

The dissolution of the Brazilian National Food and Nutritional Security Council and the food and nutrition agenda

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Food and Nutritional Security can be understood as “ensuring the rights of all people to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on food practices that promote health and respect cultural diversity and that are environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable” ¹. Food and nutritional insecurity unequally affects the different social strata and is determined by economic, political, environmental and educational factors, among others ². The complexity of this phenomenon, a crucial element of contemporary discussions around food, demands articulated and convergent policies between the relevant sectors and instances that overcome the barriers of sectoral policies ^{2,3}. For more than two decades, Brazil has worked toward these goals.

The experience that best exemplifies these efforts is the construction of the Food and Nutritional Security System (SISAN) ⁴. According to the Food and Nutritional Security Law (LOSAN) ⁵, this system’s governance structure included, as central elements, the National Food Security Conference, the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA) and the Inter-ministry Food and Nutritional Security Chamber (CAISAN) ^{1,5}. CONSEA, an advisory body to the Presidency (<http://www4.planalto.gov.br/consea>), was tasked with presenting proposals and exercising social control over the design, execution and monitoring of food and nutritional security policies. One third of its members were representatives of different Executive branch agencies and the remaining two thirds were civil society representatives. It brought together representatives of movements and organizations from different social sectors and was an important space in which often-sidelined rights-holders had a voice and could influence public policies. Its inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary composition was one of its strengths.

An important civil society achievement after redemocratization in Brazil and an example for other countries, CONSEA was a space for dialogue, articulation, mutual learning and concertation between government and society. In addition to its federal-level role alongside the Executive branch, it also established a dialogue with the Legislative and Judiciary branches and with states and municipalities, through the state and municipal CONSEAs. It took part in strategic agendas, such as: including the right to food in the *Federal Constitution*; defending the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples and *quilombola* communities; strengthening food crops, in consonance with Brazilian biomes and ecosys-

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tems; strengthening family and agroecological farming; reducing pesticide use; advancing the regulatory agenda, for example, with regard to food labels (GMO, ultra-processed) and to taxing food and inputs; advancing the sanitary code in order to make it more inclusive and adequate for small-scale productions and commercialization in short distances, among others ⁴.

Within a virtuous cycle of progressively ensuring the Human Right to Adequate Food, CONSEA contributed to the formulation and/or enhancement of public policies directed at guaranteeing food and nutritional sovereignty and security in Brazil. Emblematic examples of this are: the National Policy and Plan for Food and Nutritional Security; the Programs for Living with the Semi-arid; the National Agroecology and Organic Production Policy; the Safra Plan for Family Farming; the Food Acquisition Program; the National School Food Program; the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population (and its policy-guiding character). This process enabled Brazil to no longer figure among the countries in the United Nations' (UN) Hunger Map as of 2014.

Based on a Working Group of council-members who were researchers, CONSEA organized, in 2012, the *1st National Seminary on Food and Nutritional Security Research* ⁶. The developments of this Seminar led to the creation, in 2017, of the Brazilian Network of Research on Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security (<http://pesquisassan.net.br/>). As part of that process, CONSEA enabled the formulation of a research agenda that systematized proposals made at the National Food and Nutritional Security Conferences. Also debated in the Seminary were the challenges to research on Food and Nutritional Security in Brazil, due to its interdisciplinary nature, both in its dialogue with graduate programs and with funding agencies and academic journals. Since its inception, the principles of "citizen science" and "knowledge ecology" have guided the discussions and bases for the development of the Research Network. The meetings were organized so as to value and give visibility to research on the many dimensions of Food and Nutritional Security, from agricultural sciences to the social sciences and humanities, public health and public administration. They promoted a meeting between types of knowledge, research and extension, and stimulated dialogue between consolidated and emerging research groups.

With the *Provisional Measure n. 870* (MP 870) ⁷, issued by President Jair Bolsonaro in his first day in office, CONSEA was dissolved, threatening SISAN and compromising processes for guaranteeing the Human Right to Adequate Food in all government spheres. This is especially concerning amid a period of economic crisis coupled with fiscal austerity measures, marked by a rollback of social policies and by the leveling-off or worsening of indicators that show the degradation of living conditions: rising child mortality rates, interruption of the process of reducing income and racial inequalities, increases in poverty and unemployment rates (with signs that Brazil will return to the Hunger Map), rising violence in rural areas, among others. Additionally, the dissolution of CONSEA is an affront to democracy and a setback for society, since it tears down a space for participation, one of the pillars of the democratization process, as agreed upon in the *Federal Constitution*.

The reaction to the MP 870 was immediate and intensifies with each passing day: state and municipal CONSEAs, civil society entities, coalitions, networks and collectives, from different areas and political affiliations, and international entities have vehemently opposed this measure ^{8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15}. The MP went into effect at the time of its publication and will be debated by Congress starting in February 2019. It is up to the recently-elected senators and representatives to take in and act upon, sensibly and in adherence to the pub-

lic's interests and to the guarantee of rights, the analyses and proposals that civil society will provide them in order to revert CONSEA's dissolution. Understanding that food is a decisive determinant of health conditions and that the Human Right to Adequate Food is inseparable from the right to health, it is up to the collective health community to engage not only in the debates and analyses of this context, but also in political action, so that this historic mistake may be overcome.

Additional information

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