

ASSESSING FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES IN CHIAPAS

Looking Forward from an Analysis of Past and Present Programs



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ABOUT US

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METHODOLOGY

Our research was qualitative in nature. We started our project with background research before traveling to Chiapas, including information on local, state, and federal governmental policies, international standards, and the evolution of food security and sovereignty. Our travel research complemented and expanded upon the background research. This research included visiting seven communities, conducting semi-structured interviews with project participants and directors, organizing and participating in focus groups, attending a training session held by the State Secretary for Social Development and Participation, and follow-up interviews via telephone once we returned to Pittsburgh.

Places and Projects in Mexico (March 11-March 15, 2013)

Day 1: Santiago El Pinar, Sustainable Rural Cities

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Day 3: Chojolhó, Chenalhó, Agricultural Training & Productive Projects (Caritas International), Zinacantán, Indigenous Women's Cooperative (independent)

Day 4: Pantheló, Women's Cooperative (FORO), Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Training Session on the *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre* (State Ministry of Development and Social Participation)

Day 5: San Cristóbal de las Casas, Forum of Exchange of Ideas (GSPIA & FORO)



ABBREVIATIONS

ACE:	Agricultural Commodity Exchange (<i>Bolsa de Productos Básicos Agrícolas</i>)
CNDS:	<i>Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo Social</i> (National Commission for Social Development)
CIESAS:	<i>Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social</i> (Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology)
CONASUPO:	<i>Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares</i> (National Basic Foods Company)
CUMAS:	<i>Cooperativas para el Uso de Equipos Agrícolas</i> (Cooperatives for the Use of Agricultural Equipment)
DICONSA:	<i>Distribuidora e Impulsora Comercial CONASUPO</i> (Commercial Distributor and Promotor CONASUPO)
ECOSUR:	<i>El Colegio de la Frontera Sur</i> (The College of the South Frontier)
FAO:	Food and Agriculture Organization (<i>Organización para la Alimentación y la Agricultura</i>)
FCI:	Farm Concern International
GTPA:	Grain Traders and Processors Association (<i>Asociación de Comerciantes de Granos y Procesadores</i>)
IDESMAC:	<i>Instituto para el Desarrollo Sustentable en Mesoamérica</i> (Institute for the Sustainable Development of Mesoamerica)
IFAD:	International Fund for Agricultural Development (<i>Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola</i>)
INDESOL:	<i>Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social</i> (National Institute of Social Development)
PAL:	<i>Programa de Apoyo Alimentario</i> (Food Support Program)
PROGRESA:	<i>Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación</i> (Education, Health and Nutrition Program)
PESA:	<i>Proyecto Estratégico de Seguridad Alimentaria</i> (Strategic Project for Food Security)
SAGARPA:	<i>Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food)
SEDESOL:	<i>Secretaría de Desarrollo Social</i> (Ministry of Social Development)
SAM:	<i>Sistema Alimentario Mexicano</i> (Mexican Food System)
UNDP:	The United Nations Development Program (<i>Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo</i>)
UNEP:	The United Nations Environmental Program (<i>Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente</i>)

ASSESSING FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES IN CHIAPAS

Looking Forward from an Analysis of Past and Present Programs

Executive Summary

Two thousand and twelve was an electoral year in Mexico at the federal level and in many states. As with any new administration, it was accompanied by new development plans and landmark policies including the main initiative, the *Cruzada Nacional contra el Hambre*. The Cruzada will be implemented in communities that face extreme factors of multidimensional poverty, making it especially relevant to the state of Chiapas, given its high poverty rates, marginalized populations, and dependence on small-scale agriculture.

The main objective of the report is to analyze current government policies related to food security and agriculture, taking into account the many challenges for civil society actors. First, the report provides a general background to the issue of food security, differentiating it from food sovereignty, and explores several global cases in which food security initiatives were successful. It then focuses more specifically on the Mexican case, outlining the history of food security and sovereignty in the country and seeking to understand the current initiative, the Cruzada. The report concludes by discussing opportunities for civil society, and encourages them to actively engage with government actors during the transition process and the implementation of the Cruzada, in order to help the government better address the needs of these communities.

Introduction

Two thousand and twelve was an electoral year in Mexico at the federal level and in many states. Enrique Peña Nieto, from the Institutional Revolutionary Party was elected President, and in Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Coello from the Green Party was elected Governor. As happens in every transition, the incoming administration creates new development plans and introduces landmark policies. One of these was to instruct the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL) to put in operation an initiative entitled the *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre* within the following 60 days.¹

The *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre* has taken a central position in the current social development agenda. The target population is people living in conditions of extreme multidimensional poverty that lack access to food. Initially, the Cruzada is going to be implemented in 400 municipalities, where 7.4 million people live in extreme poverty, 1.5 million children suffer chronic malnutrition, and where 240 municipalities are mainly indigenous communities.² This is extremely relevant in the state of Chiapas, as this region will be one of the most affected by the Cruzada's implementation given the high poverty in the area, marginalization of many communities, and their dependence on small-scale agriculture.

The objective of this study is to provide an analysis of the current government policies and challenges faced by civil society organizations, and ultimately to provide suggestions on how civil society organizations working in areas related to food insecurity can better engage with state-level government in the context of the Cruzada. Actively engaging with government actors during and immediately following this transition presents a strategic opportunity for civil society to improve the conditions of the communities in which they are working.

To this end, this report is divided into five main sections. First, it discusses the key elements of a conceptual framework based on the concept of food sovereignty, differentiating it from food security. The second section briefly illustrates several examples of how the concept of food sovereignty has been applied in different parts of the world in successful community development projects,

highlighting specific aspects of these projects that are especially relevant to Chiapas. The third and fourth sections provide a brief historical overview of how food security and sovereignty have been applied in Mexico and Chiapas, laying the foundation to understand the current initiative, the *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*. Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of possible opportunities for civil society to act within the context of the Cruzada.

Conceptual Framework

In some sources of international law the right to food is recognized as a universal human right.³ The concept of food security has evolved, since the 1970s, as a key factor in development. Its measurement incorporates aspects of food quantity, quality, and accessibility.⁴ A food secure community has a sufficient amount of food on a consistent basis, that is part of a nutritious diet and can be easily obtained.⁵ Up to this point, however, food security has focused on individual consumption and has failed to address the origin of food, including the conditions under which it is produced and distributed, which is especially relevant to marginalized communities.⁶ Food insecurity may not necessarily originate from a lack of food, but rather could be a result of an inadequate distribution of food.⁷ This notion was further developed by civil society organizations, eventually leading to a new doctrine of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, [including] their right to find their own food and [develop their own] agriculture systems.”⁸ At the core of food sovereignty is the empowerment of local producers and local economies. Empowering these local entities requires six fundamental components: focusing on food for people, valuing food providers, localizing food systems, putting control locally, building knowledge and skills, and working with nature.⁹

By incorporating these elements that the concept of food security has neglected, food sovereignty is thought

to be a more sustainable approach and is more suitable for small and medium-sized producers. Many international organizations have begun to gradually incorporate these elements into their development initiatives.¹⁰

Relevance to Chiapas

Food insecurity seriously affects the southern region of Mexico, particularly in the culturally and ecologically diverse state of Chiapas. Many people in Chiapas face either seasonal or permanent food insecurity. Chiapas is one of the states with the lowest socioeconomic indicators in the country. In Mexico, at the national level, only about 27% of the population lives in communities of less than 5,000 inhabitants compared to about 56% of the population in the state of Chiapas. The great majority of these small communities in Chiapas show very high indices of isolation and exclusion. In its 2010 statistical analysis¹¹, the Mexican government classified most of these small communities as highly marginalized.¹²

Access to basic services is very limited in these communities and there is an overall lack of economic opportunities for their population. Therefore, the vast majority of them engage in subsistence agriculture, with little assistance for production.¹³ Basic infrastructure and water

is lacking in about 15% of small communities throughout Chiapas. About 16% of these small communities are located to more than one kilometer (sometimes even more than 10 kilometers) away from a road. In 2010, 56% of the available roads were unpaved dirt roads.¹⁴ Food insecurity is even more acute between planting seasons.¹⁵ In addition, achieving a balanced diet is a challenge. Access to proper nutrition is even more limited for landless low-income households.¹⁶



Photo: Project by Caritas in highlands of Chiapas

Table 1: Levels of Marginalization within Mexico¹⁷

Category	Entity	Indices of Marginalization at the National/State level*		People in Small Localities**	Indices of Marginalization for Small Communities***	
		Very High	High		Very High	High
National	Mexico	5.30%	4.09%	27.00%	21.57%	58.79%
States with higher indices of Marginalization	Chiapas	25.30%	29.80%	57.90%	37.50%	59.76%
	Oaxaca	16.30%	28.80%	61.50%	29.39%	65.16%
	Hidalgo	10.60%	5.10%	58.70%	11.24%	66.37%
States with lower indices of Marginalization	Baja California	<0.0%	<0.0%	10.30%	4.00%	36.35%
	Nuevo Leon	<0.0%	0.10%	6.70%	6.22%	51.70%
	Distrito Federal	<0.0%	<0.0%	0.70%	1.42%	66.74%

*Percentages of people living in conditions of very high and high marginalization.

**Percentages of people living in communities of less than 5000 inhabitants.

***Percentages of localities in conditions of very high and high marginalization.

Source: CONAPO. 2010. Estimaciones del CONAPO con base en el INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010, Principales Resultados por Localidad. http://www.conapo.gob.mx/en/CONAPO/Indices_de_Marginacion_Publicaciones

Table 2: Socioeconomic Indicators for Small Communities in Mexico¹⁸

Socioeconomic Indicators for Small Communities		Mexico	Chiapas
Problems identified in small Communities	Lack of infrastructure or water	13.59%	15.34%
	Lack or road or transportation	9.73%	12.61%
Access	Communities connected to road	83.95%	80.64%
	Paved roads	30.33%	24.93%
	Distance 1-3 km	6.55%	9.9%
	Distance 4-10 km	3.87%	5.01%
Availability of water and food	Drinking water	79.34%	67.83%
	Beans	89.49%	79.3%
	Corn	84.35%	78.34%
	Rice	92.21%	83.95%
	Milk	90.21%	70.63%
	Meat	39.61%	27.29%
	Chicken	57.11%	49.2%

Source: CONAPO. 2010. Estimaciones del CONAPO con base en el INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010, Principales Resultados por Localidad. http://www.conapo.gob.mx/en/CONAPO/Indices_de_Marginacion_Publicaciones

The population dispersion and cultural diversity in Chiapas present many challenges to efforts to counteract food insecurity.¹⁹ Food insecurity affects communities of every nature from urban to rural, indigenous and non-indigenous, and across all ecological landscapes. As indicated previously, this problem is not new, and government initiatives to ameliorate its effects have not been successful so far.

Understanding about the needs and cultural preferences that might affect the outcomes of development programs will increase the probability of program success. For example, traditional agricultural practices, including the preference for particular crops, are culturally determined.²⁰ Strategies to increase productivity that do not take into account these cultural practices might find resistance and only limited possibility for success. Moreover, with policies at the national and state levels, disregard for cultural diversity and indigenous peoples rights are directly tied to governability crises that have greatly affected Chiapas in recent decades.²¹ Longstanding political tensions in the region have limited the provision of benefits and therefore, the long-term impact of initiatives.

Providing people with the adequate tools to improve their conditions in a sustainable way can help them achieve food sovereignty. This requires considering the diversity that characterizes the territory and adapting

programs such that they are applicable to particular local conditions. At the forefront of food sovereignty initiatives are the innovations and programs of civil society organizations.



Top: View from Sustainable Rural City in Santiago el Pinar, Chiapas
Bottom: Greenhouse constructed in Zinacantán, Chiapas

LESSONS FROM CASE STUDIES

Around the globe, civil society plays an important role in leveraging local resources to produce greater food sovereignty, environmental regeneration, and local economic and social development. Farmers, civil society, national governments, and intergovernmental organizations have tried to address the food insecurity challenge from a variety of approaches and through different methodologies. First, at the individual level, knowledge sharing and innovation produces gains for small-scale farmers. Knowledge sharing of traditional methods is particularly relevant. Second, at the community level, strong organizational leadership is essential for increased productivity and market access. Third, cross-sector partnerships aid in achieving food sovereignty at both the local and regional levels. Cross-sector partnerships refer to initiatives that foster relationships with leaders in nonprofits, government, labor and business in order to drive the economic growth of regional economies.

Traditional methods of farming have been developed over generations and provide valuable insights into the sustainable management of the land. For example, the milpa, the rotation of five different crops, forms the bedrock of food consumption for indigenous populations in Chiapas and the surrounding areas. The rotation of corn, beans, tomatoes, squash, and peppers creates a sustainable nutrient system for the soil and provides a consistent nutritional base for each family.²²

However, increased pressure from the expanding agricultural and livestock sectors has led to deforestation and increased land degradation across the globe. According to International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), three quarters of crop diversity has been lost since 1900.²³ The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) estimates a global 0.2% loss in cropland productivity annually, due to unsustainable agricultural practices²⁴. It is estimated that the total annual

Box 1: Agroecological Practices

Agroecology is a whole systems approach to agriculture that focuses on using nutrients and energy already in the system to create a diverse and resilient environment. Agroecology systems build off of traditional and indigenous land-use techniques, which tend to be specifically adapted to the land and climate of a particular region, allowing for better management and resilience with regards to local environmental conditions.

Traditional techniques include polyculture and crop diversity, which minimize risk while increasing soil fertility. By focusing on recycling nutrients, land requires less external inputs, such as fertilizer or pesticides. Agroecology offers multiple benefits in addition to the regeneration of degraded land; including regional food security, long-term sustainability and greater resilience to environmental risks and climate change.



Example of agroecology in Zinacantán, Chiapas by FORO para el Desarrollo Sustentable

loss of soil from erosion costs the world about USD 4 billion, or approximately USD 70 per person, per year.²⁵ In the short term, problems associated with land degradation can be masked by external inputs (i.e., fertilizer and chemical additives to soil). However, in the long term, crop productivity declines with the use of these additives, especially in areas where land degradation is high.²⁶

knowledge, ideas, and technology and promote social inclusion.

Another method, more directly facilitated by NGOs, is the farmer field school, which attempts to improve farmers' agroecological knowledge and productivity through discovery based learning methods, learning by doing, and thus internalizing key concepts.³²

Box 2: Caritas

In the highland region of Chiapas, Caritas, a non-governmental organization, is working with various indigenous groups to produce a seed vault that will ensure the survival of local seed varieties in the event of an environmental disaster. Caritas also facilitates community exchanges between numerous indigenous groups in order to encourage trade in seeds and agricultural knowledge.



Market access, including selling locally, accessing credit, developing market strategies, and improving inputs, transport, packaging, and storage, is crucial for farmers to move beyond subsistence farming. International examples show that organization and the strengthening of civil society is necessary to achieve this aim.

Often, small-scale farmers do not have direct access to markets and must depend on the services of middlemen.³³ Selling locally, the ability of small-scale farmers to access proper outlets to sell their products, avoids unbalanced competition with larger suppliers. Moreover,

it is more cost effective and contributes to the growing niche market of green and organic products.

These changes in farming practices, irrigation methods, and an increased reliance on external inputs have severely degraded productivity in Chiapas.²⁷ One method to address this problem has emerged in agroecology. Agroecology is a whole systems approach that emphasizes the use of traditional knowledge and local practices to restore land fertility.²⁸ For this to be effective, farmers must have sufficient information and technology to adapt various approaches to their particular region.²⁹ Small-scale agriculture, in particular, will benefit from these practices. Agroecology offers multiple benefits in addition to the regeneration of degraded land; including regional food security, long-term sustainability and greater resilience to environmental risks and climate change³⁰.

The supply of agricultural credits by traditional banks is restricted by several factors: the high risk of non-repayment due to instability of agricultural production; the small size of the loans requested; and geographical isolation of communities. These factors increase transaction costs for banks, lowering their incentives to provide these financial services. Consequently, alternative forms of financial services evolved, such as microfinance institutions and credit unions. However, the structure of their financial services has failed to meet the needs of the small-scale farmers' loan requests.³⁵ Through fair access to adequate agricultural credits, small-scale farmers could purchase the quality inputs needed to boost production or to undertake activities that would supplement their income.

Importantly, mechanisms are developed by NGOs and other organizations that support local innovation and empower local farmers, enabling them to play a leading role in the development of agricultural solutions.³¹ One such method is the formation of farmer-to-farmer networks in which farmers come together to exchange

Subsistence farmers find it difficult to navigate the concept of market development for their products. Designing effective communication strategies can help create or increase product demand.

Higher crop yields can be achieved by an increase in mechanization, such as the use of tractors that can reduce labor burdens and overall production costs while expanding cultivated areas. Low-level mechanization stems from the financial limitations of small-scale farmers, but through self-organization and local leadership this obstacle can be overcome.

Poor logistics and handling techniques in the food supply chain – specifically transportation, infrastructure, temperature management, and food distribution systems – cause damage to or waste of the products.³⁹ Food losses cause economic hardship, exacerbating food insecurity. This issue has been addressed through private sector buy-in, rural-urban coalitions, and the implementation of simple, low-cost technologies.⁴⁰

An example of one of these projects at work in Chiapas is the “*Red de Comida Sana y Cercana*.” This small local market, or “*mercadito*” incorporates the idea of “selling locally.” The network was launched by graduate students (consumers) years ago, with seven families that decided to create a mini market. They started with two producers; at present day, there are 25 producers. The producers are linked through this network that enables the connection between local agroecological producers to local processing agents and consumers.⁴¹ The producers of the *mercadito* are not “organic”, but rather produce following agroecological practices (See Box 1: *Agroecological Practices*).

They are also trying to rescue traditional practices of the region. There is a decision-making committee for technical issues composed by producers, consumers, processing agents, and members of academia. Moreover, the producers are very strict in terms of production standards, such as enforcing a zero pesticide rule.

The final factor in the success of this and similar proj-

ects is the fostering of peasant-to-peasant exchange.⁴² Though this project has seen some success, it still faces some challenges. The certifications for participation in the *mercadito* are very expensive, making expansion difficult.⁴³ Transportation of the produce is another limiting factor. Notwithstanding, institutional relationships and collaboration across sectors, such as that seen in the *mercadito*, can help to reduce food insecurity.⁴⁴

Box 3: Selling Locally: Contract-Based Model

Swift Co. Ltd. established a contract-based model, in Thailand, for the purpose of linking small-scale farmers directly to consumers, as well as providing farmers with the means to transport their products from the fields to produce stands. They accomplished this by providing easy access to collection stations to deliver daily harvests, by providing inexpensive and reliable transportation, and by ensuring product quality with refrigerated trucks and processing facilities. This guaranteed the sale of their entire harvest and ensured a steady flow of income.³⁴



Multi-sector partnerships, such as those, are important because each sector has their own comparative advantage. Partnering with the private sector can help producers gain better market access and reduce risks and transaction costs.⁴⁵ A sustainable partnership requires mutual benefit for all partners, making building cross-sector partnerships challenging. Though farmers have much to gain from engaging with the private sector, the asymmetrical power distribution places them at the mercy of private companies’ interests.⁴⁶ When farmer groups are better organized, they are in a better position to effectively partner because they have an internal network and support system. Thus, they are able to advocate for and protect their own interests more effectively.

Smallholder farmers are especially vulnerable because they are susceptible to risks such as environmental and price shocks. Traditionally, governments mitigate the risk of price shocks through subsidies. Additionally, governments may partner with aid organizations in the event of an environmental disaster. However, these responses are not always ideal. They may incentivize big business rather than small-scale production and are not sustainable solutions.

In sum, agroecology, in combination with mechanisms to increase production, and improve distribution and market access, can have positive effects on food security. Food security as informed by food sovereignty is a valid and attainable goal. This is demonstrated by the global experiences of grassroots and civil society organizations and collaborative efforts in the developing world over the last 20 years. Nevertheless, the regional agricultural approaches in Chiapas have been met with challenges of coordination between civil society actors and the government at all levels, local, state, and federal.



Top Left: Poster of agroecology practices by Caritas
Top Right: Field of maize near Santiago El Pinar, Chiapas
Bottom: Drying coffee beans beside house near Santiago el Pinar, Chiapas

Box 4: International Examples of Commodity Exchange and Cooperatives

In **Malawi**, the Agricultural Commodity Exchange for Africa (ACE) and the Grain Traders and Processors Association (GTPA) allow small-scale farmers to access the agricultural credits they need through a public warehouse receipt system. This receipt system enables small-scale farmers to securely store their grain, access credits, and sell their grain at better prices through the pooling of individual assets and risk.³⁶

In **Kenya**, the regional NGO Farm Concern International (FCI) implemented the project “Enhancing Market Access for African Leafy Vegetables” (EMAC). Through this project EMAC identified two main factors that decreased demand: poor product image and lack of consumer awareness.³⁷

In **Benin**, farmers pooled their resources to purchase agricultural equipment, and formed Cooperatives for the Use of Agricultural Equipment (CUMAS). These cooperatives allowed them to organize communal use of equipment, resulting in increases in production and stabilization of crop yields.³⁸

In **Sao Tome and Principe**, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) worked with 78 farmers’ associations and 4 export cooperatives to increase their yields and overall quality of cocoa, coffee, and pepper that could then be certified as organic or fair-trade. This led to the formation of several partnerships between smallholder farmers and private companies in Europe based on pre-negotiated contracts. These partnerships helped assure that the farmers received fair prices for their crops. In addition, benefits of the partnerships included risk reduction; increased access to credit, training programs, improvements in storage, inputs and technology; and more involvement in the decision-making process. Moreover, these partnerships have resulted in overall farmer empowerment and community development in the region. Notably, IFAD’s ex post analysis highlights the importance of supportive government involvement in facilitating the formation of these partnerships.⁴⁷

FOOD SECURITY POLICIES

Historical Overview

Throughout Mexico's post-revolution history, the different federal and state administrations have implemented various policies addressing food security. These policies have followed a similar evolutionary path as the concept of food security, focusing initially on individual consumption rather than production methods.⁴⁸ Beginning in the 1930s until the 1980s, food security policies aimed to foster agricultural production, food independence, and mass commercialization of products.⁴⁹ Initially, Mexico worked toward self-sufficiency, spending less than 5% of its GDP importing food and ultimately exporting corn.⁵⁰ However, following a period of decreased agricultural growth and export revenues, by 1973 almost 25% of the corn consumed in the country was imported.⁵¹ In response, the federal government of Mexico created the *Programa de Apoyo al Comercio Ejidal* in 1975 with the purpose of supporting farmers in selling their crops and augmenting their bargaining power and increasing local production. The program focused on farmers that already had high production capacity, but it failed to reach the small farmers in the most marginalized communities.⁵²

In 1980 the government created the *Sistema Alimentario Mexicano* (SAM) as a subsequent effort to improve self-sufficiency and distribution of food to the marginalized areas. It did so by facilitating farmers' access to credit and improving price floors, among other strategies, to motivate the production of staple foods.⁵³

Following the debt crisis of 1982 and the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1987, the government restructured and dismantled all the previous food security programs and created *Solidaridad*, shifting toward a more market driven approach to development. It was designed to target the poorest citizens and regions by investing in infrastructure, such as small community projects and the allocation of service functions between federal and subnational governments.⁵⁴ These investments were

made with the objective of strengthening rural service provisions. The focus was on basic infrastructure projects, such as small-scale irrigation, corn mills, potable water and sewage, and roads. These projects aimed to assist smaller communities in their technical capacity with the aim of bringing social benefits to these communities to produce the overall benefit of better access to food and markets for profit.

In 1993, the *Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo* (PROCAMPO) emerged as a resource transfer mechanism to compensate domestic farmers who were harmed by the competition that foreign subsidies generated.⁵⁵ In 1995, the first cash transfer program, the *Programa de Educacion, Salud y Alimentacion* (PROGRESA) was created. PROGRESA represented the turning point from which food security policy in the country shifted from fostering production and availability toward securing access to food. Additionally, food security programs were no longer administered by the *Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación* (SAGARPA), but by SEDESOL. This program currently operates under the new title, *Oportunidades*.⁵⁶ *Oportunidades* is currently the most important program for improving the nutrition of vulnerable Mexican households because of its wide extent.

Through these years, food security saw a shift toward being achieved through human development approach rather than through economic growth approach. In this way, the framework under which food security policies are implemented has changed from the idea of food production as part of economic growth to food production as a means to poverty reduction. In 1996, the *Alianza para el Campo* reflected this conceptual shift by promoting the quality of human resources through agricultural training. It focused on progressively increasing producer income, increasing agricultural production, producing enough staple food, promoting exports of farm products, facilitating access to new technologies, and encouraging capitalization of the land.⁵⁷

Recent State Level Policies

The government of Chiapas, during 2006-2012, instituted a number of policies aimed at enhancing capacity for local communities to produce sufficient amounts of food. Such programs aim to improve the productivity of family or communal farms and provide a means of income generation.⁵⁸ Two examples of state-level policies related to production include poultry farms and family agricultural plots.

Throughout Chiapas, poultry farms were established to create small businesses, mainly operated by women and centered on the productive culture of a communal resource. Poultry farms were seen as a way to improve access to food for families and communities, while also providing additional income and decreasing expenses on external foodstuffs.⁵⁹ For example, in Santiago El Pinar, women were in charge of the projects under this program and managed them jointly after receiving government-sponsored training. Four hundred chickens were initially provided, as well as the facilities to raise them.⁶⁰ This model serves as an example of the concept of food sovereignty policy because of the emphasis on self-sufficient production with the possibility of generating further income from egg sales.



Photo: Poultry farm in Santiago El Pinar, Chiapas, part of the Sustainable Rural City Program

Unfortunately in the case of Santiago El Pinar, a government official stated that the poultry farms were not self-sufficient, suffering from high production costs and reliance on government subsidies. Moreover, many of the hens in Santiago El Pinar died from infectious disease.⁶¹ The women running the *granjas* did not have enough grain to adequately feed the hens, decreasing the production of eggs.⁶² Furthermore, single families, rather than communal organizations, operated *gran-*

Box 5: The Case of Maiz Solidario

Maiz Solidario was a state initiative implemented in Chiapas in 2008 where support was provided to producers to encourage the production of corn. Farmers were given agricultural supplies and technical support for agroecological environment conservation. However, this state-sponsored support pushed farmers away from traditional practices (for example, milpa maya) and agroecological practices due to the distribution of chemical fertilizers, pesticide, etc.⁶⁵

jas.⁶³ Because Santiago el Pinar is located in an area with limited access to markets the *granjas* face an insufficiency in supplies and inability to easily obtain more. In addition, there was a lack of cooperation among the many community members originally designated to participate in the project. Due to these challenges, benefits to food sovereignty were severely limited. Neither a sufficient level of food nor the ability to generate additional income could be achieved.

Finding sustainable alternatives that make farmers self-sufficient economically and ecologically is a challenge due to a number of factors—social, political, technical, economic, cultural, historical, and ecological. These factors ultimately affect the success or failure of the projects.⁶⁴

One of the most central agricultural initiatives that the past administration implemented was the traditional and technical use of family plots, such as the milpa maya, mainly promoting subsistence agricultural production.

Family agricultural plots, traditional production systems, are considered an important alternative for the management of resources (i.e. soil, water, fertilizer) because of their minimal impact on biodiversity. Similar to the poultry farm program, family agricultural plots incorporate strong aspects of food sovereignty. The rationale is to cultivate sufficient fruits and vegetables for the family to consume throughout the year and sell any surplus at market for additional income. The composition and utilization of crops vary according to the circumstances and needs of the farmers. In addition, women generally determined what was planted in the gardens because, in many societies, women are primarily responsible for food and family health. The family plots initiative was designed to work hand in hand with the poultry farms described above, as they were also to provide the feed for the chickens--in essence helping to create a closed, sustainable system of production.⁶⁶

Along the same lines as family agricultural plots, a program sponsored by the Minister of Environment in Chiapas offered technical assistance to communities for the management of mushroom production.⁶⁷ This project had two sequential goals, which directly align with the principle of food sovereignty: 1) produce enough mushrooms for family consumption to provide supplementary nutritional and vitamin value with minimum expenses; and 2) sell surplus mushrooms outside of the immediate program beneficiaries through markets or intermediaries.



Photo: Mushroom production project in Chilil, Chiapas run by small cooperative of women

The mushroom project was implemented in Zinacantán and Chilil due to their relative ease in starting, low cost, and ability to be sustainable. The program operates sustainably, as women are provided technical assistance and start-up spores. After the initial harvest is collected and sold, the women are able to buy new spores with the income. Currently, both communities are producing only enough mushrooms for self-consumption. However, women are able to sell small amounts of surplus to neighbors and external family members.

Interviews revealed that while members of the cooperatives hope to sell mushrooms at market, market access and capacity to expand production are major obstacles.⁶⁸ The cooperative in Zinacantán spoke of high demand for mushrooms with a lack of capacity to expand yields. Additionally, the communities lack effective conflict resolution mechanisms to settle disputes related to work in the mushroom houses. Despite strong motivation to continue this program, Chilil experienced a 50% decrease in participation (from 14 to 7 individuals) due to disputes among the participants. Also, in some instances, husbands did not want their

wives to contribute labor because of concern that their wives would be spending too much time away from daily, household activities while caring for the mushroom project.⁶⁹ Teamwork is also an ongoing challenge, as some of the women are unaccustomed to participating in group cultivation activities. Nonetheless, both communities are excited about progress and are willing to continue working toward the second goal of selling surplus mushrooms for additional income.

Federal Level Programs

Concurrently, the federal level initiative *Proyecto Estratégico para la Seguridad Alimentaria* (PESA) is being implemented in 16 states. Beginning in 2003, the pilot program PESA, in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aimed to address the needs of smallholder farmers. It worked to develop their capacities for self-sufficiency and to provide assistance in the operation and consolidation of projects to satisfy the needs of highly marginalized rural communities.⁷⁰ PESA was developed in response to criticisms that programs such as *Alianza para el Campo* were benefiting a small share of farmers -- the wealthiest producers that could commercialize their produce. For example, small farmers with less than 2 hectares only received 13% of Procampo's total budget,⁷¹ while about 30% of Procampo beneficiaries obtained roughly 58% of the total resources.⁷² Unfortunately, this program, as well as many others, has been considered an electoral commodity -- the pork-barrel policies that benefit large producers.⁷³ This criticism is the main concern with regards to many social and agricultural improvement programs.

PESA aims to provide support for investment and includes a component of capacity development, technical guidance, and job creation through Agencies of Rural Development (ARDs).⁷⁴ ARDs are created with the assumption that marginalization is a problem requiring the attention and coordination of professionals in order to bring attention to the needs of dispersed communities. The program has different components and types of support according to the level of productivity and primary need of the farmer (food production for self-sufficiency, food production for sale, commercialization, etc.). Until January 2013, the program benefited 174 thousand families in 1013 municipalities, 8,300 localities with the support of 307 Agencies of Rural Development.⁷⁵ For 2013, the approved budget reaches 3 billion pesos, a 14% increase from 2012⁷⁶ and will be extended to 20 states.⁷⁷

Evaluations show that the design of PESA is following the principles of food sovereignty approach and laying the groundwork for food sovereignty in Mexico. Participants are likely to benefit from participation in the financial system, to produce for commercialization, and to consume more nutritious food. Self-sufficiency and participation in environmental conservation activities have also increased. Women have also increased their participation in decision-making processes.

There are some complexities in the implementation of PESA in Chiapas. The ARD requirements are very demanding. Monitoring and accountability during service delivery is difficult.⁷⁸ Not all of the ARDs have the capacity and the level of commitment required to make the projects work. Given that ARDs could be formed by civil society, consultancy firms, or entrepreneurial individuals, engaging in critical self-evaluations by non-state actors is necessary. Finally, PESA focuses attention on a particular set of indicators—cultivated area, corn production, asset accumulation, perception of whether consumption is adequate, and perception of satisfaction of life—thereby missing the opportunity for the ARDs to monitor the process of nutrition and quality of consumption.⁷⁹

Across communities in Chiapas, access to markets is a significant barrier to income generation. Remote communities are often unable to transport their products to the marketplace, leading to food waste and inability for farmers to take crop production to scale or to take advantage of niche markets in the region, such as the *mercaditos* mentioned above. Under the initiative launched by President Enrique Peña Nieto, the *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*, food distribution – which for small and medium scale producers translates to market access – is a primary goal to eliminate regional food insecurity. There are limited options available for improved food distribution and storage.

Food consumption programs have attempted to target the problem of food insecurity in Mexico more directly by providing food and monetary supplements to eligible families. Though this aspect of service provision is not planned to be the focus of the *Cruzada*, the following programs are also included in the framework.

DICONSA (*Distribuidora e Impulsora Comercial CONASUPO*) is a long lasting agency of SEDESOL. The efforts of DICONSA improve access to food and fit within the broader framework of the *Cruzada*. DICONSA's programs, however, address making food available

without paying attention to its quality or production processes. Many of the programs DICONSA manages are cash-transfer programs or dispensaries, which is something from which the *Cruzada* aims to move away—avoiding “handouts” and creating a more participatory approach to access to food.⁸⁰ Analyzing the contribution of DICONSA to the *Cruzada* is important because of its influence and inclusion in current and future plans. It aims to contribute to the improvement of food poverty, through the supply of basic and complementary commodities to highly marginalized rural locations, with organizational and community participation. DICONSA serves 25,000 people through 468 stores across the country, utilizing over 300 rural and central warehouses. One of its main functions is to conduct negotiations for the acquisition of major commodities that are commonly consumed in rural areas such as corn, beans, rice, sugar, milk, coffee, corn flour, wheat flour, table salt, oil, chocolate, chili, tuna, sardines, crackers, noodles, and general merchandise. DICONSA also provides nutritional assistance, social assistance, help in response to natural disasters, and a safety net for grain price increases.

In 2004, DICONSA began the *Programa de Apoyo Alimentario* (PAL), which provided in-kind supplementary food items. The program was designed to add more dietary variety into households. In 2009, DICONSA began offering financial services to the rural poor, in addition to its food commodities programs. The financial services program served as a distributor for the *Oportunidades* payments, which had previously been difficult to reach for many people in rural areas. However, the institution has not delivered the expected results.⁸¹ The challenge of the “new DICONSA” is to commercialize perishable products, with the goal of building a network of warehouses in strategic zones for small and medium producers to ensure a strategic reserve of three months.⁸² On February 25, 2013, SEDESOL published the operating rules for the *Programa de Apoyo Rural* (PAR) as part of the *Cruzada*.

A state government program that focuses on increasing consumption levels is the “Food Care Program for Population at Risk” (*Programa de Atención Alimentaria a Población en Riesgo, Desamparo y Vulnerable*). This program gives direct food aid that equals at least 20% of the daily energy and protein recommendations to children and vulnerable populations.⁸³ The support goes straight to families and households to combat child malnutrition by providing one kilogram of rice, beans, and corn. The women from the community of Zinacantán expressed

concern for this program because it was uncertain if it was going to continue next year. Previously, tuna and oil were also provided but have been discontinued from the distribution. Although the program helped alleviate hunger and improved malnutrition rates throughout Chiapas, it only addressed short-term solutions to food insecurity. Beneficiaries become dependent on programs such as this, and therefore it ultimately will not alleviate malnutrition in the long run. One of the main problems facing marginalized people in Chiapas is malnutrition; the solution is not provision of pantries but rather programs that strengthen small and middle-sized producers so that they may produce their own food in an independent and sustainable manner. Programs focused on consumption lack an exit strategy and only make the beneficiaries dependent rather than self-sustaining.



Photo: Students discussing food security initiatives with members of community in Zinacantán and FORO para el Desarrollo Sustentable

In Chiapas, 64% of families benefit from *Oportunidades*, which is a larger proportion than any other state in Mexico.⁸⁴ However, many families have complained about the structure and execution of the program. For instance, interviews with women in Chilil and Huixtán revealed that many participants felt the required community meetings and healthcare appointments were too time consuming and inconvenient due to the long distances that they would sometimes have to travel in order to attend.⁸⁵ Likewise, problems with the quality of health clinics have resulted in women receiving poor care due to inexperienced staff and poor equipment.⁸⁶ The problems of the program have led some women to reconsider their continued participation, but often their dependence on the cash transfers determines the outcome of their decision.

In spite of the Cruzada's intent to limit the expansion of cash transfer programs and to support programs with more sustainable outcomes, *Oportunidades* will likely continue due to its focus on healthcare. Moreover, the program has undergone recent expansions that incorporate a number of the goals of the Cruzada including increased coordination for program implementation with state and local governments. In addition, *Brigadas Hambre Cero*, an expansion of *Oportunidades*, was developed to offer grants to adults for training, technical assistance, and microcredit for increasing food security and promoting social inclusion.⁸⁷

Current Policy: Description of the Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre

The *Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre* was enacted by decree on January 22, 2012 and contains five main objectives, each of which responds to a different dimension of the hunger challenge: i) zero hunger through adequate nutrition and food for the people in extreme multidimensional poverty and lack of access to food; ii) eradication of acute child malnutrition and improvement of indicators of height and weight of children; iii) increase food production and income generation for small holders and farmers; iv) minimize post-harvest losses during storage, transportation and commercialization; and v) promote the community participation for the eradication against hunger.⁸⁸

This strategy was first defined at the *Comision Nacional de Desarrollo Social (CNDS)*⁸⁹ in 2012, and its recommendations were submitted to the Transitional Team of the Elected President and the Congress. It aims to respond to the recommendations of the FAO on the need to invest in infrastructure, smallholder agriculture, and adaptation to climate change, as well as organizational development in rural environments and strengthening of networks of citizen protection against price volatility.

A coordination system will be established to operationalize the Cruzada. SEDESOL will head the effort alongside three other decision-making bodies: an Interagency commission, established on February 15th, 2013; a National Council established on April 10, 2013 that will be integrated by an Executive Secretary and representatives of the private, social, academic and professional sectors; and Community Committees that will be integrated by the beneficiaries of the social programs.

In collaboration with academia,⁹⁰ the Federal Govern-

ment developed a methodological framework where the objectives of the Cruzada were reorganized to reflect the initiative's aim to tackle the challenges of the entire food cycle, from production to consumption. The Federal Government has emphasized the production of food as the cornerstone of the initiative. This emphasis begins to reach beyond food security and into food sovereignty, searching for sustainable solutions to the whole food system of production, distribution, and consumption.

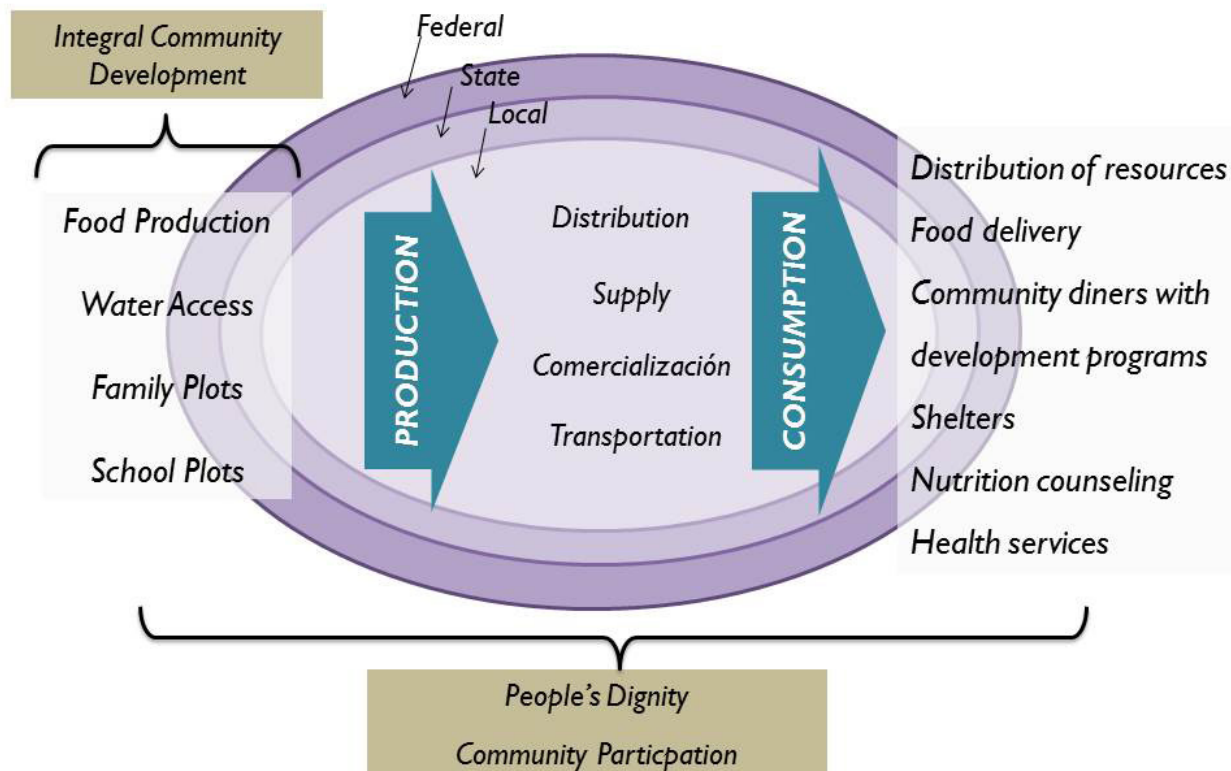
According to this framework, there are three main stages to achieving food sovereignty: food production, food storage and distribution, and food consumption. The first goal is to increase the food production and income of peasants and small producers. To achieve this, investment in agricultural infrastructure is essential. For example, access to water infrastructure is one of the most pressing needs in Chiapas.⁹² A second stage in the food cycle is the improvement of food storage and distribution to avoid harvest loss and maximize opportunities for commercialization. In the highlands of Chiapas, coffee commercialization is still underdeveloped and the lack of organization among producers obliges small producers to deal with intermediaries. There are no

adequate storage facilities, and the lack of technical sophistication in the storage reduces the quality of the coffee, therefore also reducing the income generated. Road improvement is another key element. The final stage is the consumption, including the direct provision of food for the most vulnerable, community diners, nutritional assessments, and health care.

The emphasis on development of the agricultural sector instead of focusing solely on the consumption stage seems to resonate with the approach of food sovereignty approach. In line with this new approach to eliminating food insecurity, CNDS is hoping to collaborate closely with the SAGARPA, the National Commission of Water and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources. Unless food sovereignty strategies incorporate the local practices and adapt to the local context, there is a risk of repeating policies that have been implemented in Mexico before. Moreover, there is a continued risk of emphasizing quantity over quality (See Box 5: *Maiz Solidario*).

The Cruzada faces some criticisms, but its eventual outcome is not known, as it is just in the early phases of im-

Framework of the Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre⁹¹



Source: Coordination Group of the Cruzada Nacional contra el Hambre. National Commission of Social Development.

plementation. The three main stages to achieving food sovereignty, described above, will all be addressed in the initiative. All the details regarding the implementation of the Cruzada are unclear, however, certain strategies and objectives have been defined.

Embarking on the Cruzada does not imply the creation of a new program or set of programs, or the allocation of more money for specific actions.⁹³ The Cruzada represents a strategy aimed at coordinating actions and using the available budget more efficiently. For immediate realization, the coordination group has two specific objectives. First, to contribute to the implementation of the *Acuerdos Integrales de Desarrollo Incluyente* [that will be put into action with the different states], focusing on the alignment of the budgetary programs at the local, state, and federal levels with the priorities and needs identified, and the mobilization of the corresponding indicators. And second, to define the structural changes that need to be made in each aspect of the food cycle, with the participation of all the government institutions, members of the National Council of Social Development, and the contribution of the academic community. These adjustments should derive into proposals to redirect the budget for programs related to food insecurity for 2014.⁹⁴

There are some strong criticisms of the strategy, including the selection process of the participating municipalities and the lack of detail regarding implementation. First, of the 400 municipalities prioritized with the Cruzada, some municipalities not classified as in extreme poverty were included, partially attributable to electoral aims.⁹⁵ Also, the lack of information and details about the implementation is a major source of suspicion, especially because this uncertainty creates speculation about the risk of using the program for electoral purposes. Most recently, SEDESOL signed agreements of collaboration with multinational companies such as *Un Kilo de Ayuda*⁹⁶, Nestlé, Pepsico, Femsas, Banamex, and Devlyn for their inclusion in the Cruzada.⁹⁷ Some of these agreements sent a negative message in terms of the Cruzada's commitment to small producers, local practices, and the approach of food sovereignty in general. For example, Pepsico, through its oatmeal and cereal brand Quaker, will develop a fortified product against malnutrition, again encouraging imports rather than local production.⁹⁸

Several questions emerge regarding the implementation of these immediate actions. It is unclear to what extent the three levels of government know and under-

stand their tasks in the short-term. Some states such as Zacatecas and Chiapas have organized training sessions on the Cruzada, and the *Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social* (INDESOL) has produced a distance-learning program for the public to inform them about the Cruzada.⁹⁹ April 2013 was the month of the Cruzada, with the main goals of disseminating information about the strategy and generating interest in civil society participation. However, the information is still incomplete, difficult to access and in some cases, contradictory. There is uncertainty regarding the local governments' capacity to generate effective structural changes, perform the analytical exercises necessary, and define and negotiate the structural changes needed by September 2013, when the budget must be approved.

These government-run programs deal with food insecurity and operate in Chiapas; however, they still need to be revised in the coming months for adequate recommendations in the next budgetary cycle.



Photo: Example of a more sustainable and healthy stove (*Fogón*) constructed by FORO para el Desarrollo Sustentable



Photo: Forum of discussion between civil society organizations and Pittsburgh students in San Cristobal de las Casas

Civil Society: Opportunities for Action Within the Context of the Cruzada

The relationship between the government and civil society has traditionally been tumultuous. In fact, civil society developed as a reaction against the government in the 1980s following a period of high marginalization and atrocity carried out by national governments – including that of Mexico. As a result, civil society has traditionally been a voice of criticism against government policies that often negatively impact some of the poorest and most marginalized communities. The origins of the government-civil society relationship then complicate present-day relations when the civil society is in a better position to cooperate with the government rather than push against government initiatives.

In the present day, civil society is faced with the difficult challenge of continuing to serve as a voice for communities – often requiring a critical eye for government policies – and coordinating with the government to improve policies to better reach the communities they seek to benefit. The development of the Cruzada opens a window of opportunity to improve this coordination as the government aims to undergo a large-scale revision of its current policies. However, this coordination is nonetheless an enormous challenge. Even creating a

dialogue between with the government can be a difficult first step complicated by bureaucracy, and especially given that it is only recent that the government begun to involve civil society in the planning process.

In an open discussion forum, 14 different NGOs in San Cristobal de las Casas were able to voice their thoughts and concerns regarding the challenges faced by civil society actors. The conversations were grouped into three main categories: interactions between civil society organizations and the communities in which they work, interactions between civil society and the government, and interactions among civil society organizations.

When working in the communities, civil society organizations face challenges of coordinating with local cultures and of developing culturally relevant programs. In addition, monitoring and evaluation of projects can be difficult. Identifying and measuring the most effective indicators is not done consistently for various reasons. It is not yet a process that has been fully integrated in the operating systems of many NGOs, and these organizations also face many limitations of technical capacity, available funding, will, and vision. These factors can have a significant impact on the implementation of these processes. In addition, selection of the indicators, and follow-up and impact evaluation of the programs often

depend on who is funding the project. What the donors wish to measure may not truly reflect the long-lasting impact of the program. If funding was not the main deciding factor in the selection of indicators, this could be a means of empowerment for the community and the civil society. Moreover, working with the communities to determine the most appropriate indicators can further empower communities by instructing them in how to develop their own indicators and monitoring systems in the future.

Programs sponsored by the government, but then implemented through civil society often result in conflicting goals or strategies for how to best carry out services to local communities. In general, civil society often develops more community-oriented and culture-specific services, while the government develops more generalizable and scalable programs to span larger geographical areas. Maiz Solidario, See box about Maiz Solidario (second reference) as described above, is an example of the government approach in practice. In contrast, most civil society organizations support programs with a more agro-ecological focus including organic farming initiatives. This conflict of program goals can be exacerbated by poor communication from the government regarding its programs and goals, and how it plans to engage the program-eligible populations. Moreover, civil society organizations are often dependent on the government's fiscal cycle for funding, but this time frame does not necessarily mirror the type of program schedule needed to implement effective food sovereignty programs. Likewise, this funding generally does not include support for monitoring and evaluation, or to follow-up or scale-up in ways that is costly in the short term, but beneficial in the long run. Some organizations note that this relationship has fostered a culture of paternalism instilled through sweeping government provision of goods and services, which creates more dependency rather than developing more community-driven and sustainable programs.

There is little incentive for civil society organizations—even ones implementing overlapping projects—to coordinate with other civil society organizations because frequently they are competing for the same funding sources. Without coordination, a number of civil society organizations have duplicated efforts that are carried out in the same or nearby geographical regions. For example, one NGO noted a case in which one family received support from five different organizations. The overlapping services hindered any progress because the family did not know with which organization to voice

concerns or needs. This breakdown in communication among civil society organizations and between the organizations and beneficiaries not only creates redundancies, but also leaves many gaps – in this example, four families that could have been assisted with the available funding, but were not. In addition to coordinating among themselves, few channels are available for civil society organizations to coordinate with academia and other actors for support and knowledge sharing.

Overall, the discussions seemed to show that there was a significant mismatch in incentives for the different actors, misunderstanding of goals, and poor communication. Although civil society organizations face challenges at multiple levels, understanding the underlying causes of many of the problems can advise solutions. An awareness of the limitations that organizations face due to funding in the budgetary cycles, concurring projects undertaken by other organizations, and cultural norms and traditions, civil society can improve its relationship with the government, communities, and other civil society partners.

For the purposes of the Cruzada, civil society organizations can become a partner of the state and federal government. This partnership can go beyond the process of sharing information about their mechanisms of intervention and activities, as was planned by INDESOL. They can inform the process of revision and restructuring of the food security programs. Many NGOs have years of experience in helping communities to take advantage of the state and federal initiatives. They have helped the local population to develop project proposals and manage their projects. Organizations that work at the grassroots level know very well the specific needs and limitations of the local communities. They also know the flaws and the strengths of the different social programs. Just as academia collaborated with the government to develop a methodological framework for the Cruzada, the civil society can engage in a knowledge sharing process to identify how to better serve the needs of the population.

CONCLUSION

The framework of food security has evolved internationally to incorporate elements of food sovereignty, aiming to improve production, distribution, and consumption in an environmentally and sustainably conscious way. Though the various levels of the Mexican government have attempted coordination efforts at implementing these aspects of food sovereignty, the attempts have faced and will continue to face difficulties.

Some of the areas in Chiapas record the lowest socioeconomic indicators in the country. Food insecurity is widespread in these regions, exacerbated by the populations' marginalization. Population dispersion and cultural diversity contribute to the difficulties in the region. Additionally, the diverse needs and cultural preferences of each area affect the outcomes of development programs, and an understanding of these increases the probability of success for programs addressing food insecurity.

Over the years, state and federal programs in Mexico aimed at reducing food insecurity have been met with mixed success. The current federal government has launched the Cruzada in an effort to revise and revitalize the way in which the government addresses food insecurity. Understanding the framework for the Cruzada is a crucial step for civil society organizations that would like to take advantage of the new government approach to combating food insecurity. Although there are still many uncertainties surrounding the implementation of the new Cruzada, this initiative provides prime opportunity space for civil society organizations to have their voices heard at the governmental levels and improve coordination among the many different actors. Civil society organizations should take advantage of this opportunity by working toward monitoring programs and partnerships with universities. This strength in numbers and effective organization will help civil society to accurately inform the government entities of what the current and future needs will be in the most impoverished and marginalized communities, especially in the areas of food sovereignty.



Left: View of houses in the Sustainable Rural Cities program in Santiago el Pinar, Chiapas

Top Right: Three students from University of Pittsburgh speaking with Ramon Martinez, President of FORO

Bottom Right: Two students from University of Pittsburgh presenting preliminary findings at the NGO forum in San Cristobal de las Casas



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