



Food and Nutritional Security of the Brazilian Population in Pandemic Times

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Abstract

In the context of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, the field of nutrition has highlighted some knowledge such as the production of immunoprotective foods, healthy eating and manual of good food hygiene practices. On the other hand, we ask ourselves: does the population have access to food? In this sense, this work is characterized as an essay that aims to reflect on this question, analyzing barriers encountered by the Brazilian population for access to food in the context of the pandemic. The difficulty of access to adequate food will negatively influence food consumption. Therefore, it is necessary to assess all the factors that guide access to food, whether economic, political, social and structural, considering the importance of urgent government measures to guarantee the basic right to food. In this pandemic scenario, the main actions being the creation of basic income for the vulnerable population; stimulating the production of food by family farming; provide peripheral regions with access to these foods and the creation and strengthening of policies that aim to guarantee the Human Right to Adequate Food for the entire population.

Keywords: Food and Nutritional Security; Public Health; Nutrition Programs and Policies

Introduction

The year 2020 will be marked worldwide by the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. This is the most talked about, studied and reported subject at the moment. As of July 2020, more than 10.5 million cases have been confirmed worldwide [1]. In Brazil, there were more than 1.5 million confirmations, with more than

30 thousand new cases per day, according to the Federal Government's official website. COVID-19 (disease of the new coronavirus 2019) is an easily contagious disease, being transmitted by respiratory virus, by direct contact between people, by droplets of saliva and secretions or contaminated objects and surfaces. For this reason, social distance, along with hygiene habits, such as washing hands frequently, are effective security measures in controlling the

spread of the virus [2]. Attention by all areas of knowledge is essential for the development of studies, analyzes, booklets, guidelines and other materials to assist the population and governments in combating this pandemic.

Methodology

In the field of nutrition, a subject in great evidence is immunoprotective foods, with the objective of increasing immunity through food, as a measure to protect the symptoms of COVID-19. There were also several materials on healthy eating, encouraging the preparation of meals at home, tips and guidelines on recipes, manuals of good food hygiene practices, etc.

Although there is no scientific proof of the relationship between the consumption of certain foods or supplements and the fight against COVID-19, healthy eating plays a major role in maintaining health and the immune system. These themes are relevant within nutrition, as they comprise a set of health education and hygiene practices. On the other hand, we are thinking about something that precedes: does the Brazilian population have access to food?

The impacts of COVID-19 are still inconceivable. In the context of the health crisis, political and economic contradictions are exacerbated and social fissures are exposed, that is, we cannot attribute to the new coronavirus all of our current social problems. We recognize that the current situation has increased food insecurity, in addition, the setbacks in public policies on food and nutrition security endanger the food sovereignty of Brazilians. It would be contradictory to discuss the food system without being linked to the social justice debate.

In this sense, the guiding thread that will guide the reflections of this essay goes through the following question: is there food and nutritional security in Brazil in the current pandemic situation? The aim is to reflect on this question, analyzing barriers encountered by the Brazilian population in terms of access to food in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion

In Brazil, the first public policy actions related to food emerged in the 1910s, based on price lists and stock control, being quite incipient as to what the population experienced in the decade. Over the years, government actions have taken initiatives regarding food

and some proposals were created in an attempt to promote access and food security for the Brazilian population. The Federal Government instituted the Zero Hunger Project in 2003, with a view to concentrating and focusing public actions in favor of food and nutrition in the country, under the newly created Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger (MESA). In 2004, MESA was replaced by the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS), under the National Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security (SESAN) [3].

The MDS was created in the form of an institution aimed at promoting public policies of a social nature and access to food, whose primary focus would be the creation of a social protection system, based on three pillars: 1 - income transfer, in which it was the Bolsa Família Program was instituted, which constitutes the integration of several previously existing income distribution programs (Auxílio-Gás, Bolsa Escola, Food Card and Bolsa Comida), currently it consists only of income transfer; 2 - the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), which consists of programs based on social assistance, training and social insertion actions, family integration and combating child labor; 3 - Food and Nutritional Security (SAN) policies that fit into various programs related to food [3].

It is worth noting that, in 2005, the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) reports that public policy initiatives for the area of SAN are more a broad set of programs and actions than properly a system of food security articulated as politics. It is worth remembering that the creation of the MDS, in 2004, occurred as a result of the merger of three institutions (Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger, Ministry of Social Assistance and Executive Secretariat of the Bolsa Família Program). Although it is a commendable effort of administrative rationality, it also brought a problem: the discontinuity of actions, particularly those related to Food and Nutritional Security [4].

SAN covers a field of public policy that is still under construction in Brazil, has an eminently interdisciplinary nature, with thematic scope and high complexity. This can be attributed to two factors: the high degree of complexity of this task, due to the very characteristics of the FNS, notably interdisciplinarity and transversality; and the difficulty of the managing body in charge of this articulation in carrying it out in practice. When talking about access

to food, it is essential to discuss SAN. In Brazil, since 2006 we have the Organic Law on Food and Nutritional Security (LOSAN), where it is conceptualized that:

Food and nutrition security consists in realizing the right of everyone to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting food practices that respect cultural diversity and that be environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable [5].

Every Brazilian citizen has rights, the Human Right to Adequate Food (DHAA) is one of them. DHAA is expressly linked to access to food in sufficient quantity and quality to meet individual and collective needs. When talking about access to food and food security, it is necessary to think about the entire chain that it goes through, from production in the field to the final consumer. This includes the dietary patterns, income, culture and health of those who produce and those who consume the food [5].

SAN covers several areas of our political, social, health, agriculture, industry, etc. Consideration should be given to aspects such as: food production and availability (production in the field and marketing); access to food (physical and economic access); food consumption (pattern of food choices, food culture, information); and, biological use (health conditions, drinking water, basic sanitation and access to health services) [5].

Considering the current pandemic scenario, in which the production of this essay is inserted, we can diagnose the problem of access to adequate food through several aspects, encompassing social, economic and political problems. One is the increase in unemployment, which in the last quarter of 2019 covered 11% of the population. In the first quarter of 2020, 12.2% were unemployed [6]. The emergence of COVID-19 brought social distancing measures, the closure of several public places and shops, in addition to the decrease in the circulation of people on the streets. One of the consequences was the loss of jobs or the impossibility of working, especially in the case of informal professionals. Without income, the difficulty of acquiring food has also increased.

At the same time, there was an increase in the price of various foods, mainly fresh foods, such as beans, rice and potatoes [7], which should be the basis of the diet. In this chain, the obstacle

of physical access must also be analyzed, since several security measures included the closing of street markets and street stalls that sell vegetables, fruits, eggs and other food products. These spaces, usually, have more accessible prices and better quality food than the products found in the markets, therefore, we consider this as another barrier in the access and consumption of these foodstuffs.

Taking into account the s populations of greater social vulnerability and lower income, which includes m mostly the periphery, it is necessary to evaluate the site which they operate and what the supply of available food. Even before the pandemic, it is known that these families had difficulty accessing healthy food. A study by Borges, Cabral-Miranda and Jaime (2018), analyzed 650 food stores in a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo, it was concluded that in the peripheries of the city, where there are populations of medium and low income, there are 22 times more establishments that sell ultra-processed products as a priority than fresh foods. In addition, in these peripheral areas, places were found where there are no establishments that sell healthy and fresh food [8]. With the arrival of COVID-19, Food and Nutrition Security tends to worsen these locations.

Poverty in Brazil substantially interferes with the population's food intake and quality. Given this context, and several other socioeconomic factors, the IPEA made a diagnosis of the Brazilian situation in relation to the first Sustainable Development Objective (SDG) for 2030, which is to end poverty in all its forms and everywhere in the world. According to the report "ODS Notebook 1 - What does the portrait of Brazil show?", The country will need to reduce poverty by between 0.3 and 0.4 percentage points per year in order to reach the goal established in 2015 by 193 countries [9].

While the international poverty line is \$ 1.90 per capita per day, in Brazil the goal is more ambitious: no one should live on less than \$ 3.20 per day. According to the report, 15 million Brazilians lived on less than \$ 1.90 a day in 2017, equivalent to 7.4% of the population. The research reveals that poverty in Brazil has a very clear age profile. The rates exceed 10% for younger age groups, falling to less than 1% among elderly people aged 70 and over. Still in demographic terms, when the breakdown is by color or race, the data reveal that blacks and browns living in the North and Northeast regions represent 56% of the country's poor [9].

To achieve the main goal of the 2030 Agenda, IPEA concludes that the country needs to prioritize the fight against poverty in the North and Northeast regions and also in rural areas. The proportion of extreme poor in rural areas grew by almost 2 percentage points between 2016 and 2017, exceeding 19%, while in urban areas the percentage fluctuated at a much lower level, increasing from 4.7% to 5.4%. According to the data, there are 5.6 million extreme poor in rural areas, which correspond to 37% of the total poor in the country - a disproportionately high figure, since the rural population accounts for less than 15% of Brazilians [9].

In this context of social vulnerability, in addition to other social determinants, the difficulty of access to adequate food and the socioeconomic situation have a negative influence on food consumption. As a result, we have a deficit in the quality and quantity of food, in addition to less qualified information on food and nutrition. From this paradigm, there is impairment in the biological use of nutrients, which can lead to malnutrition, chronic diseases (diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, etc.) or other related diseases [8].

The Brazil was off the map of hunger from 2014, returning in the year 2018. The consequences of this are worrying, as the high number of people in extreme poverty in the country, that is, living on less than \$ 1, 90 a day. In 2019, there were 13.5 million people in this situation, adding up to 6.5% of the population [10]. As mentioned by Bocchi, *et al.* (2020) "[...] hunger is not a matter of unavailability of food, but of insufficient income to acquire it".

In July 2020, the report "The hunger virus: how covid-19 is increasing hunger in a hungry world" was published by Oxfam (a civil society organization that aims to help tackle situations of poverty, inequality and social injustice), which aimed to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 in countries where food and nutrition security was already threatened. From the situational analysis of political, economic, agrarian, social and climatic aspects before and during the pandemic, it was diagnosed that there will be an increase in the number of deaths caused by hunger in the world, reaching up to 12,200 deaths per day by the end of 2020 [11].

According to the report, Brazil stands out as one of the countries that will be the epicenter of extreme hunger in the world, the result of a lack of support on the part of the Federal Government for the most vulnerable population. Even before the emergence of COVID-19, the country was already facing a major political and

economic crisis, in addition to the sharp increase in poverty and unemployment rates and cuts in budgets for agriculture and social protection, which are essential factors for the current Brazilian situation in Brazil. hunger map. Among the proposals presented to avoid this scenario is the provision of emergency assistance to save lives, building fairer, more resilient and more sustainable food systems and canceling foreign debts in developing countries so that they promote stronger protection mechanisms social [11].

On April 7, 2020, emergency aid was approved by the Federal Government, due to the current pandemic scenario for the new virus. The benefit of 600 reais per month for a period of five months, and 300 reais for another four months, is intended for informal workers, individual microentrepreneurs, self-employed and unemployed. In addition, citizens must be over 18 years old, have no formal job, be a family with a monthly income per person of up to half a minimum wage or total monthly family income of up to three minimum wages, in addition to not having had taxable income in 2018 above R \$ 28,559.70 [12].

It should be noted that there are several exclusion criteria for receiving the assistance, in addition to barriers to this, such as the need for a cell phone and internet to make the request in the system, delays in the analysis for approval, problems and errors in the Individual Taxpayer Register (CPF) at the time of registration of families, delays in receiving the benefit, huge queues and long hours of waiting at Caixa Econômica Federal branches to withdraw the money, among others [13]. It should also be noted that there are only five aid installments. This short period does not allow for the coverage of all the financial consequences that the pandemic will cause for these families.

Many families have reduced their monthly income and are finding it difficult to obtain financial aid. In the period from December 2018 to December 2019, there was a reduction of 972,200 families among the beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família Program, an important social assistance from the government for the low-income population and high social vulnerability. From February 2019 to February 2020, there was a drop of 697,450 families benefited by the program [14].

That said, we have a situation of significant reduction in a social program and the obstacles imposed on the low-income population

since the genesis of emergency aid. This social layer is in complete financial, social and structural helplessness in this pandemic moment. Even the families that managed to receive the aid, it was limited to too short a period, given all the economic consequences that are already being demonstrated in this period.

It is essential to recognize that we are experiencing various dismantling of public policies and retaliation for basic rights of the population, such as the DHAA. The National System of Food and Nutritional Security (SISAN) has suffered several retaliations with the reduction or even extinction of programs, in addition to losses of funds such as the National Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security (SESAN/MDS), which had a budget of R \$ 2.5 billion in 2014, down to just R \$ 447 million in 2019 [15]. Another great loss was the extinction of the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA), an organ of control and social participation within the SAN and advisory to the Presidency of the Republic, made on the first day of the current government, on January 1, 2018 [16].

CONSEA, created in 2003, was responsible for important achievements and inspection of actions related to SAN, being an autonomous and critical body. Some of the contributions that the council left for society are: the inclusion of the Right to Food in the Federal Constitution; approval of the Organic Law, Policy and National SAN Plan; proposition of the Family Agriculture Food Acquisition Program; improvement of the School Feeding Law, by determining that at least 30% of food purchases come from family farming; approval of the National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (Planapo); Intersectorial Plan to Combat Overweight and Obesity, among others [17].

The extinction of this body is worrying, as it directly attacks the SAN and hinders social participation within government actions that involve public food and nutrition policies. Coincidentally, we had a historical record of 624 new pesticides released in Brazil from January 2019 to May 2020. Making a comparison, from January 2015 to May 2016, 208 new products were released [18].

Several social issues were highlighted with the pandemic, such as social, ethnic-racial, gender inequality and the precarious living conditions of most Brazilians, especially the black population, women, children and the elderly, indigenous peoples, peoples and communities. traditional, informal workers. Based on this worry-

ing scenario, several Brazilian entities that defend SAN and DHAA came together to draft the letter "Guarantee the right to food and fight hunger in times of coronavirus: life and human dignity first!". The document presents proposals to fight hunger to be implemented, in an emergency way, by the municipal, state and federal governments, in partnership with the councils for social participation in the areas of FNS, social assistance, health and school meals [15].

Eleven proposals were reported, which must be in line with the health legislation and adapted to the reality of each location, when considered at the state and municipal levels. It highlights some of the proposals submitted: immediate withdrawal of EC 95, which froze social spending for 20 years; creation of State and Municipal Emergency Committees to Combat Hunger; adequacy of the continuity strategies of the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), such as the delivery of basic food baskets periodically to the families of enrolled students; expansion of income transfer and social security programs; guarantee of emergency policies for family farming and artisanal fishermen; among others [15].

The document concludes that the dismantling of public policies and insecurity in guaranteeing the basic rights of the population only highlights the critical political period that Brazil is going through. Furthermore, it stresses that the short and long-term consequences of the pandemic depend on immediate government actions [15].

Conclusion

We understand that the current Brazilian political, economic and social context reported in this essay directly affects the (lack of) Food and Nutritional Security. In view of the impaired income of a large portion of the population, the increase in unemployment, the distance and social isolation measures, the lack of government assistance to the population, especially the most vulnerable, how will Brazilian citizens have access to adequate food? How can we talk about immunoprotective foods for the population when the people on the outskirts have empty plates? How to advise good hygiene practices for food, hands and utensils in a reality in which water hardly spurts under the tap?.

As described in LOSAN, SAN is constant. Food availability must be of sufficient quality and quantity to meet the population's physiological and nutritional needs. Emergency aid, basic food baskets, food donations and any other benefit that does not come through a

State policy, are momentary actions and do not meet the constant demand, hurting one of the constitutional foundations that it advocates to guarantee the dignity of the human person.

It is necessary that the instruments of social control, the tools for the dissemination of information and knowledge echo the damage suffered by the population, it is urgent that the science of nutrition expose the causes of Brazilian food (in) security, with the class cuts and crucial to understanding the political project underway in the country.

Regarding government actions, the following are indispensable: financial incentives and incentives to increase the production of small family farmers; creation and qualification of spaces for the sale of these products, and that these places are also implemented in the peripheries and areas of greater social vulnerability, making healthy foods and more attractive prices reach the entire population; implementation of a fixed minimum basic income for low-income families, with a value that can guarantee the dignity of life and make it possible to improve the quality of life of this population, with the guarantee of access to basic rights such as food.

Throughout the production of this article, there was a reduction in access to adequate food in the context of the pandemic, some families who had their participants in full unemployment due to the current period and even the loss of someone who had a family financial consequence, obtained the need for change in eating habits and therefore a worsening in the quality of food. Foods with low nutritional value and easy access are the most acquired in this scenario of facing Covid-19 when it comes to low-income families, there is a need for a restructuring in public policies that reach this type of population in Brazil, especially in this period, so that there is no further worsening and impact on the nutritional status of these individuals affected by the pandemic and poverty in the country, guaranteeing the right to adequate food and social stratification.

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