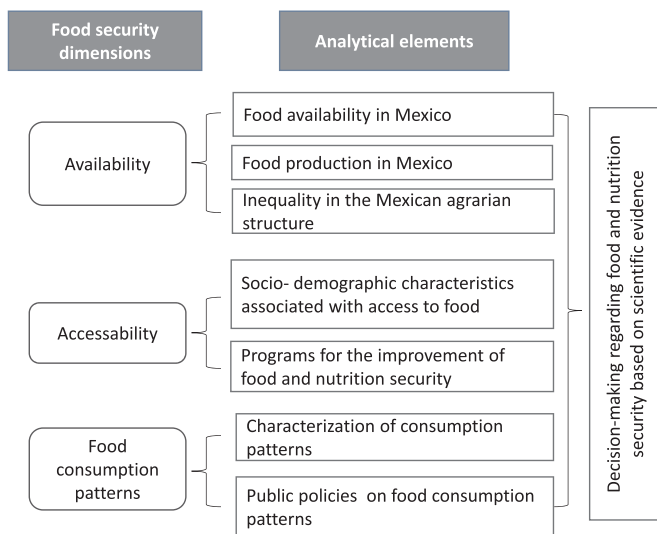


Fig. 1. d for analyzing food security governance in Mexico.

Experiences of governance in Brazil and South Africa have demonstrated that food security conditions can be significantly improved by adopting three fundamental measures: creating a new social policy program, establishing a ministry specifically to coordinate the work of other ministries towards food security goals and including stakeholders in the decision-making process (Haddad, 2011; Pereira and Ruysenaar, 2012).

As far as can be determined, the issue of food security governance in Mexico has scarcely been studied. Therefore, the objective of this article is to identify, describe and analyze elements of food security governance in Mexico.

2. Methods

Based on the food security definition proposed by Candel (2014) (*Op cit*) and the framework of food and nutrition security proposed by Gross, 2000, we built a concept map to identify, describe and analyze elements of food security governance in Mexico. To this end, we consulted the scientific literature and official sources of information.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, our analysis included the following determinants:

a) Availability: adequate food is ready to have at people's disposal; and b) Access: when all households and individuals within those households have sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods (through production, purchase or donation) for a nutritious diet (Gross et al., 2000. *Op cit*). In addition, we considered (1) food consumption patterns in the Mexican population and public policies addressing these patterns, as well as (2) scientific evidence that might serve to design and implement population nutrition policies.

Our analysis focused on identifying the key actors within each food security dimension and on describing the food security status or state of the art based on available information from official sources.

With regard to food availability and accessibility, this work describes and analyzes data relevant to the current presidential administration (2013–2018).

3. Results

3.1. Food availability

Concerning food availability, Mexico offers a daily dietary energy supply (DES) of 3141 kcal (kcal) per capita, with the largest proportion of energy provided by the following food groups: cereals (predominantly corn) and tubers (43.9%); sugar and sweeteners (15.4%); meat

(beef, fish and chicken) (11.6%); and oils and fats (11.2%) (FAO, 2006). It is noteworthy that fruit and vegetables contribute only 4.9% of the Mexican DES (Flores, 2013. *Op cit*).

3.1.1. Food production in Mexico

Well into the second decade of the 21st century, and despite a domestic market of over 122 million inhabitants, the Mexican agricultural sector continues to grow slowly, favoring the exportation of fruit and vegetables while simultaneously importing large volumes of food consisting mostly of yellow corn, soybean and wheat (Flores, 2013. *Op cit*). The productive structure of the Mexican agricultural sector installed 25 years ago has remained virtually unchanged. Corn is still Mexico's staple, representing a large share of the country's cultivated land (approximately 50% of its total agricultural area) and production value (34% of total agricultural output) (SAGARPA, 2016).

Although Mexico has already joined the ranks of the world's top producers (China, the USA and India) (SAGARPA, 2016. *Op cit*), its agricultural sector, which employs close to 13% of the country's labor force, accounts for less than 4% of the country's GDP (INEGI, 2015a).

3.1.2. Inequality in the Mexican agrarian structure

Mexico's agrarian structure is markedly unequal: The land tenure and production structure is polarized with a small nucleus of modern and highly capitalized producers at one end and, at the other, a majority of smallholders composed of family farmers, most of who live in precarious and poverty-stricken conditions (CONEVAL, 2015. *Op cit*). Between the two poles, there is a large group of medium-sized farmers, some of them transitioning towards more modern and commercial forms of production (SAGARPA-FAO, 2012). The socially owned “ejidos” (43%) and communal lands (9%) occupy slightly more than half of the country's territory, with an enormous majority of production units (approximately 80%) constituting small, low-profit holdings still engaging in subsistence production and dedicated mostly to corn (INEGI, 2007).

Similarly, 13.9% of the economically active population in Mexico engages in agriculture, forestry and fishing. When linked to its products, this population falls within the category of low labor productivity, representing only 23% of national productivity (INEGI, 2015b).

3.2. Access to food

In 2004, the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL by its Spanish initials) was established by the General Law of Social Development (LGDS by its Spanish initials) as a government agency with technical and administrative autonomy. Its mandate consisted both in standardizing and coordinating the evaluation of social development policies and programs, and in establishing the guidelines and criteria for defining, identifying and measuring poverty.

Since 2009, CONEVAL has been the agency in charge of measuring deprivation due to access to food. This indicator provides a proxy for the difficulties that populations face in attempting to satisfy their food requirements as regards quantity, quality and dietary diversity owing to insufficient income (CONEVAL, 2009. *Op cit*). According to the CONEVAL, approximately one-fourth of Mexican households suffer from deprivation due to access to food, with those most affected inhabiting rural areas (33.5%), residing in largely indigenous municipalities (36.5%) and falling within the lowest decile of median income (48.0%) (Villagómez-Ornelas et al., 2013).

In addition, the National Household Income and Expenditure Survey (ENIGH by its Spanish initials) has indicated that 34.1% of the Mexican household budget is allocated to the purchase of food and drinks. The poorest households spend 50.7% of their budgets on food as opposed to the 22.5% spent by higher-income families (INEGI, 2015c). According to the ENIGH, consumption of certain foods is contingent on household

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