



Human Rights in the Design and Implementation of Local Actions of the Special Programmes for Food Security in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua

A Comparative Analysis





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Report prepared by Susana Gauster

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Foreword

The topic of food security and nutrition is currently of great importance in Central America. In spite of significant progress made and many efforts undertaken, segments of the Central American population still face inadequate access to nutritious and safe foods. Current levels of malnutrition in some of the countries are unacceptably high. In other words, the right to food has still not been realized for all. Central American countries have formulated, or are in the process of formulating, food security and nutrition policies and laws. But it is the actual implementation of those policies and laws that will make the difference in contributing to the protection and fulfilment of the right to food. Food security and nutrition programmes are important instruments to implement policies and laws. Therefore, we need to understand how these programmes are contributing to the realization of the right to food, and if they respect human rights principles and apply good governance practices.

The Special Food Security Programme (SPSF) in Central America has for many years contributed to improving the food security and nutrition of vulnerable population groups in four countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. The impacts of the SFSP are being evaluated at present, and as part of this evaluation an assessment was undertaken of the SPFS in three countries that applies a human rights lens. The present report presents the findings and conclusions of this assessment for the purpose of promoting that food security and nutrition programmes in Central America are designed and implemented respecting human rights principles while applying good governance practices.

The collaboration with the FAO Country Representations in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, with the Sub-Regional Office for Central America and with the Special Food Security Programme in Central America is hereby gratefully acknowledged.



Acronyms

AECID *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo*
(Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development)

AFS Agro-forestry system

AWP Annual work plan

CDMA *Comisión de Desarrollo Municipal* (Municipal Development Committee)

CIUSSAN *Consejo Inter-Universitario para la Seguridad y Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional*
(Inter-University Council for Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty)

COCODES *Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo*
(Community Development Councils) (Guatemala)

COMUSAN *Comisión Municipal de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional*
(Municipal Food and Nutritional Security Committee)

COMUSSAN *Comisión Municipal de Seguridad y Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional*
(Municipal Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty Committee)

ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ENRDC *Estrategia Nacional de Reducción a la Desnutrición Crónica*
(National Strategy for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition) (Guatemala)

ESAN *Estrategia de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional*
(Food and nutritional Security strategy) (Honduras)

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FNS Food and nutritional security

FNSS Food and nutritional security and sovereignty

GDP	Gross domestic product
GPs	Good practices
HDI	Human development index
INSAN	<i>Inseguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (Food and nutritional insecurity)
INTA	<i>Instituto Nicaragüense de Tecnología Agropecuaria</i> (Nicaraguan Agricultural Technology Institute) (Nicaragua)
MAGA	<i>Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Alimentación</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food) (Guatemala)
MAGFOR	<i>Ministerio Agropecuario y Forestal</i> (Nicaragua) (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry)
MINED	<i>Ministerio de Educación</i> (Ministry of Education) (Nicaragua)
MINSA	<i>Ministerio de Salud</i> (Ministry of Health) (Nicaragua)
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMM	<i>Oficina Municipal de la Mujer</i> (Municipal Women's Office)
PAFFEC	<i>Programa de Agricultura Familiar para el Fortalecimiento de la Economía Campesina</i> (Family Farming Programme to Strengthen the Peasant Economy)
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
PESACAM	<i>Programa Especial para la Seguridad Alimentaria Centroamérica</i> (Special Programme for Central American Food Security)
PHC	<i>Plan Hambre Cero</i> (Zero Hunger Programme) (Guatemala)
PME	Planning, monitoring and evaluation
POASAN	<i>Plan Operativo Anual de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (Annual work plan for food and nutritional security)
PSAN	<i>Política de seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (Food and Nutritional Security Policy) (Honduras)
SAG	<i>Secretaría de Agricultura</i> (Department of Agriculture) (Honduras)
SESAN	<i>Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (Department of Food and Nutritional Security) (Guatemala)
SINASAN	Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (National Food and Nutritional Security System) (Guatemala)
SINASSAN	<i>Sistema Nacional de Seguridad y Soberanía Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (National Food and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty System) (Nicaragua)
SNEA/SNER	<i>Sistema Nacional de Extensión Agropecuaria/Rural</i> (National Agricultural/Rural Extension System) (Guatemala)

SPFS	Special Programme for Food Security
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UTSAN	<i>Unidad Técnica de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional</i> (Food and Nutritional Security Technical Unit) (Honduras)
WFP	World Food Programme



Executive Summary

The analysis contained in this report seeks to identify the extent to which the Special Programmes on Food Security (SPFS) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as implemented in the Republics of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, reflect a human rights approach in their design and implementation practices. The aim of this is to encourage the design and implementation of food and nutritional security (FNS) programmes in Central America to respect human rights principles and apply good governance practices. As the human right to adequate food complements the technical concept of FNS, these stand alongside established human rights principles such as participation, inclusion, equity, empowerment, transparency and accountability, and others.

To conduct this analysis, fieldwork was undertaken with selected communities in the three countries. The following issues were addressed with the target community groups: selection of participants, implementation of the process, technical actions, participation and accountability, knowledge of human rights and the right to food, gender and perceptions on FNS and poverty reduction. At the municipal level, conversations were held with leading stakeholders on aspects relating to the process of implementing the SPFS programme in each municipality; knowledge and upgrading of their actions, approach and basic concepts (human rights and right to food); processes for replicating good practices (GPs); interagency coordination processes; accountability, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation; dissemination of results; social, political and institutional support for the programme; perceptions on FNS and poverty reduction; and special emphasis was placed on analysing gender mainstreaming in the programmes. Key interviews were held with technical experts, and with representatives from public entities (at the municipal and national levels) with which the SPFS programmes had been working. These addressed aspects related to the implementation of the fieldwork, including difficulties and achievements, monitoring, evaluation and accountability, and key strategies.

The three programmes have several elements in common. They have been developed in a context of high poverty indices and chronic malnutrition and inequality, but with recent legislative and institutional progress related directly to FNS. The programmes' objectives are to reduce food insecurity, and their intervention strategies combine direct support for community groups with the validation of GPs for incorporation into the public system. The four pillars of FNS are addressed, through a technology based on "learning by doing". Interagency coordination is a key strategy in the three countries.

There are also a number of differences relating to the institutional context and presence of the state in the countryside in the three countries, which affect possibilities for transferring the validated GPs to the public entities. The organizational strategies on which the SPFS programmes are based also vary — between interest groups and promoters on the one hand, and rural savings funds on the other. Moreover, the intensity and context with which the mainstreaming of gender and indigenous issues are addressed also vary.

The analysis undertaken shows that, although their designs did not include a human rights approach, in practice the SPFS programmes in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua uphold several human rights principles and good governance practices, with a number of individual features and, above all, with clarity in terms of their weaknesses and objectives for the future.

The human rights principles satisfactorily addressed include that of *adequate responses*. The four pillars of FNS are taken into account, both in their own work and in interagency partnerships and coordination at the local (and national) level. Results show that improvements in the various FNS-related domains succeeded in reducing "acute and chronic" malnutrition in the SPFS programme zones.

The programmes promote *participation* and *empowerment*. The methodology is participatory and based on horizontal transfer of knowledge, to facilitate the appropriation of new knowledge. Apart from the emphasis placed on the capitalization of incentives, SPFS programmes do not come with prepackaged designs, but are prepared in conjunction with the participants. By expanding capacity to take important decisions, autonomy is increased and a contribution is made to empowering the participating families.

One of the aspects to be taken more into account concerns identifying the participants (which is related to the human rights principles of *inclusion* and *equity*). Although SPFS programmes target poor rural population groups and those living in situations of food vulnerability, no strategies have been defined to make sure the most vulnerable families are incorporated. In this regard, the programme has not succeeded in overcoming the frequently observed tendency to have the greatest impact on the most active people in the community, such as the promoters and affiliates of rural saving and loan associations (*cajas*).

Another aspect to be improved relates to *transparency* and *accountability*. The right to food appeal mechanisms related have not yet been strengthened. This involves empowering

participants to see themselves as subjects of law and social audit. Nor have accountability mechanisms been incorporated into the SPFS programmes themselves.

As regards the *absence of adverse impacts*, although the practices are ecologically sustainable and socially inclusive, there are risks of intra-community disputes, mainly in relation to money management (for example in incentive capitalization initiatives) or when physical goods are distributed.

When designing future FNS programmes with a rights approach, it is important to place special emphasis on mechanisms for identifying vulnerable people and families. This means clearly defining the target group, identifying it in the field, and designing explicit and operational strategies to guarantee its inclusion in the programme. Approaching vulnerable families personally and directly has proven an effective way to motivate their inclusion. To make this possible, it is important to: (1) clarify responsibilities; (2) raise awareness among key stakeholders from the outset, for them to assume this role with commitment and success; (3) maintain flexibility in operating the programme according to the participants' time availability, and consider the resources needed for the preparatory activities; (4) hold constant dialogue based on mutual respect, to gain an understanding of the constraints on participation and find ways to facilitate it.

It is also crucial to more systematically consider the specific needs and circumstances of women and indigenous peoples; form multidisciplinary teams (anthropologists, gender experts) to gain a better understanding of cultures and power relations, both for executing the programmes and for monitoring them as an additional option. Progress has also been made in certain programmes — such as in Honduras in terms of gender mainstreaming — which would be worth sharing with the other initiatives.

To minimize the adverse impacts that some programme components could generate, it is essential to have clear and transparent information, because this counteracts the emergence of incorrect interpretations and comments that also fuel potential dispute. It is important to ensure that: (1) the community has information on the amount of resources available, so that everyone (and not just the participants) agrees on the priorities for their use; and (2) reports are periodically made to the community on the management and investment of those resources.

Lastly, it is important not only to apply a human rights approach, but to visualize the right to food and its implications in terms of appeal and justiciability mechanisms. This is a *sine qua non* precondition for social audit and accountability. Consideration must also be given to the time and resources needed for the initial activities to raise awareness of the approach, to ensure that participants know their rights and the mechanisms for upholding them; and that awareness and openness in implementing such mechanisms is generated in the municipal public entities associated with FNS.



Introduction

This document was prepared as a result of an analysis made of the Special Programmes on Food Security (SPFS) in Central America (specifically Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). The purpose of the analysis was to ascertain the extent to which the current design and implementation practices of the programmes took account of human rights principles, so that future FNS programmes can be designed and implemented in ways that respect human rights principles and apply good governance practices.

Given that the formal commitment to realize economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to adequate food is being adopted in many countries of the world, including the three covered in this study, it is important to assess whether FNS programmes, as public policy tools, do in fact contribute to protecting those rights and facilitate their realization.¹

The right to food involves the recognition of certain elements that are not necessarily present in the FNS concept. The two concepts complement each other; they coincide in the definition of their basic components (availability, access, biological utilization/consumption and stability of supply in terms of availability and access). Like all human rights, the right to food imposes obligations (on states) and responsibilities (on non-state organizations and individuals). Whereas the FNS concept recognizes that adequate food is a basic need, the right to food is augmented with specific human rights principles such as participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and respect for the law. The right to food cannot be decoupled from good governance practices,² because without these its fulfillment cannot be guaranteed. States have the

1 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which refers to the right to adequate food (Art. 11), was ratified by Honduras in 1977, Nicaragua in 1980 and Guatemala in 1988.

2 The exercise of authority through political and institutional processes that are transparent and accountable, and encourage citizen participation (OHCHR 2008:2).

obligation to adopt equitable measures with maximum efficiency to make progress in realizing the right to food, allocating the maximum possible amount of resources for protecting and steadily realizing this right and always respecting its principles. The fulfilment of these obligations can and should be monitored and demanded by members of society to realize their rights.

Thus, analysing a programme from a technical FNS standpoint is not the same as doing so with an the right to food approach. In the latter, any outcome, no matter how effective, must also be evaluated from the human rights standpoint. In other words, the achievement of good results does not mean that the design and/or implementation responds to a human rights approach. Ideally, the global objective of an FNS programme will include contributing to the realization of the right to food. If that is the case, the evaluation of the programme should automatically include a human rights approach.

This report is intended for the technical personnel and managers of SPFS programmes and the technical and administrative teams of FAO and other institutions, in Latin America generally and in Central America in particular. Thus, the analysis presented shows the integration of human rights principles in the design and implementation of SPFS programmes without pretending to provide a comprehensive assessment of those programmes.

Organization of the report

Following a brief section on the methodology used to analyse the programmes, the report describes and compares the context, design and main strategies used in each country. It then makes a comparative analysis of the application of human rights principles in the design and current implementation of the programmes. The main findings on the application of human rights principles are summarized in the following section, while the final section synthesizes the lessons learned in practical application.



Methodology

As there is no unique design for SPFS programmes, the analysis was based on the project documents and methodological guidelines on which the methodology and main strategies of the programmes in the three countries were based. Systemizations of municipal experiences, project reports and analysis documents expanded the information base. Interviews with national SPFS teams and/or directors yielded supplementary information on the history, key changes and main strategies. Annex 4 of this report provides details of the various information sources used for the different topics of the analysis.

Framework of analysis

Prior to this study, the human rights principles to be considered when designing, implementing and analysing an FNS programme with a human rights approach had been defined (box 1). These were applied in the comparative analysis of SPFS programmes. The principles in question represent a sort of “gold standard” which will not be applied 100 percent in practice. As they can be applied in different ways, they should be seen as a framework that helps when considering which aspects the programme could be strengthened in.

BOX 1: Checklist: Human rights principles

Equity. This means that the programme should deliver goods and/or services to the most needy, in other words to people who suffer food-nutritional insecurity or are most vulnerable. It means that the design and implementation of the programme are based on detailed information that identifies those groups and the causes of their insecurity. The groups in question then become programme target groups.

Non-discrimination. The absence of discriminatory practices and effects that could occur when specific groups are benefited at the expense of others with equal rights in terms of religion, ethnic affiliation, age, gender, political opinion, social or cultural status, nationality, language, property, or some other unrelated criterion when prioritizing the most vulnerable.

Inclusion. Specific efforts are made to reach the groups that traditionally suffer from political, social, economic and/or cultural exclusion, and to include them among the programme's target groups as participants with the same rights as others.

Respect for human dignity. No person is obliged to act in a way that undermines their self-esteem, sense of human dignity and/or the respect of others towards them.

Participation. This refers to the degree to which people's voices are heard and respected during decision-making and in the process of planning, implementing and monitoring programme actions. Participation may vary, from greater to lesser importance — from the person who is asked to provide information, or is consulted on an issue, or contributes with everyone else in decision-making or the planning of actions; to the person who is organized to take decisions, taking account of his/her own priorities and perceptions (self-determination), and for the implementation of actions that respond to those priorities, with or without help from the programme or other actors ("participation scale").

Empowerment. This means that people acquire the capacity to choose, from the different alternatives, the one that is most advantageous to them and can turn those decisions into actions with desired results. This capacity depends on: (i) the ability to recognize the existence of various options and be able to make an appropriate choice; (ii) the opportunities that exist in people's formal and informal environment (including the way the programme operates).

Absence of adverse impacts. Account is taken of all decisions and actions to judge whether the programme has any negative effect on the protection and upholding of the human rights of any member of society.

Adequate responses. This means that the responses provided by the programme to a given problem reflect the priorities and needs of the target groups. It means that the programme has clear knowledge and understands those priorities and needs before being designed and before decisions are taken on its implementation process. It also means that the target groups continually have the opportunity to make the programme aware of their priorities and needs.

BOX 1: Checklist: Human rights principles (cont.)

Consensus orientation. This involves mediating between the different points of view and interests to reach a consensus on how to proceed in the best interests of the group or community as a whole. Mediation is done on the basis of mutual respect between the participants, bearing in mind short and long-term perspectives.

Transparency. This means that decisions are taken, and actions are implemented, according established rules and regulations that are known and understood by all actors. Adequate and valid information is provided openly, to subsequently proceed with the respective decisions and actions.

Accountability. Mechanisms are established and widely known, to enable the programme's target groups to demand accountability from the persons responsible for the programme and the institutions with which the programme is associated, whether public or private. It also requires the persons responsible and the institutions to have a good understanding of their responsibilities towards the programme and the consequences of the decisions and actions they have to take. The persons responsible have the obligation to explain and justify their decisions and actions (or absence thereof) and their consequences, to those affected by them.

Source: FAO, 2011b: 6f; FAO working papers.

A series of indicators were prepared to analyse the application of human rights to FNS programmes, referring to the aspects that need to be considered at the different moments of a programme cycle (analysis of situation, analysis of the political and institutional environment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). These indicators were used as a reference for the field interviews.

The information compiled was analysed with help from the “Atlas.ti” qualitative analysis programme, which, according to the scheme of analysis prepared, made it possible to classify and interpret that information systematically.

Country visits: Guatemala and Honduras

In both countries, a number of interviews were held with actors at the national level (Ministries of Agriculture, FNS department/units, FAO Representatives and national SPFS programme teams), and at the municipal level (mayors, municipal planning offices, municipal planning offices, municipal women's offices and municipal FNS offices, health centres, education supervisors, agricultural outreach teams, delegations from the Food Security Department (*Secretaria de Seguridad Alimentaria*), and community entities (promoters, and rural saving and loan associations).

Two municipalities were visited in both Guatemala and Honduras (Guatemala: Huité and Casillas; Honduras: Yoro and El Negrito). The selection criteria reflected the support that FNS was receiving, or not receiving, from the municipality. In both countries,

a municipality was visited where the mayor was fully committed to supporting FNS, as shown by investments in projects, the issuance of municipal orders and leadership in municipal committees related to FNS, thereby presenting a favourable context for the work of the SPFS programme. Also in each country, another municipality was selected where that support was not in evidence, with the difference that in Huité, Guatemala, the municipal FNS structures and the promotion network had already been created, which implies a degree of pressure on the new mayor to continue with the process. In contrast, in El Negrito, Honduras, the municipality has demonstrated apathy for a long time, so the work of the SPFS programme was being done on an isolated basis and in a setting that was not propitious for its progress.

Country visits: Nicaragua

Owing to time constraints, initially only one municipality was to be visited in Nicaragua (San Juan de Limay), which had served as a reference for systemizing the experience of the SPFS programme in that country. San Juan de Limay is a municipality in which the programme had been developing for several years but where post-implementation follow-up of progress could not be observed. Subsequently, the opportunity arose to learn about a new experience, in the municipality of Palacagüina, where the mayor had recently started to implement a process entitled “Implementation of Law 693 through the implementation of the municipal FNS model”, with technical support from the SPFS programme, and represented by its current strategy aimed at monitoring and assisting the public institutions that execute it.

Field methodology

It is important to mention that the study was done from Guatemala, with specific visits being made to Honduras (five days) and Nicaragua (three days). This made it possible to devote more time to the field visits in Guatemala and to interact more with the staff of the SPFS programme. Consequently, the Guatemalan experience is taken as a basis for comparing the experiences of the programmes in Honduras and Nicaragua.

The following topics were addressed in the target community groups: participant selection, implementation of the process, technical actions, participation and accountability, knowledge of human rights and the right to food, gender and perceptions on FNS and poverty reduction. The leading actors at the municipal level were interviewed on aspects relating to the process of implementing the SPFS programme in the municipality; knowledge and valuation of its actions, approaches and basic concepts (human rights and the right to food); processes for reproducing good practices; processes of interagency coordination, accountability, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation, dissemination of results; and social, political and institutional support of the programme. In the case of

the Municipal Women's Office (OMM), special emphasis was placed on analysing gender mainstreaming in SPFS programmes. Key interviews were held with team members, municipal technical workers, regional or national coordinators and those responsible for some of the thematic areas (gender, nutrition, agriculture). These interviews addressed aspects related to the implementation of the process on the ground, difficulties and achievements, monitoring, evaluation and accountability, and the main strategies to be implemented.

The interviews held with FAO representatives provided information on the linkage between the technical part (SPFS) and the political part (FAO) within this organization, as well as the institutional strategy and priorities. Conversations with government representatives and institutions involved in SPFS programmes at the national level helped to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the contributions made by those programmes at national level, and their recommendations for carrying them out.³

It is worth describing the nature of the municipal visits and their implications. They were short visits of a day and a half in each municipality, and included interviews with the technical workers on SPFS programmes, the municipal authorities, institutions with a presence in the municipality, and the visit to the community. Given constraints on time (which is needed to generate a minimum level of trust and obtain valid data) it proved possible to talk only with the promoters and in a single case (Sta. Martha, Yorito, Honduras) with the rural saving and loan association; but in no community were there conversations with non-participating families. The arrival of a stranger in the community generates a feeling among the interviewees of being "evaluated"; so the promoters made efforts to highlight the strengths and achievements of the programmes rather than analyse them with a critical eye. Consequently, the visits made it possible to obtain a general idea of the application of the programmes in practice, without delving into the community dynamics generated by them.

3 Annex 4 contains a summary table on the information sources used for each topic.



1. General description of the programmes⁴

The three programmes have been developed in a context of high indices of poverty, extreme poverty, malnutrition and inequality, with Guatemala standing out for high levels of chronic malnutrition (stunting), Honduras for poverty, and all three countries for the low range of their human development index (HDI) in which only Haiti is lower among Latin American countries.

TABLE 1: **Indices of poverty, malnutrition and inequality in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua**

	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
Poverty	51	58,8	48,3
Extreme poverty	16	36,4	17,2
Rural poverty	72,2	64,4	70,3
Malnutrition (height-for-age)	49	27,4	27,2
Gini coefficient	53,7	57,7	46
Latin American HDI ranking (21 countries)	20	18	19

Source: UNDP, 2011; UNICEF, 2011; ECLAC statistics, national surveys (cited in the SPFS project documents of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).

4 For a general description of the SPFS programme, see <http://www.pesacentroamerica.org>. The general description of the programmes in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua are contained (separately) in the annexes to this document.

These national figures, in conjunction with global phenomena such as the multiple crises — particularly food and environmental crises — have generated a context in which FNS (*Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional* – SAN) is attracting increasing attention and solidity. In fact, along with climate change, FNS is one of the predominant themes on the global development agenda, which provides a propitious political environment for promoting its actions.

The three project documents cite similar problems as underlying causes of the precarious food-nutritional situation:

- Lack of availability of food (owing to low agricultural productivity, environmental vulnerability and lack of diversification).
- Lack of access to food (incomes too low to purchase food products).
- Low biological utilization of food (unhealthy consumption habits and lifestyles).
- Bad health conditions (little access to quality water and basic sanitation).
- Lack of supply and reserves (grains) to mitigate the disastrous consequences of weather events.
- Few institutional capacities to steer and coordinate FNS-related actions.

The three countries have been promoting major FNS-related actions in the legislative, political and institutional spheres, as shown in box 2. The fundamental role of SPFS programmes has been recognized in the formulation of FNS laws (in the three countries), strategies (National Strategy for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition of Guatemala, Food and Nutritional Security Strategy of Honduras), policies (National Agricultural Extension System and Family Farming Programme to Strengthen the Peasant Economy in Guatemala) and the provision of methodologies and tools for managing them. Currently, the representatives of public entities linked to FNS insist that their governments are committed to it, but they do not always show that commitment through practical actions. There are challenges such as budgetary appropriation and execution,⁵ institutional strengthening,⁶ local articulation of food and nutritional security and sovereignty (FNSS) systems⁷ and recognition as a human right.

5 In Guatemala, experts criticise the lack of a budget for FNS and (budgetary) execution in the “Zero Hunger” programme (<http://ipsnoticias.net/nota.asp?idnews=101792>); and the Family Farming Programme to Strengthen the Peasant Economy (PAFFEC) has no funding yet.

6 This relates mainly to creating the economic, political and technical conditions to give FNS coordination mechanisms greater room for manoeuvre.

7 In addition to that, there is little understanding of the topic given that there are public officials and/or employees that confine FNS to the topic of access, such as the Vice-Minister of the Department of Agriculture (SAG) and the Municipal Manager of El Negrito.

BOX 2: The institutional framework created and its challenges

Guatemala was the first country to institutionalize FNS. Since 2005 it has had the Law on the National Food and Nutritional Security System (Decree 32/2005), which recognizes FNS as a human right and defines an institutional framework for implementing its national policy. The FNS Department (*Secretaría de SAN – SESAN*) was created, and this prepared a Strategy for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition (ENDRC). The current government announced implementation of the “Zero Hunger” Covenant and Plan, which aims to reduce chronic malnutrition by 10 percent over a four-year period.

In Nicaragua, in 2009 the Law on Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (Law 693) was passed, creating the institutional framework for a National Food Sovereignty and Security System (SINASSAN) and laying the foundations for FNSS coverage in its full scope. Guatemala also set up a department to coordinate government efforts related to that system.

In Honduras, the Technical Unit on Food and Nutritional Security (UTSAN) was created through Decree 038/2010. This unit is located in the Ministerial Office of the President, with responsibility for the planning, follow-up, monitoring, evaluation and formulation of methodological procedures linked to the implementation of the country's FNS policy and strategy (*Política y Estrategia de SAN – PSAN and ESAN*). In 2011, and the Law on Food and Nutritional Security (Decree 25/2011) was passed, addressing a number of human rights principles (equity, non-discrimination, respect for human dignity, participation and transparency).

Agricultural extension/outreach has been resumed and strengthened. In Guatemala, the National Agricultural Extension System (SNEA) was created under the government of Álvaro Colom (2007-2011). The current government, despite having changed all of the field personnel that had been trained in the methodology, has assimilated the methodologies of the SPFS programme and the previous SNEA, making small changes, such as the Family Farming Programme to Strengthen the Peasant Economy (PAFFEC), which has recently been implemented. In Nicaragua, the entity in charge is the Nicaraguan Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA), which was created in 1993, but switched its focus to the agroecological sphere in 2009. In Honduras, after the disarticulation suffered by all agricultural public sectors in Central America, there has been no reconstitution of agricultural outreach.

Source: Project documents of Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua; SPFS 2012; interviews with SESAN and MAGA (National Rural Extension System) Guatemala; SAG, UTSAN and Municipal Manager El Negrito, Honduras; Deputy and MAGFOR, Nicaragua

The history, development and most important changes made to the programmes have been very similar in the three countries. SPFS started with agricultural projects (see annexes 1, 2 and 3 for a more detailed description in each country). In Guatemala and Nicaragua, they initially targeted access (irrigated vegetables for commercialization) and then switched focus to availability; whereas in Honduras, work was done initially on the validation of good practices (GPs) through agroforestry systems (AFS) to increase

availability. Then, qualitative jumps were made in the three countries: the incorporation into FNS of the biological utilization component (nutrition) and the effect on public policies at the national and municipal levels. In Honduras, a third major step in the work has been gender mainstreaming.⁸ In the three countries, the changes introduced are the result of evaluations made by the SPFS programme technical teams and by FAO itself.

The current objectives of the three programmes (as indicated in respective project documents) speak of improving FNS among the most vulnerable population groups (table 2). In Honduras, that objective is being pursued with a heavy emphasis on gender equity, a perspective that is present in the other two countries but in a less conceptual and operational manner.

In the three countries, the intervention strategy is based on validating GPs,⁹ to demonstrate their potential to the institutions responsible for outreach/extension and other actions related to FNS (Ministries or Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health, FNS department/units, municipalities). Nonetheless, there are significant differences according to context. Whereas in Guatemala and Nicaragua the institutional context made it possible to pursue the strategy and focus on advice and the transfer of experience and knowledge to public institutions,¹⁰ in Honduras, institutional weaknesses in the Agriculture and Livestock Department (SAG) has affected the role that the SPFS programme can play. Initially, as a response to its technical and budgetary weakness, the SAG decided to enlist support from FAO for the execution of programme activities, while undertaking to maintain a national counterpart in terms of budget and human resources (a commitment that has been fulfilled). Nonetheless, instead of promoting the experience generated and the sustainability of the project's GPs under its own efforts, the SAG ended up abandoning its service-provider function and, consequently, its obligations to uphold human rights. In practice The SPFS programme became isolated and without the option of institutionalizing its methodology in the public entity responsible for outreach. Nonetheless, the programme in Honduras aims to transfer knowledge to other entities such as the municipality (with technical extension workers), and to educational institutions and health institutions.

The local strategy in the three countries involves implementing four approaches or systems: one related to the establishment and strengthening of agroforestry systems

8 Although it is mentioned in the other countries, this approach has not been given the same priority as in Honduras.

9 These successful practices are productive or other practices linked to FNS, which require few external inputs, are environmentally friendly, and are readily adopted by the rural families.

10 In this regard there is a three-step strategy to be followed: (1) in-field validation of successful practices; (2) the effect in terms of having the methodology incorporated into the laws, policies and institutional processes, both national and municipal; (3) support for public entities in the field, in the framework of the COMU(S)SAN.

(the “milpa” approach in Guatemala, agroforestry systems in Nicaragua and Honduras) to improve the availability of basic grains, sustainable management of natural resources and resilience to natural events;¹¹ another related to improving the availability of food products to complement the basic family food diet and its consumption under conditions that improve biological utilization (this component is known in the countries as patio-home (Guatemala), integrated patios (Nicaragua), or food-nutrition (Honduras));¹² the third approach relates to income generation, mainly through the capitalization of incentives; and the fourth approach concerns community organization.

There are significant differences in relation to the latter two. Whereas in Guatemala and Nicaragua, the capitalization of incentives is optional, in Honduras it is a *sine qua non* condition that can actually be discerned in the organizational strategy. The creation of rural saving and loan associations (or else microenterprises) is the basis for programme execution; and participation as an affiliate of these entities is a requirement of the SPFS programme to gain access to the goods and services.¹³ In contrast, in Guatemala and Nicaragua, participation involves the creation of interest groups centred on a promoter.

The three SPFS programmes are based on the “learning by doing” methodology, using an outreach method involving knowledge transfer from “campesino to campesino”. This method uses direct communication to disseminate lessons learned horizontally, in a language that is common to all, respecting local knowledge and customs, and making use of existing resources. The key players are the promoters — men and women who undergo a training and skill development process to deepen their knowledge and then lead the activities of monitoring, evaluation and reflection on the whole organizational and productive process as “voluntary” rural extension workers. The technical support given in the land plots with promoters, and the exchange of experiences with different communities, is a mechanism that is highly valued for improving capacities on a participatory basis and according to context.

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- 11 The GPs contained in this approach include: no burning, stubble management, cropping in furrows, contours, plant barriers, diversification of the land plot, enhanced seeds, distancing of seeding, integrated pest management (natural extracts), dispersed trees, pruning, agroforestry, fruit trees, production and selection of seeds, organic farming.
 - 12 Includes components of crop farming, livestock breeding, healthy household and food-nutrition education, with the following GPs: family fruit tree orchards, poultry management and health, medicinal plants, enhanced greenhouses, water treatment, healthy home (waste management, healthy floor, healthy wall - wall plaster - healthy roof) handling, preparation, distribution and consumption of food products, management of soil fertility (fertiliser, vermicompost and natural extracts), animal health, school vegetable gardens, water harvest (grey water filters).
 - 13 The services are mostly training events in agricultural GPs, food and nutrition GPs and the management of saving and loan associations. Persons not associated with them can in principle make use of the services (training) but are precluded from obtaining the physical goods.

In the case of business activities (such as seed banks, grain reserves or, in Nicaragua, rural development communication firms), the interest groups are set up as leadership committees and/or partners of the microenterprise. In those groups, the strategy does not go through the promoter but the group is trained collectively. This becomes particularly important in Honduras where the organizational structure is based on the rural saving and loan associations. In that case, the affiliates emphasize different components (production and natural resources, food and nutrition, business and finance, institutional strengthening), and participate in the respective training activities.

In the three countries, the importance of the strategy applied is based on the forging of institutional links and the strengthening of interagency coordination, with a view to making the process sustainable and enabling the FNS to be worked on with a multisector approach. At the national level, there are key references which, depending on institutional context, differ from one country to another.¹⁴ These are being used to influence FNS policies (in the three countries); agricultural outreach (in Guatemala and Nicaragua); educational curricula (in Honduras and Nicaragua); and health (in Honduras and Nicaragua).¹⁵ All three countries have made significant progress in that direction, including the formulation of the PAFEC in Guatemala¹⁶ and the introduction of FNS in school curricula in Honduras and Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan SPFS has focused particularly on work at the national level, which not only involves a number of government entities (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Nicaraguan Agricultural Technology Institute, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health), but also the Inter-University Council for Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (CIUSSAN), a key mechanism created for formation, awareness raising and technical capacity creation in various sectors.

At the local level in the three countries, there is close collaboration with the municipality, encouraging it to assume FNS both as a priority (through the issuance of municipal orders, budget appropriation, and training the technical workers, the forming of municipal committees (COMU(S)SAN and municipal development committees (CDMAs)) as a tool for making the most of public (and private) actions at the municipal level, and a space for transferring the SPFS methodology to the technical personnel present in the municipality.

14 In Guatemala, the national institutional references are the MAGA (Rural Extension System) and SESAN; in Honduras, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and UTSAN; and in Nicaragua, MAGFOR, INTA, SESSAN and the Ministries of Education and Health.

15 In the health sphere the aim is to expand the range of community intervention to activities that are merely linked to that topic (such as weight-size measurement) and to others more closely related to food (consumption, clean households).

16 See FAO and MAGA, 2010a; FAO and MAGA, 2010b; MAGA, 2012.

TABLE 2: Elements in common and differences between the SPFS programmes in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and their environment

Topic	Elements in common	Differences
Legislative context	Passing of FNS and FNSS laws in recent years	
Institutional context	Existence of FNS coordination entities	Public outreach strategies in Guatemala and Nicaragua only; institutionalization of the SPFS methodology in those two countries only
Analysis of the underlying causes of food and nutritional insecurity	Highlighting of availability issues (linked to a lack of productivity and resilience to natural events), access, biological utilization and institutionality	
Objectives	Reduction of food and nutritional insecurity (Spanish acronym: INSAN)	Gender perspective particularly developed in Honduras
Intervention strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct support to rural families in target municipalities; • Validation of GPs for inclusion in public and institutional policies at the National and municipal levels; • Strengthening of municipal interagency coordination in FNS 	Direct execution in the case of Honduras, owing to the lack of a government outreach policy
Local strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validation of GPs, with four approaches, corresponding to the pillars of FNS and the underlying causes of food and nutritional insecurity; • Income generation (capitalization of incentives, microenterprises); • Community organization 	
Capitalization of incentives	Incentives capitalization process as a saving and microcredit strategy	Capitalization of incentives at the centre of the strategy and conditions for participation in Honduras
Local methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning by doing; • Horizontal transfer of information under the “campesino to campesino” modality; • Exchanges and visits 	Promoters as figures and interest groups as key structures of the programme (Guatemala, Nicaragua) compared with the organizational structure as a microenterprise or rural saving and loan association in Honduras

TABLE 2: Elements in common and differences between the SPFS programmes in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and their environment (cont.)

Topic	Elements in common	Differences
Institutional links nationally	National references: FNS coordination entities, Ministry of Agriculture	Additional national references in Honduras (Ministry of Education and Health) and in Nicaragua (Ministries of Education and Health and CIUSSAN)
Interagency coordination at the municipal level	Support for the creation, consolidation and strengthening of municipal FNS committees	



2. The application of human rights principles in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua: a comparative analysis

The following elements were selected to review the application of human rights principles in the design and implementation of SPFS programmes: (a) targeting systems; (b) technical actions implemented; (c) community participation processes; (d) interagency links and sectoral participation; (e) social auditing and accountability; and (f) planning, monitoring, evaluation and systemization.

Targeting

SPFS programmes identify municipalities, communities and families. In Guatemala, although the group most vulnerable to food and nutritional insecurity is said to be the poorest rural population (FAO, 2008: 46), so food vulnerability would seem to be a targeting criterion, this is only true to the extent that municipalities, communities and families are visualized as broadly belonging to those groups (the poorest rural population). In other words, in practice, it is assumed that all (poor) rural populations have the same degree of food vulnerability, irrespective of their specific socioeconomic level, ethnic membership, or gender.¹⁷ Consequently, as a result of the methods applied, in none of these three levels (municipalities, communities, families) has the level of food vulnerability been used explicitly as a targeting criterion (although this does not mean that families vulnerable to food-nutritional insecurity have not been supported).

¹⁷ Moreover, belonging to one of the indigenous peoples and/or to the female sex is related to higher levels of food vulnerability, and also gives another connotation to food insecurity, which is not considered here.

The municipalities identified have been proposed by the MAGA. They are located in the country's Dry Corridor, a zone characterized by arid soils, with little productive capacity and high vulnerability to the extreme weather events that are occurring with increasing frequency (droughts, floods, etc.). The original suggestion was to maintain the initial territorial zone of the SPFS programme, namely the east, which had been targeted in previous periods by the coffee crisis. Nonetheless, of the programme's six priority municipalities (Camotán, Chiquimula; Casillas, Santa Rosa; Huité, Zacapa; Jalapa, Jalapa; Conguaco, Jutiapa; and San Agustín, El Progreso), only two are among the 166 municipalities selected by the Zero Hunger Programme (PHC), which in turn are prioritized for their degree of food vulnerability. The selection of communities at the municipal level was coordinated according to the micro-watershed support criterion.¹⁸ Given the existence of municipal diagnostic studies, priority was given to the micro watersheds whose communities as a whole had recorded the most encouraging results in terms of malnutrition.¹⁹

In Honduras there are 120 municipalities considered the most vulnerable by the Human Development Index, food vulnerability and environmental vulnerability — the municipalities selected by the SPFS programme are among them. Recently, much attention has been paid to the prevalence of chronic malnutrition as a selection criterion, incorporating 22 municipalities from the zones traditionally worst affected by this (Lempira, Intibucá and La Paz). As additional identification criteria, supplementary data from other projects were used, such as the weak institutional presence and the demands of the municipality. The committees were selected on the basis of an FNS analysis in relation to available natural resources, accessibility, poverty and institutional presence, undertaken jointly by the municipal corporation and community leaders. Priority was generally given to the more remote communities that tend to receive less attention. In other cases, they were selected on the basis of the prevalence of malnutrition, in coordination with the health centres which usually have the most up-to-date data.

In Nicaragua, municipalities were targeted on the basis of high levels of food vulnerability and municipal plans articulated with FNS (as an indication of the municipality's interest). In terms of communities, the most remote and forgotten ones were sought, provided they had an already structured level of organization (FAO/SPFS, 2012).

Municipal and community selection in the three countries thus responds to different criteria, as does the definition of the target group. Honduras is the only country that aims

18 The microwatershed approach is a participatory planning proposal for the integrated management of natural resources of a watershed or microwatershed, for the purposes of environmental management, territorial management and local development.

19 Nonetheless, it does not guarantee that the most vulnerable community is located in that microwatershed. This was the case with Casillas, where the community with the highest levels of acute malnutrition (Monteverde) was not considered initially (because it did not belong to that microwatershed).

to serve families with children under five years of age or expectant mothers, or families with reproductive potential, in other words families displaying a specific food-vulnerability condition. In Guatemala and Nicaragua, the target population is that included among the government's priorities in its national FNS programmes, mainly poor people and rural producers; but in practice, the selection of the families in the three countries functions in the same way. A mechanism known as "self-selection of participating groups" is followed, which means that the participants are those who wish to participate, those who show interest and availability. When introducing the SPFS programme in the community (the "approach" stage), a community assembly is convened to present the programme and its options. All families are invited to participate; and persons who wish to be registered are registered, interest groups are formed, and a promoter is chosen. In Honduras, the Board of Directors of the rural saving and loan association (*Caja Rural*) is chosen.

In general, few people register at the outset (about 1/10 of the community, according to the interviews held). Municipal technical personnel explain this phenomenon in terms of people's apathy and paternalistic mentality, which stems from previous projects that have been implemented with little participation.

There is apathy among the people. For example, in Monteverde, in a fertile community of 300 families, only 15 registered. The people need to be motivated, because they are used to receiving and not doing things for themselves (Interview SESAN, Sta. Rosa, Guatemala).

In the three countries, a start was made with few families, but as the results started to emerge, more families asked to join. In Guatemala, accepting a new member in a group or not, was a matter for the promoter. If there was no mutual interest between them, the applicants in question could create their own group, although it would be smaller than other groups already created. One way or another, they registered with the SPFS programme technician and joined the group. Despite a number of irregularities, in general terms, the programme was open to the entire community;²⁰ and in Honduras, which initially made admission to the *Caja Rural* open to the whole community, on the condition of capitalizing and applying the no-burning rule.²¹

20 These problems occur particularly when the SPFS programme closes down. For example, one group was unclear as to the size to which it could grow (Interview with promoters, Casilas). In another case, a promoter refused to accept a person who wanted to join — the wife of someone who had shown negative attitudes to the project. Although the wife guaranteed that she did not share the opinion of her husband, the promoter decided not to include her (Interview with Huité promotion network).

21 In practice, the *Caja Rural* is not really open to the community, but closed. This is seen as a natural reaction in defence of the interests of affiliates that have been struggling for several years to give life to a saving and loan association. Nonetheless, it is something that could be corrected through regulations established in the form of rules, so that new affiliates could progressively enjoy rights (shared analysis of the national team of the Honduras SPFS programme).

Given this openness to family participation, it is hard to understand why some did not wish to participate.

Sometimes people do not participate because of laziness, mistrust in giving their identity card number (Promoters Coralitos, Casillas)²² or else they simply do not want to “waste time”, or they are lazy or egotistical (promoters from Casillas). **Sometimes there are negative people who do not want to participate and sow mistrust. Others rapidly lose heart as a result of a mistake** (Interview with Promotion Network, Huité). **They don’t like to participate...; I told them and they didn’t like it...** (Interview with *Caja Rural* Sta. Martha, Yorito, Honduras).

While community leaders state that it is often the poorest families who do not participate, they do not identify the causes of their lack of interest, which may be physical, economic, social or psychological. The condition of malnutrition itself does not enable them to lead an active life, and the psychological effects of extreme poverty intensify apathy and lack of initiative.²³ In addition, it involves a permanent search for some form of income in the short term. The perception that the lack of interest or approach is “to blame” or is the families’ responsibility, hampers the promoters’ action in seeking to specifically incorporate the most vulnerable more actively into the programme; but no effective strategies have yet been designed to achieve that.²⁴

In Guatemala, the SPFS programme considers approaching vulnerable families to be the job of the promoters; nonetheless, the latter have not been trained for this and do not feel responsible. When addressing the lack of participation by vulnerable families, a direct visit is seen as a viable alternative for persuading them to join. In Honduras the issue is present in the thoughts of the SPFS team, which describe efforts made to include the target groups (ensuring that all vulnerable families are offered the inputs needed for capitalization, holding meetings at the best times for people living in situations of extreme poverty,²⁵ hoping that community leaders convince the families). But if there is

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- 22 In Casillas people fear of the arrival of a mining firm. The population rejects these extractive activities, even when there are municipal hearings. When signing and giving their ID number to a register (such as the SPFS programme) there are people who fear that the mining company is behind this and uses their signatures to promote a mining activity. This reflects confusion in the information reaching community members.
 - 23 In addition there are the experiences from other projects, such as abuse by staff, lack of concrete results, or “participation” as a means of mobilising resources for projects that are not priority, to mention just a few.
 - 24 The two communities visited are an indication of this: in El Pate, El Negrito, of 27 vulnerable families (with children under five years of age), less than half (11th) participate in the caja -in total there are 45 families (27 vulnerable), of whom 24 participate (11 vulnerable); and in Sta. Martha, Yorito, of 150 families only 23 participate in the caja rural (interviews caja rural Sta. Martha y and president of caja rural El Pate).
 - 25 *The poorest do not go because they have to get food for the next day. So the meetings are held on Sundays which are the only days on which they can participate* (Interview: national SPFS team, Honduras).

no immediate and positive response from them, the persons responsible rapidly become disillusioned because they fail to reach those groups. The greatest progress has been made in Nicaragua, where the most vulnerable families are identified (with cases of malnutrition), and they are visited and advised to approach the promoter to be able to join the organization, which generally works.

It is particularly complex to identify target groups in Honduras, because it is not only a matter of them participating, but capitalizing on the incentives²⁶ to become an affiliate of the *caja* and thus a programme participant. Consequently, someone who does not wish to, or cannot, capitalize, does not receive any material support and/or mechanism of support apart from a few general training sessions which are open to the entire community. Possibly, not all families are in a position to pay. Although the basic assumption is that even people immersed in poverty can pay, is doubtful whether this is actually the case. There is also the fact that they want to save but cannot do so in a situation of extreme poverty which does not enable them even to cover the basic food basket.

Thus, in practice, the identification of vulnerable families is the road along which the SPFS programmes need to travel. Although this is mentioned as a priority, there are no explicit strategies for guaranteeing their incorporation into the programme. Neither the project documents nor the methodological guidelines contain written indications on how to contact and include the most vulnerable people. Instead, in the case of Honduras, the *emphasis of extension work is to work with groups, the project cannot rule out attending exceptional individuals that make much faster progress than other producers in the region and prove just as good allies in the projects as community leaders* (FAO, 2011a: 43).

Consequently, if from the ownership perspective it is desired that participation be voluntary and based on a participatory and proactive attitude, in other words exclusively on the “demand” side, this runs the risk of involving the people with greatest capacities (physical, financial, educational and social) while excluding the most deprived families. The actors that make the most of SPFS programmes— the promoters and/or members of the management boards — are clearly the most active, dynamic and educated people in the community. From a human rights perspective, in this way, the identification of participants does not uphold the principles of equity and inclusion.

Although the delivery of goods is not the primary objective of the SPFS programme, in a context of high poverty the distribution of inputs or materials attract attention from the entire community. The ill-feeling that this can generate among participants and nonparticipants, mainly if they see that families with the most capacities benefit most, creates a potential source of conflict. This does not seem to be a frequent problem,

26 In other words, a high percentage (70-100 percent) of each programme contribution (fertilisers, seeds, latrines, icons, etc.) must be paid for in cash to contribute to the creation and consolidation of a small cash fund, managed by all members of the *caja*.

but it can exist; and it is a point that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the principle of the **absence of adverse impacts**. On the other hand, the fact that in some cases the selection criteria involve agroecological conditions and landholding to be able to introduce technologies, particularly for fruit trees or for the land itself, leads to the issue of **non-discrimination**; in other words, some families might be left outside an FMS programme for ownership reasons.²⁷

A final point to be mentioned is that although the resources that SPFS programmes directly manage do not necessarily reach the most vulnerable families, there are strategies that support the most vulnerable groups, albeit indirectly. An example of this is a solidarity fund that the rural saving and loan associations seek to maintain in Honduras, which enables them to cover humanitarian needs. The key strategy involves interagency coordination mechanisms at a municipal level. As we shall see below, the three SPFS programmes have been successful in promoting and consolidating such mechanisms, namely the Municipal FNS Committees (COMUSAN) in Guatemala, Municipal Development Committees (CDMA) in Honduras, or the Municipal Food Security and Sovereignty Committees (COMUSSAN) in Nicaragua. These committees, in turn, have clear strategies for prioritizing the families and communities most affected by malnutrition and food and nutritional insecurity.

Technical actions: good practices

The technical actions promoted in the three countries have sought to validate good practices (GPs), which are easily adopted, do not rely on external inputs and are environmentally friendly. The three countries work with AFSs, which are based on sustainable land management (increasing their resilience to natural events) and on the diversification of land plots with family and school vegetable plots, associated with investments in water and household sanitation infrastructures, along with training on healthy homes and safe food consumption. Various methodologies are implemented for that purpose, such as the “milpa” approach, the patio-home approach in Guatemala, and “*Apreciando lo Nuestro*” [valuing what is ours] in Honduras, which has guidelines for the initial training of programme technicians.

In addition, as part of income diversification and generation in Guatemala, or actions targeting the business sector in Honduras, the three countries have sought to implement some type of mechanism for capitalizing incentives and creating community microcredits, whether through seed banks (Guatemala, Nicaragua), immunization of poultry (Guatemala) or projects involving goats (Nicaragua), among others. Those projects usually

27 It is worth clarifying that this does not mean that there were some actions requiring land ownership (or water sources), but contexts in which the actions are exclusively (or mostly) targeted on groups in that situation.

return twice the input obtained (for example for every pound of seeds, two are delivered after harvest), or a given percentage is paid to make some action sustainable. As noted above, the strategy has been followed with greater impetus in Honduras because the rural saving and loan associations that manage the capital obtained from capitalization have been defined as centres of community organization around the programme.

In terms of the GPs, these are known and understood by the people interviewed, the promoters and the technicians from the municipalities and public institutions with a presence in the municipality. They display a high degree of ownership of the GPs and capacity to disseminate them. The adoption of the practices by the groups is good: according to information from the promoters, they are adopted successfully by most participating families to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the practice (for example, the GP of “no burning”²⁸ is applied even by families who are not participating in the programme).²⁹

Innovation and the introduction of new technologies and modalities for exchanging experiences (educational trips, meetings, visits to other communities) under the “campesino to campesino” methodology, are effective alternatives;³⁰ they enable the promoters to see different options, and their knowledge forms the basis for making the decisions that are most appropriate and correct for the community. They also strengthen the organizational structures of a municipality’s communities. In Guatemala, promotion networks have been created which, beyond the horizontal transfer of knowledge, experiences and materials (seeds, for example), have succeeded in forming organizational structures that make it possible to channel demands from the communities and become an important player in civil society at the municipal level. Honduras is promoting the articulation of community saving and loan associations into second-tier *cajas*, which, apart from allowing for a more profitable connection to the national financial system, also establishes a structure with potential for organized political action.

The strengthening of these technical capacities, which makes it possible to take qualified decisions, together with the mentality change involved in attempting to overcome poverty and food and nutritional insecurity using their own devices, the growth of the

28 “No burning” means ending the practice of burning stubble and leaving the residue of the harvest to be absorbed into the soil.

29 The extent of transfer between the promoters and families making up the group is hard to establish in short visits, but is an important aspect for evaluation in the future, for which surveys of knowledge, attitudes and practices will be undertaken.

30 The interviews held showed the degree of ownership that these exchanges provoke among the promoters. For example, one case considered the possibility of using biogas as an energy source, a practice that had been observed in another community (interview promoters Casillas).

organizational capacity of the communities and a functional microcredit mechanism (in Honduras)³¹ help to empower the participating groups.

Some practices are particularly well-suited to human rights promotion, such as cultivation in car tyres, as practised in Nicaragua, which contributes to **inclusion** and **non-discrimination** of landless people, the analysis of the food pattern and the orientation of productive actions (particularly family vegetable plots, also in Nicaragua), which, depending on the deficit encountered, ensures **adequate responses** to the food problem. The same happens with the creation of community and municipal grain reserves (in Nicaragua and Honduras), because storage in periods of undersupply makes it possible to regulate the price, which suffers huge variations from one season to another, and can generate profits as part of an activity adapted to the reality and experience of the community's families.

Some specific cases in Guatemala have had difficulties applying some of the practices, such as the production of vermicompost or poultry immunization. With the departure of the SPFS programme, there is a fear of a shortage of seeds to continue sowing vegetables either in family land plots or in diversified plots.³² This aspect has been treated differently in Honduras and Nicaragua, where from the outset, the family, school and diversified vegetable plots were only used for growing local herbs and vegetables, the seeds of which can be produced on a small scale. In both countries, the teaching of traditional recipes for consumption has helped restore the nutritional culture, acceptance in the family diet, and thus the sustainability of its cultivation and consumption.

The only mechanism that mentions various difficulties is the capitalization of incentives. In Guatemala, the left-over funds generated by some projects (seed bank, poultry immunization) have given rise to disputes in some communities; in other cases the funds ran out or were simply created but never used. In Honduras, where the creation and management of the funds has generally been successful,³³ not all of the experiences of the saving and loan associations were good. There have been cases where the treasurer took the money and experience ended in conflict. In Nicaragua, there have been problems with the management of goats (a large percentage of families did not succeed in maintaining, reproducing, and delivering the young animals committed to), and also with the storage centres (payment default by some producers). Although there have been successful experiences in some communities, there is a clear risk of triggering conflicts, thus going against the practice of good governance (based on human rights principles)

31 A functional community microcredit mechanism has much potential in terms of affording more autonomy to the community development process (since reliance on external contributions is minimised).

32 These cases involve seeds that cannot be produced on an informal basis, such as cauliflower or broccoli.

33 The 750 rural *cajas* set up have demonstrated the high capacity that exists for saving and management of microcredits.

and the **absence of adverse impacts**. Also, with respect to other activities in which funds are managed (grain bank, handicraft microenterprises, shops), attention needs to be paid to this aspect. Apart from the latter mechanism, assessments of the methodology applied by the SPFS programme have been highly positive.

The package that the SPFS programme develops is very well organized. It accommodates and relates to the needs and capacities of the communities (Interview OMM, Casillas). **Its methodology is unique, very good; there's nothing else like it. People change their mentality with the programme** (Interview FNAA, Sta. Rosa). **It would be good if public entities operated like it — with an organized process, clear methodologies, an integrated process to respond to the pillars of FNS...** (Technical interview SPFS, Casillas). **I've noticed the change in mentality towards cultivation and nutrition** (Interview with a doctor in El Negrito, Honduras). **They've shown us how to make money and not lose it** (Promoter El Pate, El Negrito, Honduras).

Without going into details on the specific results in terms of productivity growth, diversification of production and consumption, improvement of access to treated water and basic sanitation and, consequently the indices of acute and chronic malnutrition in the municipalities (all the municipalities visited reported significant indices of malnutrition),³⁴ it can be inferred that the technical actions have been appropriate for successfully addressing the causes of food and nutritional insecurity identified at the start of the process (of phase III).³⁵ It can therefore be confirmed that the SPFS programmes offer **adequate responses** to the food problem faced by the communities.

Community participation

The SPFS programmes in the three countries are based on the fact that the “social capital”³⁶ existing in the communities affects FNS conditions, so the response alternatives are related to the community organization, for which reason people's organized participation is sought.

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- 34 For example, in Huité, acute malnutrition decreased from 90 cases (2009) to 70 (2010), and then to 37 (2011) and 7 cases in 2012 to date; in Casillas, acute malnutrition dropped from 102 cases (2009), to 75 (2010) and then to 44 in 2011; and in Yorito, chronic malnutrition dropped from 58 percent (2008) to 34 percent in 2012.
 - 35 The reduction in malnutrition cannot only be attributed to the work of the SPFS programme, nor can it be considered as only that programme helped to achieve it (compare to other factors that may have had an influence), given the absence of indicators that make it possible to precisely identified this specific contribution.
 - 36 The SPFS programme documents talk a lot about “social capital”, “human capital” or “natural capital” (see project documents, methodological guidelines, etc.). There is discussion on these terms, to refer to a community's social, human or natural potential, since speaking of “capital” reduces empowering phenomena and its intrinsic value (satisfaction, dignity, participation, etc.) to a merely instrumental value, measurable in terms of future income.

This participation is firstly manifested in the formation of promotion groups and networks, and secondly is seen as a key element throughout the process. This means that from the outset, it is developed in consultation with the stakeholders. In the three countries, the community process starts on a participatory basis with one or several initial diagnostic studies (mentioned by the participants and the SPFS programme team), to then jointly take decisions on the programme's orientation, based on the main problems identified. Both the SPFS programme technical workers and the promoters have been emphatic in stating that the programme does not come with pre-established designs or plans, but aims to respond to the issues raised, within the parameter of its actions (technical assistance and the implementation of microprojects); and that the actions are chosen by the participating community groups according to their priorities, which is crucial in terms of ownership by the population and its **empowerment**.

In the Guatemala project document, this mechanism is referred to in terms of *negotiating agreements for the inclusion of community demands or potentials... and activities... of technical assistance and other production support services...*; and then it adds that it will include *the mechanism for capitalizing incentives decided on by the participants* (of the groups and communities). This means that the design proposes the mandatory adoption of some incentive capitalization mechanism (and that the population should take the corresponding decision). In the case of Honduras, as noted above, it goes even further: the creation of a rural saving fund is the main strategy in the community organization, and participation in it is the only gateway into the SPFS programme.

Without detracting from the merit of the incentives capitalization mechanism, this aims to resolve a key problem in rural communities: access to a credit at a reasonable interest rate. It is important to pay attention to this: firstly because it affects the broad concept of **participation** by "imposing" a mechanism; and secondly because it is a mechanism and a practice that are foreign to the experience and life of the community. Managing collective funds (through records and account books), monetary debts, and seeking investment in successful firms, requires (economic) rationality, which is foreign to the rationality with which the communities have traditionally conducted their human and economic relations.

In implementation, for the case of Guatemala, it should be recognized that the technical personnel of the SPFS programme have not been mistaken in proposing the capitalization of incentives as an essential condition. Although they suggested a mechanism, they left the final decision to the participating groups. In Nicaragua, the situation has been similar; capitalization was promoted, but it is not a mechanism that is imposed. In general terms, in both countries (Guatemala and Nicaragua), the respect shown for community dynamics — in terms of the slow formation of the groups and the demands and priorities put forward — has contributed to the change in mentality that many technical workers in the municipalities mention as an outcome of the programme's work. In other words,

a change from a paternalistic attitude that expects solutions to problems to be provided from outside to a proactive, participatory, and responsible attitude towards the challenges faced in the context of poverty and food and nutritional insecurity. This has contributed to quality **participation** and **empowerment** of the participating groups. Through their attitude, the programme technicians show **respect for human dignity**, and horizontal relations of mutual respect are observed along with increasing self-esteem among the participants as a result of the (participatory) process implemented and the programme's impact. Given the leadership that SPFS programmes have had in the COMUSSAN, which is the result of the transfer of methodology among the various public stakeholders, a change in attitude can also be seen in them, in terms of respect, towards the community's own dynamics.

The case of Honduras is different. At the community level, it is possible to prioritize certain actions that promote the SPFS programme, provided the predefined strategies are respected, mainly in terms of the capitalization of incentives. In other words, there is no participation if there is no capitalization. It is possible, or even likely, that the decision to "impose" this mechanism forcefully, and without fear of doubts, has produced the positive results are now being seen. Nonetheless, in human rights terms, it does not respect the principle of **participation**; and there is a risk that at the end of the programme and/or if an unexpected (weather) event occurs, it will no longer be sustainable. Despite acting on a participatory basis and encouraging participants to take ownership of the practices implemented, the fact that the technical workers make the working methodology clear from the outset, generates a hierarchical dynamic that shows who has the last word. In the field visits, compared to the experiences of Guatemala and Nicaragua, there is a less horizontal attitude and, on the part of some technical workers, and attitude that is less **respectful of human dignity**, as shown by their acceptance of the gifts offered to them by programme participants, among other things.

In terms of women's participation, the three SPFS programmes have shown significant efforts to include them. In Guatemala and Nicaragua, many of the training events and investments have been targeted towards women,³⁷ particularly in the biological consumption and utilization component, under the "patio-household" and "integrated household" approaches. As a result, the traditional space occupied by women (the home) shifted to centre stage, thereby achieving direct connection with their experiences and knowledge. Several actors (programme technicians, municipal technical workers, promoters) agree that women's participation has increased considerably within the SPFS programme, and since its implementation. In several communities, it is women

37 For example, in Guatemala in the first of the 2012, about 70 percent of the groups served had been women (1st semester report, 2012; FAO, 2008: 5); and in Nicaragua, all the training events held in the first after 2012, over 50 percent of the participants were women (1st semester report, 2012; FAO, 2007: 28).

who participate the most, there are more women promoters than men; and in Casillas, Guatemala, the presidency of the promoter network is held by a woman.

Nonetheless, in Guatemala and Nicaragua, a participation modality persists which consolidates the traditional roles of men and women. Men participate in the “milpa” groups (Guatemala) or “agro-forestry system” (Nicaragua), and in “diversification”, when that exists; in other words, in productive activities. In contrast, women are given the responsibility in the home, such as food preparation and childcare. Although this may be a good strategy for motivating women’s participation from the spaces closest to their daily life, the power relations existing within the home are not questioned, and it is not yet proven that later on the traditional roles are mixed (with women participating in productive activities and men in training events related to a healthy home or adequate food consumption). Although it empowers women in the transfer of knowledge and helps to reduce malnutrition, this way of approaching gender equality could entail a high cost for women, because it increases their workload and adds to their responsibility in the home. In that regard, although the programme respects **non-discrimination**, because it extends to the entire population, there is a risk that by not acting more intensively on specific context of discrimination faced by women, intra-family power relations that marginalize them, discriminate against them and reduce the chances of overcoming the machismo structures with which they have always lived, become consolidated and expanded.

The Honduras SPFS shows leadership in addressing gender, because it confronts the inequality between men and women more deeply. Its importance is recognized in the project document, which devotes several pages to summarizing the gender strategy, with one page used exclusively to design its strategies. The targets, objectives and indicators are formulated from the gender perspective. Specific actions are implemented to allow for women’s participation, without this representing an additional burden (space for children, making training schedules coincide with available time, training events within the same communities, etc.). Currently, work is being done on a methodological proposal to develop family co-responsibility, which, like other measures, encourages participation by men in the training events of the “food and nutrition” component.

Nonetheless, in terms of women’s access to productive resources or other goods, and owing to the organizational structure developed, this is difficult for them. The rural *cajas* only allow one family member to be an affiliate, which, given the history of oppression, is generally the man. Although women show interest, they often cede participation to the man, as was confirmed by some women who represented their husbands in the interview held with the Sta. Martha rural saving and loan association. Given that the incentives are distributed exclusively to the affiliate of the rural saving and loan association, and that these are mostly men, gender equity is not being taken into account. In fact, just 27 percent of the members of the rural saving and loan associations

are women. Thus, although women's participation is reported at 40 percent, the goods, whether for the land plot or for the home, are mostly handled by the men. That differs from the practice in Guatemala and Nicaragua, where the tendency to treat the land plot and the home separately, under different organizational structures, enables women to directly access the programme's inputs.

Thus, addressing the issue of gender in Honduras is two-faced. On the one hand, it promotes a clear and determined strategy to address the causes of inequality, which responds to the principles of **non-discrimination**; on the other, the fact that the rural saving and loan associations only accept one family member as affiliate, without encouraging the woman to take this role from the outset, helps ratify historical intra-family power relations, and has a negative effect on **inclusion**.

Indigenous peoples constitute another sector that has historically been discriminated against by society in Central America, in Honduras and Nicaragua, where they represent minorities (in relation to the total population). Their **inclusion** is promoted in the programme,³⁸ among other reasons, because indigenous populations are generally those most affected by malnutrition. Nonetheless, the topic of indigenous peoples is still given little consideration; particularly in Honduras, where exclusion and discrimination against indigenous population groups has not been a topic of debate in society, unlike the situation in Guatemala or Nicaragua. Gratuitous comments about the mentality of indigenous communities and/or their standard of hygiene are frequently made by public-sector employees and personnel related to the programme, which can only be considered a **lack of respect for human dignity**. The profound and serious lack of understanding of the culture of indigenous peoples is not only felt in Honduras; although FAO has an indigenous peoples policy, in practice it is not taken as a reference.

Interagency links and sectoral participation

In all three countries, a fundamental strategy of the SPFS programmes has been: (1) work connected to the municipalities; (2) the creation, consolidation and/or strengthening of interagency coordination at the municipal level, such as the COMUSAN in Guatemala, the CDMA in Honduras, or the COMUSSAN or production offices in Nicaragua.

The municipality is considered a key player. If the municipality does not show interest in promoting FNS, the SPFS programme does not generally enter it. Otherwise, initial contacts are made with the municipality to present the programme and coordinate its functioning (including identification of the target groups). To demonstrate the municipality's commitment with FNS and guarantee its sustainability, steps are taken to ensure that: (a) the municipal budget allocates resources to it; (b) municipal ordinances

38 In fact, in the territories in which the SPFS programme operates, they are a majority.

are issued in favour of GPs; (c) they have at least one technical/trainee/per programme (but financed by the municipality), which is achieved in some cases. In others there are a number of difficulties following elections and changes of municipal administration. That is where the COMUSSAN or the consolidated the CDMA can exert pressure to maintain the municipality's commitment. For example, in the case of Huité, Guatemala, the structures developed did not give the new mayor any alternative than to continue with the FNS strategy. In contrast, in El Negrito, Honduras, in the absence of such structures, it has been impossible to make headway because its mayor shows little interest.

The strategy of strengthening the interagency coordination units is recognized as highly successful by the institutions involved. In Guatemala, in the six municipalities directly covered by the SPFS programme, the COMUSANs have been created and consolidated. In Honduras, a significant contribution is made to implementing the CDMAs, the priorities of which include FNS. In Nicaragua, where the law provides the legal basis for creating the COMUSSANs is more recent, progress has been made in some municipalities, where the previous municipal intersectoral coordination structures linked to the topic (production offices) have been strengthened.

Those municipal commissions encompass various governmental institutions with a municipal presence (municipal representations of the Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture and the Environment), municipal offices (Planning, Women, the Mayor) and the NGOs present in the municipality. Some commissions have participation from formal representatives elected by the communities (Community Development Councils (COCODES) in Guatemala, *Patronatos* in Honduras); but the social and community representatives and the structures created by the SPFS programme (promotion networks in Guatemala, rural saving and loan associations in Honduras) still need to be systematically incorporated.

Nonetheless, integration thus far has greatly expanded municipal FNS work, encompassing more families and more communities, effectively complementing the work of the SPFS programme, and constituting a sustainability mechanism whose effectiveness could be seen at the end of its work at the municipal level (as in the case of Guatemala).

The COMUSSAN or CDMA prioritize the communities most affected by malnutrition; and, within them, they identify the most vulnerable families, which they then visit directly and give differentiated support (for example, in some cases, in addition to training for the entire community, they receive food), and multisectoral support. Families with malnourished children are identified through the health entities, or based on information from community structures (COCODES, *Patronatos*), to identify the most poor. They are then visited directly, to encourage them to participate in the SPFS or FNS project promoted by the commissions. While being clear about the importance of prioritizing the most vulnerable families and acting consistently with this, other rights such as equity and inclusion are also addressed through the COMUSSANs.

Two modalities are used for the coordinated work: either all the technical workers support the action of one institution (for example the nutritional survey), or each one supports the programme according to his or her expertise (health, hygiene, water treatment, food preparation, vegetable plots, food assistance), thereby ensuring comprehensive support for the vulnerable families of the community as a whole. In general, the institutions have flexibility to adjust their work to the needs and priorities of the COMUSSANs.

The SPFS is recognized not only for the initiative of promoting the creation of the COMUSSANs or “*Municipales*”³⁹ and contributing to their conservation, but also for the contribution of instruments and methodologies, such as GPs. In fact, there is now widespread knowledge of such practices and application by the different institutions in their respective spheres of work.

In that regard (application of good practices by the institutions and synergies created by effective coordination processes), this multisector strategy not only supports the principle of **adequate responses**, but also contributes to **transparency** (their own and that of other institutions) since institutions and organizations that participate in the COMUSSANs, production offices and CDMAs publicize their plans and, in some cases, their budgets also. In addition, it can contribute to **accountability**, provided the plans and budgets are monitored and such monitoring is adequately disseminated.

Social audit and accountability

In terms of social control and accountability, there are three levels to be considered: accountability of the SPFS programme with community groups; accountability of the programme with municipal stakeholders (COMUSSAN, CDMA); and accountability of municipal stakeholders (COMUSSAN, CDMA) vis-à-vis the community. Effective accountability requires all stakeholders (SPFS, community groups, COMUSSAN) to be aware of their rights and obligations as human beings, citizens and institutions, and of the appeal mechanisms available to uphold them, in which there are clear deficiencies.

With few exceptions, the communities are unaware of the right to food, and even less of its implications in terms of appeal. The social audit, which is applied both in specific programmes and in the SPFS programme, and in the work done by institutions and municipal corporation, is still not considered a mechanism for demanding the fulfilment

39 *As a result of the initiative of the FAO/SPFS programme and the Mayor, it finally proved possible to articulate the COMUSSAN (Interview OMM, Casillas); the Municipal FNS office was an output of a programme that COMUSSAN coordinates, in conjunction with FNSS, (Interview MIDES, Huité); the SPFS programme has also shown the way to consolidate the CDMA ... the CDMA has been important for linking many initiatives undertaken in the municipality and for combining strategies (Interview FIPA, Yoro, Honduras); It is in the last two years that we have been strengthened, and more now with the SPFS programme that came specifically for that purpose (Interview COMUSSAN Palacagüina, Nicaragua).*

of rights. There is no in-depth knowledge of participation in the consultation mechanisms defined in the laws on decentralization. And despite increasing openness and transparency in terms of plans and budgets, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua,⁴⁰ which is an important factor in the social audit, the communities do not yet have the confidence to hold the persons who implement their programmes and “help” them to account. In the three countries, the interviews make clear that despite respectful and even-handed treatment, the communities still see themselves as “beneficiaries” who cannot be other than “very grateful” (to the programme, the municipalities, and other institutions that have merely fulfilled their right to food obligations), and do not behave as right holders, which they are.⁴¹ The SPFS programmes have not created spaces or activated proposals to foster that social control, even though this is seen as positive both for the programme and for its participants.

In the case of the technical workers present in the municipalities, the situation is similar: they do not have knowledge of economic and social human rights. With few exceptions, the institutional and community actors interviewed in Honduras and Guatemala did not know about the right to food and, in fact, agreed that they would require training for this purpose, particularly in terms of its implications in their own work. For that reason, in practice the COMUSSANs and CDMAAs do not include social participation mechanisms apart from the COCODES or the *Patronatos*.

Nor are there any accountability mechanisms in the communities.⁴² In some cases, such as Honduras, public hearings have been held to publicize the CDMA and the work being done; and spaces have been provided on murals where people can write their suggestions, but this is still insufficient in terms of accountability. In Nicaragua efforts are also being made by the municipality; communities are consulted about action priorities, investment, and information feedback; and a municipal meeting is held in which all communities participate with 16 elected representatives (eight men and eight women). Then a report is issued on what was fulfilled and what was not. Similarly, at least in the municipality of Palacagüina, the municipal budget is formulated on the basis of community consultations and priorities, and then is made public (through bulletins),

40 *There is no concealing of how much money arrived, what it was invested in, how much it cost ... the executor-beneficiary relation has been handled very well* (Regional Coordinator Estelí, Nicaragua); and, in relation to the annual work programmes of the SPFS programme, *they are told how they will work* (Coordinator Yorito, Honduras), in addition to encouraging the communities to have plans that clearly establish what institution will contribute and in what action.

41 It is worth noting that, although in Guatemala and Honduras, based on the SPFS programmes, another type of language is now being applied (talking of “participants” or “actors”), in Nicaragua, community participants continues to be referred to as “beneficiaries”.

42 Given that the presence of the state and its institutions is shifting from the national to the departmental and to the municipal, formal mechanisms of accountability with public institutions are almost non-existent at the community level, and generally unknown by community members.

which facilitates its audit. Nonetheless, in the aforementioned municipalities, the work of the SPFS programme is still recent, so the more open mode of implementation reflects the concerns of the current mayoress.

Although the causes of this situation are deep-seated and hard to change from one day to the next through the action of a single programme, it is clear that promoting **transparency** and **accountability** is a very incipient process. Thus far, it has not been a priority in SPFS programmes, despite the progress mentioned within the COMUSSANs and CDMAs (both from the programme with the COMUSSANs and CDMAs and the programme with the mayoralties) with respect to the transparency in plans and, in some cases, in the budgets between institutions.⁴³ But in the SPFS programme itself, neither its design nor its implementation practice includes mechanisms for accountability in the communities. Moreover, there is still no decisive strategy for promoting FNS as a human right, seeking greater transparency with community actors in the COMUSSAN and CDMAs,⁴⁴ strengthening capacity for influence and social audit among community groups to demand their rights and seek accountability from institutional actors, although the need to move in this direction is shared by the SPFS programme management in Honduras.

Planning, monitoring, evaluation and systemization

SPFS programmes can promote the preparation of participatory tools of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) at three levels: in their own work, in the communities and in the COMUSSANs or CDMAs. These tools establish support not only for measuring progress towards the objectives, but also for accountability and transparency in decision-making on objective and verifiable bases.

As regards the planning of the SPFS programme in Guatemala, the work plans of the technical experts are in fact governed by the communities' demands; and, as noted above, the programme does not operate with pre-established plans. Nonetheless, the work plans are not known by the community groups. In fact, it has been commented that there are no calendars or precise plans for the visits and training events. The usual practice is to give eight days' advance notice of an activity, always taking into account the time available to the participating families. The situation is similar in Honduras. The annual work plans (AWPs) are prepared from the community to the municipalities,

43 *At the community level, the programme budget is publicised so that the municipal corporation also assigns resources to it. Previously, there was no willingness to share that information (financial), we were told how, where, ... but not with what resources* (Interview with the National SPFS programme team, Honduras).

44 The processes mentioned in the Mayorality of Palacagüina were under way when the SPFS programme entered the municipality (which is recent).

then to the region and to the country. Every June, a draft AWP is prepared, containing the budget for the following year, which is revised and updated in January. Unlike the situation in Guatemala, in Honduras, the AWP's are known by the community.

In Guatemala the intention was to set up a participatory monitoring and evaluation system, involving the stakeholders; but which stakeholders and how to involve them were not specified. In practice, the stakeholders do not know which monitoring and evaluation tools will be used, nor do they participate directly in these processes. In Honduras, the communities refer to workshops with the participants as a source of information on those tools. In Nicaragua, no participation by community stakeholders in the SPFS programme monitoring and evaluation processes is provided for.

The communities of Guatemala have no tools to develop the corresponding PME processes. Apart from the community FNS plans, which set action priorities, the communities do not have work plans; so they also lack monitoring, tracking and evaluation systems. Accordingly, the monitoring and evaluation activities are simple; they ask what works, what does not work, what is good and what is not. A very similar thing happens in Nicaragua, where community assemblies are held to see what is good and what is not.

In Honduras, apart from the community plans, the SPFS programme encourages participants to prepare their own work plans for the year. The community AWP's do not coincide with those of the programme, because they contain projections which the programme exclusively would not be able to fulfil. The plans include contributions from the different sectors (municipality, SPFS programme, community, institutions). In general, the (training) activities are planned on the basis of projects, which are adapted every month to the community's timeframes. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, the programme supports these processes in the communities. The AWP is analysed, along with the progress and problems arising, and in terms of who (persons responsible) may fail in implementation. Then these evaluations are related to the evaluation of the SPFS programme team.

Experiences in the municipal structures are varied: in Guatemala, whereas in Huité no tools are used to evaluate the work undertaken, in Casillas the SPFS programme provided training on planning and jointly prepared the Annual Food and Nutritional Security Work Plan (POASAN) for the municipality. This is updated at each meeting and information is exchanged on its results. The POASAN is known by the promoters who participate in the capacity of COCODE. In addition, a simple monitoring mechanism is prepared by the Municipal Women's Office (a question sheet for each of the institutions), which helps to unify and improve actions, without setting up a formal monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The situation of the CDMAs in Honduras and the COMUSSANs/production offices in Nicaragua, is similar. There are strategic plans and work plans in the commissions.

Nonetheless, the monthly meetings are not necessarily based on the AWP, but are also used to share the actions planned for each institution, and they aim to coordinate these actions. Monitoring and evaluation processes are informal and there are no tools to carry them out.

In this framework, while openness to **participation** is confirmed during the planning (strategic and operational), this is limited to the programme's monitoring and evaluation phase. The fact that the tools and results of the PME of the SPFS programme are not made known, despite their being the fundamental basis for **accountability** and **transparency** in decision-making, compounded by the scant promotion of the application of these PME tools in the communities and in the COMUSSAN and CDMAAs, shows that emphasizing these good governance principles has not been a programme priority.⁴⁵

Lastly, it is important to mention a strategy that has provided visible results in Guatemala and Nicaragua, and which is undertaken with community participation, namely systemization. The document "*Atención integral SAN*" [Integrated FNS support] is a guide resulting from the systemized experience undertaken in Huité, Guatemala; and the document "*Systemization of the experience of San Juan de Limay*" summarizes the process of SPFS programme intervention in the communities of that municipality and the municipal coordination that facilitates the achievement of good FNS results. Thus, the exchanges and visits made between the promoters in various communities, a tool which also is promoted by the SPFS programme in Guatemala and Nicaragua, have led to the systemization of its experiences for dissemination to the other communities.

45 *Moreover, SPFS programmes are based on demanding and inflexible logical frameworks, which do not always make it possible to monitor important processes, so as to fulfil all of the activities envisaged (Interview with the person responsible for nutrition in el Negrito). As participatory processes require a lot of time, switching from one activity to another is counterproductive. This is an important point to consider, but beyond the scope of this analysis.*



3. Main human rights findings

The foregoing section showed that, although their design does not include the human rights approach, SPFS programmes currently already respond to several human rights principles, with some nuances and, generally, with considerable clarity in terms of weaknesses and points to focus on in the future. Nonetheless, it is worth making a synthetic and critical analysis, specifically in terms of the application of those principles to serve as a basis for the final selection, and with a view to identifying lessons learned from FNS programmes with a human rights approach that could be used later. Here, reference is again made to the human rights principles detailed above in box 1.

1. Inclusion and equity

Although the SPFS programmes target poor rural populations living in conditions of food and nutritional vulnerability, no strategies have been defined to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable families, which, given their condition of malnutrition could be less motivated and have less capacity to participate. According to the interviews held, there has been a positive response to direct approach initiatives, despite the fact that these are not a frequent practice within the programmes.

Nonetheless, “they do not want to participate and we cannot force them to do so” has been a common attitude, according to impressions both from the technical workers and from the promoters. In this regard, SPFS programmes have not succeeded in overcoming the prevailing tendency in most development projects: to have greatest impact on the most active people in the community, in this case mainly the promoters and affiliates of the rural saving and loan associations (Honduras).

2. Non-discrimination

Although the SPFS programmes do not discriminate in terms of participation and focus on involving population groups that historically have been excluded, such as indigenous communities, women and poor families, they do not always succeed in overcoming the underlying power relations, both between men and women (in Guatemala and Nicaragua), and between mixed-race and indigenous peoples (in Honduras).

Moreover, there are some activities (the creation of vegetable plots, for example) in which participation requires certain resources (land and water), which not all families have. Cultivation in vehicle tyres, promoted in Nicaragua, is a good alternative.

3. Respect for human dignity

Respect for human dignity is closely related to the attitudes of the technical workers in practice, and, consequently, with their selection and awareness raising. In general, one observes a lot of commitment with the community work, respect, and even-handedness from the technical workers and the families. Indicators such as the connotation given to the term “ SPFS programme participants”, which is used by the staff to refer to the families and how they interact in practice — the trust and self-esteem with which the families deal with the technical workers — is evidence of this. Only in Honduras does one observe the prevalence of certain prejudices towards indigenous population groups, which then translate into more vertical relations in the field, a more authoritarian attitude by the SPFS programme personnel and more “submissive” one by the participants.⁴⁶

4. Participation and empowerment

The methodology applied by the SPFS programmes is participatory (“learning by doing”); it is based on the “campesino to campesino” modality, and horizontal knowledge transfer, which has proven effective in facilitating ownership of new knowledge. Apart from the emphasis placed on the capitalization of incentives (Honduras), the programmes do not come with predefined designs, but are prepared in conjunction with the participants. As fundamental decision-making capacities are expanded, autonomy increases and this contributes to the empowerment of the participating families.

46 It should be made clear that what is observed in the region visited might possibly represent isolated cases. Within the scope of this study, it was impossible to get to know a sufficient number of communities to generalise this observation.

5. Absence of adverse impacts

In general, the practices are ecologically sustainable and socially inclusive. Only when the handling of money intervenes (such as in incentive capitalization initiatives) is there a risk of disputes breaking out within the community. In some communities the destination of the money is unclear.

In addition, friction can arise between participants and non-participants when distributing the physical goods (particularly in Guatemala and Nicaragua, because in Honduras it is very clear that the requirement for obtaining some input is capitalization), particularly when those who receive them are persons considered less vulnerable. This type of unease with the programme has been mentioned in two communities, although it has not yet developed into open conflict.

Although these examples do not represent the common denominator of the communities, it is important to pay due attention to them and design strategies to prevent misunderstandings as far as possible. For, even in projects implemented on a participatory basis, these can arise as a result of a lack of clear and transparent information to the entire community.

6. Adequate responses

The actions applied offer adequate responses to the problem identified. They take account of the four pillars of FNS, both in their own work and through the partnerships and interagency coordinations at the local and national levels. The results show that, based on improvements in the various spheres related to FNS (increase and diversification of production, increase in income, diversification of food consumption, more healthy households), malnutrition (both acute and chronic) has decreased in the SPFS programme intervention zones.

7. Transparency and accountability

Food and nutritional security has not yet been given the connotation of a human right,⁴⁷ with the implications that has, particularly in terms of appeal mechanisms. Despite horizontal relations in most cases, the participating families often continue to see themselves as “beneficiaries” and not as “right holders”. These are the consequences of a history of

47 Despite the title of the SPFS III programme in Nicaragua, “Strengthening of the National FNS system on the basis of the right to food, food sovereignty and reduction of poverty to support the Zero Hunger programme with the successful experiences of the Special Programme on Food Security (SPFS) of Nicaragua”, which goes beyond FNS concepts to include different connotations and implications (such as the right to food and food sovereignty), the design of the programme (project document) does not engage those concepts.

vertical implementation of development projects that are not erased overnight. The fact of striving for more participatory processes in itself does not change people's outlook, or generate a different attitude towards institutions, which currently continues to be one of "gratitude" rather than satisfaction that their right has been fulfilled.

There has not been any active promotion of accountability mechanisms either in the work of the SPFS programmes themselves or in the strengthening of a social audit attitude by the participants. In conjunction with that, the monitoring and evaluation tools are applied in the programmes, but (1) they are not known by the other stakeholders; (2) the incorporation of those elements in the local processes on the ground (in communities and municipal commissions) is weak. In this regard, apart from the lack of mechanisms, there are no objective bases for accountability or for decision-making in a transparency framework. That refers both to the relations of the SPFS programme, with participating community groups and the FNS municipal commissions, and at the intra-community level (between promoters and interest groups, or between the boards of directors of the savings banks and their affiliates).



4. Lessons learned

1. Experience shows that the inclusion of the most vulnerable persons and families requires a specific effort to be deployed from the start of a programme or project, and which means: (a) clearly defining the target group; (b) identifying it in the field; and (c) designing explicit and operational strategies to guarantee its incorporation into the programme.
2. Approaching the families personally and directly has proven an effective way to motivate their incorporation into the programme. For that purpose, it is important to: (a) clarify who has responsibility for this — the SPFS programme personnel, promoters, representatives of the community, or all stakeholders?; (b) prepare and raise awareness among all stakeholders (technical workers, promoters, community leaders) from the outset, for them to fulfil their role with commitment to be successful; (c) maintain flexibility in operating the programme according to the time available to the participants, and also consider that time and the resources needed for the necessary preparatory activities; (d) maintain constant dialogue based on mutual respect to understand the constraints on participation and seek ways to facilitate this.
3. As regards the incorporation of a gender perspective, significant progress has been made in the Honduras SPFS programme, which could be shared with other programmes, in giving greater emphasis to the structural causes of inequality and intra-family power relations. These advances are: establishing a logical framework of effects, products and activities with differentiated targets, such as the target of 50 percent investment for women, for example; the existence and use in the field of the methodological tool kit to work on the gender issue; a methodological proposal for developing family responsibility (involving men in reproductive activities traditionally assigned to women, and involving women in productive activities); development

of a strategy for strengthening the capacities of the Municipal Women's Offices (OMMs) based on FNS; more in-depth analysis of the constraints faced by women, beyond the general stereotypes, and adaptation of training mechanisms to women's circumstances (in terms of time, place, and childcare) among other things.

4. To overcome women's lack of access to the productive resources of the Honduras SPFS programme, which are assigned exclusively to the affiliates of the rural saving and loan associations (who are mostly men), consideration could be given to a system of co-participation by men and women in the saving banks (similar to co-ownership), and/or a modality for participating in the programme which does not necessarily entail affiliation to a rural saving and loan association (see point 7 below).
5. It is important to consider the specific needs and circumstances of indigenous peoples more systematically; for that purpose, the FAO policy on indigenous peoples could serve as a reference. The inclusion of multidisciplinary teams (anthropologists) to gain a better understanding of the cultures, is an additional option. As a minimum, work must continue in raising awareness among SPFS programme staff of the need to eliminate the use of expressions that cause prejudice with regard to indigenous peoples, in a framework that accentuates the principle of respect for human dignity.
6. In terms of participation and empowerment, it is important to overcome the imposition of predefined mechanisms. In this regard, the capitalization of incentives could represent an interesting alternative for some of the participants. Nonetheless, the possibility of participating without capitalization needs to exist particularly for the most vulnerable families.
7. To minimize the adverse impacts that some programme components could generate, it is essential to inform, inform and inform. Clear and transparent information counteracts the emergence of incorrect interpretations, which in turn give rise to potential conflicts. It is important to guarantee that (a) the entire community has information on the amount of resources available, so that all stakeholders (and not just the participants) are agreed on the priorities for their use; and (b) an account is periodically provided to the community on the management and investment of those resources.
8. It is also important not only to apply a human rights approach but to visualize the right to food and its implications in terms of appeal and justiciability mechanisms. It is a *sine qua non* condition for social audit and accountability. Consideration must be given to the time and resources devoted to the initial activities of publicizing and raising awareness of the approach to ensure that participants know their rights and the mechanisms available to uphold them. A critical and constructive attitude should be motivated throughout the process.

9. Within that framework, the SPFS programmes are responsible for: (a) internally establishing administrative appeal mechanisms, in conjunction with participatory and transparent implementation processes; (b) identifying the mechanisms of participation, appeal and justiciability of the rights that exist locally in the three countries, and encouraging SPFS programme participants to take ownership of them; this could require some additional support to strengthen participation capacities and make proposals; (c) raising awareness on existence and legitimacy and encouraging openness to the application of those mechanisms also in institutional support work, both locally in the framework of the municipal FNS commissions (or municipal development), and at the national level in the FNS (FNSS) departments or units.
10. Aspects related to the right to food, and those linked to gender and indigenous peoples, and their implications, need to be considered in the design of future programmes, and should translate into crosscutting approaches that can obtain valid feedback at the time of multidisciplinary monitoring.
11. Lastly, it is important to be very careful with the terminology used, since this influences and can even determine how concepts are interpreted. Under a human rights approach, groups that join the programme are considered “participants”. Terms such as “beneficiaries” have an implicit benefactor or charity connotation, which is inconsistent with a human rights approach. Along the same lines, is worth analysing use of other terms, such as “social capital” or “human capital”, which have an instrumental rather than intrinsic connotation (as sought by the human rights perspective) of the capacities it is intended to strengthen.



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Interviews held

Guatemala:

SPFS team

- ◆ SPFS National Director
- ◆ SPFS Technical Supervisor
- ◆ Former technical staff member of SPFS Casillas (now MAGA extension worker in Casillas)
- ◆ PESACAM consultant
- ◆ FAO Representative, Guatemala

National stakeholders

- ◆ FNSS Undersecretary
- ◆ Adviser to the National Extension System, MAGA

Huité

Target community groups

- ◆ Representatives of the promotion network

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ Mayor of Huité
- ◆ Coordinator of the Municipal FNS Office
- ◆ Extension team MAGA Casillas
- ◆ Coordinator of “Mi Bono Seguro”
- ◆ FNSS officer for the municipality
- ◆ Health centre nurse

Casillas

Target community groups

- ◆ Promoters in Corralitos

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ Mayor
- ◆ Coordinator of the Municipal Women’s Office
- ◆ Coordinator of the Municipal FNS Office
- ◆ Extension worker 1 (former technical worker of the SPFS programme)
- ◆ Extension worker 2 (former extension worker of the municipality trained by the SPFS programme)
- ◆ Health centre physician

Honduras:

SPFS team

- ◆ SPFS National Director
- ◆ Gender coordinator
- ◆ Coordinator of the food and nutrition component
- ◆ Coordinator of the extension component
- ◆ Coordinator, Yoro
- ◆ Coordinator, Yorito
- ◆ Technical worker, Yorito
- ◆ Person responsible for nutrition, Yoro (and person responsible in El Negrito)

Yorito

Target community groups

- ◆ Sta. Martha Rural Saving and Loan Association

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ Mayoress
- ◆ Director of the Agriculture Technical Institute (and Secretary of the CDMA)
- ◆ Coordinator of the FIPA NGO

National stakeholders

- ◆ UTSAN coordinator
- ◆ Vice Minister of Agriculture

El Negrito

Community interviews

- ◆ President of the El Pate Rural Saving and Loan Association

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ Municipal manager
- ◆ Coordinator of the Municipal Women's Office
- ◆ Health centre physician
- ◆ District Education Supervisor

Nicaragua:

SPFS team

- ◆ National SPFS team
- ◆ Coordinator Estelí SPFS

San Juan de Limay

Target community groups

- ◆ Promoters of El Palmar

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ Production office

National stakeholders

- ◆ Former member of Congress
- ◆ Secretary of CIUSSAN
- ◆ Coordinator of Policies and Coordinators of Units, MAGFOR
- ◆ Coordinator of the Integrated School Nutrition Programme

Palacagüina

Municipal stakeholders

- ◆ COMUSSAN
- ◆ Mayoress



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Annex 1:

Description of SPFS Guatemala

In Guatemala, the SPFS programme is being implemented in a context of high poverty, inequality and an alarming level of malnutrition. Despite having a relatively high GDP per capita of US\$ 4 694 in 2010, Guatemala has the Central American region's lowest human development index (UNDP, 2011). Its indices of poverty and extreme poverty in 2006 were 51 percent and 16 percent, respectively, and even higher among the indigenous and rural populations. As many as 74.8 percent of the indigenous population is poor (and 27.2 percent extremely poor), and 72.2 percent of the rural population is poor (INE, 2006).

Guatemala is also one of the countries most affected by inequality and malnutrition in Latin America (and in the world). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is the ninth most unequal country in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 53.7 (UNDP, 2011).

In terms of chronic malnutrition, Guatemala has the highest levels of chronic malnutrition in the American continent, and is ranked sixth worldwide (UNICEF, 2011).⁴⁸ Nationally, 49 percent of children between three and 59 months of age display chronic malnutrition, a proportion that rises in rural areas to 55.5 percent and in indigenous populations to 69.5 percent. The immediate main causes of child morbidity in Guatemala are respiratory infections (37.8 percent, diarrhoeas (10.5 percent) and non-specific dermatitis (6 percent) (UNICEF, 2011). The effects of this phenomenon are not only felt in social terms but also pose a serious obstacle to the country's economic growth. According to a WFP and ECLAC study, the total cost of malnutrition in Guatemala represents about 11.4 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (WFP and ECLAC, 2006).

48 UNICEF, 2011. In Latin America, in Guatemala with 49 percent nearly doubles the index of the second most affected country, Honduras, which has a 29 percent rate of chronic malnutrition.

As underlying causes of malnutrition, the Guatemala project document (hereinafter referred to as “GTM project document”) cites problems relating to the availability of food (low capacity to produce food products and harvest losses owing to weather phenomena), access to food (low income to purchase food products) and biological utilization (unhealthy consumption habits and lifestyles, bad health conditions, little access to quality water and basic sanitation, all of which results in diseases that restricts the biological utilization of food). This is compounded by general social problems such as the lack of coverage of basic utilities, low coverage rates in agriculture extension, and capitalization of assets in the rural area (FAO, 2008: 6f).

On the institutional front, progress has been made in recent years: since 2005 there has been a Law on the National Food and Nutritional Security System (Decree 32/2005), which recognizes FNS as a human right and defines the institutional framework for implementing the national FNS policy. The FNS (FNSS) Secretariat has been created, which prepared the strategy for reducing chronic malnutrition (ENDRC). In keeping with the importance that the issue of FNS has acquired across the continent and worldwide, the previous and current governments have both shown, at least in their discourse, a strong commitment to reducing food and nutritional insecurity and malnutrition. In the previous government, this commitment was manifested through the approval of the National Comprehensive Rural Development Policy (PNDRI), which addresses the issue of FNS on a crosscutting basis, and the creation of the National Agricultural Extension System (SNEA). The current government announced the implementation of the “Zero hunger” covenant and plan, which aims to reduce chronic malnutrition by 10 percent in four years. Nonetheless, the financial efforts made to support FNS-related programmes and policies remain modest, as is the change in economic and social structures that perpetuate the condition of extreme inequality, which is clearly one of the main underlying causes of malnutrition.

History of the programme and key changes

The Guatemala SPFS began operating in late 1999, under the framework proposal that was offered by the World Committee on Food Security. It specifically targeted the intensification of production under the irrigation system, productive diversification, and producer organization. It began in Sololá, a municipality with high poverty indices in the centre-west of the country. Good results were not achieved, because the FNS strategy was confined to the access component (irrigated vegetable cropping for sale on external markets) promoting a commercial approach that was unrelated to the immediate context and the experiences of the producers.

In 2000, the coffee crisis erupted (owing to low international prices), which caused a food crisis in Chiquimula (in the east of the country). Consequently, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) entered into negotiations with FAO to launch a pilot plan

in Jocotán. It was there that the current methodology started to be applied, along with the validation of GPs. At that time, the objective was to improve food availability, with irrigation in drought-affected zones. Subsequently, the agro-forestry systems (SAF) were initiated. This situation persisted until 2003 when the second phase was formulated.

This second phase was going to involve the extension of validated GPs (both GPs promoted by the SPFS programme and others that had been identified in the territories). Whereas the programme was used to generate learning to be transmitted to MAGA, the latter saw the programme as an executing entity (and also facilitator). As result, services were extended to 13 departments in the west, southern coast, and east of the country.

In late 2005, two evaluations were performed which changed the course of the SPFS programme: the evaluation of the damage caused by the STAN weather phenomenon, and an internal evaluation. These were undertaken with staff from FAO and the programme and showed that the expansion had generated technical problems (adoption of the GPs by the groups) and sustainability issues. The level of support had fallen badly, in response to a demand from the government (execution) which did not correspond to the SPFS programme strategy. The evaluation caused a return to the original territories, and a qualitative leap in applying a “systems” approach, which meant switching from validating and promoting isolated practices to their mutual linkage based on a family FNS system. Thus, methodologies were generated for working the “milpa” system (a set of practices with basic grains and other crops, as an energy source) and the patio-household system, considering that in the latter, nutritional needs were greater than in the former. It was at that time that the biological utilization component — within the United Nations system promoted by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) — took off. In 2006, the SPFS programme returned to the east and started to work on the methodological issue, mainly the five-stage intervention process and the validation and systemization of four methodological approaches (“milpa” and patio-household, diversification, income generation and organization) (FAO, 2008: 16).

In 2007, before formulating stage III, consultations were held with the various system stakeholders. The municipal institutional part started to gain recognition — the importance of the functioning of the FNS municipal commissions (COMUSAN) and dialogue between the municipalities — along with the MAGA extension topics. The management model continued to generate lessons to enable the State to fulfil its execution role from a right to food perspective.⁴⁹

49 Interview with the Director of the SPFS Guatemala programme.

Programme objectives and approaches

Thus phase III began, in pursuit of the following effects: improve the food and nutritional security of the most vulnerable Guatemalan population groups, and consider the gender and ethnic approaches. As results, three were completed, of which two (R1 and R3) targeted the institutional part (*FNSS and other social institutions and organizations related to FNS are strengthening their capacities for the coordination, planning and execution of actions to achieve their improvement among the vulnerable population; MAGA and other institutions strengthen methodological capacities for managing national FNS programmes*), and one (R2) targeted territorial intervention (*poor peasant-farming families who increase their capacities in terms of availability and economic access to food by increasing their productivity and their response to market opportunities*) (FAO, 2008: 28).

For that purpose, it was proposed to apply for basic strategies: (1) strengthen FNSS capacity; (2) draw up basic methodological guidelines to strengthen the management of national FNS programmes (this strategy basically concerned the creation of collective funds, capitalization of incentives and generation of local microcredit); (3), increase capacities in terms of the availability of and economic access to food; (4), achieve local harmony in the articulated functioning of SINASAN, encouraging, in particular, municipal interagency coordination through the COMUSANS. In practice, these two latter strategies were those given the greatest priority (FAO, 2008).

Territorial expression and strategy

In phase III, with which the SPFS programme concluded in late 2012, the programme basically pursued the validation of successful practices,⁵⁰ to demonstrate their potential to institutions responsible for extension work and other FNS-related actions (MAGA, FNSS and the municipalities). The programme contributed most not as executing agency but as a facilitator of experience and capacities. For that purpose, strategy (3) was particularly important, which despite referring exclusively to availability and access, in practice was oriented towards improving the four pillars of FNS in the field.⁵¹

To achieve this, the Guatemala SPFS programme works mainly with two methodological approaches: the “milpa” approach and the patio-household approach. As mentioned

50 These are successful practices (GPs) are referred to as good FNS practices, and are productive or others practices linked to FNS, which require few external inputs, have good relations with the environment, and a well accepted by the rural families.

51 It should be noted that the target population in the territorial part were poor families, defined as follows: families little or no land (less than one *manzana*) and who gain access to land in precarious ways (rental, beneficial use, etc); families who have less than four *manzanas* of land; families with members who migrated to work in an outlying urban population in conditions of food and nutritional insecurity. The aim is to cover a large number of women (FAO, 2008: 12f).

above, both focus on the holistic, interrelations (within the milpa or patio and home), and the systemic, rather than stressing isolated and specific practices.

The “milpa” approach aims to ensure the availability of basic grains in the family’s food, contributing to the sustainable management of natural resources and minimizing the vulnerability of the rural population (FAO, 2007a: 19). The GPs in this approach include: no burning, stubble management, cultivation in street, contours, plant barriers, diversification of the land plot, enhanced seeds, distancing of seeding, integrated pest management (with natural extracts), dispersed trees, pruning, agroforestry, fruit trees, production and selection of seeds, and organic agriculture.

The patio-household approach aims to improve the availability of complementary products for the basic family food diet, and its consumption under conditions that improve biological utilization in healthy homes, and with an efficient use of natural resources (FAO, 2007b: 17). It consists of the agricultural, livestock, healthy home, and nutritional food education components, along with the following GPs: family vegetable plots, fruit trees, poultry management and health, medicinal plants, improved greenhouses, water treatment, healthy home (waste management, healthy floor, healthy wall, wall coating, and healthy ceiling), manipulation, preparation, distribution and consumption of foods, management of soil fertility (fertilizers, vermicompost and natural extracts), animal health, school vegetable plots, and water harvest (grey water filters).

A third approach concerns income generation and contains GPs such as: the identification of market opportunities for the capitalization of incentives, the formulation and management of commercial agriculture projects, food processing practices, marketing and management. Although the GTM project document (48) proposes the differentiation of producers in groups, according to levels of “investment attitude”, this differentiation is not performed in practice, so the income generation approach is confined to promoting or suggesting the capitalization of incentives.

The methodology on which the SPFS Guatemala programme is based is “learning by doing”, under an extension method involving the horizontal transfer of knowledge, referred to as “campesino to campesino”. This measure consists of establishing direct communication to disseminate learning horizontally in a language that is common to all, respecting knowledge and local customs and exploiting existing local resources (FAO, 2007a: 22). The key players are the promoters, who undergo a training process to deepen their knowledge and then lead the transfer, monitoring, evaluation, and reflection activities throughout the organizational and productive process (FAO, 2008: 52) as “voluntary” rural extension worker.

Organized participation is fundamental. Interest groups are formed around each promoter. The actions to be implemented arise from the groups themselves, according to their

experience and need. For that purpose, the aim is to start from accumulated knowledge and the most pressing needs felt by the rural population. ...*the practices that are most widely adopted are those that aim to secure the grain reserve, applying a low level of cash disbursement, and tending make greater use of family labour* (FAO, 2008: 47).

Annex 2:

Description of SPFS Honduras

Honduras also displays high indices of poverty and malnutrition. Poverty persists in 58.8 percent and extreme poverty in 36.4 percent of households,⁵² which are the highest indices in the Central American region. The situation is even more acute in rural areas, where 64.4 percent suffer poverty (able to cover food needs but not other basic needs), and 52 percent are subject to extreme poverty (unable even to meet food needs) (FAO, 2011a).

Food and nutritional insecurity affects 70 percent of Honduran people, and is accentuated mostly in rural areas and particularly in the south western corridor. Although chronic malnutrition decreased from 42.4 percent to 27.4 percent between 1991 and 2005, one third of all children under five years suffer from it in the most vulnerable areas.

To make progress in terms of FNS conditions, the Food and Nutritional Security Technical Unit (UTSAN) was created under Decree 038/2010, as a unit within the Ministry of the Office of the President, with responsibility for planning and for undertaking, monitoring, tracking, evaluating and formulating methodological procedures related to the implementation of the FNS policy and strategy (PSAN and ESAN). Although, at the institutional level, the existence of this unit means progress, Honduras still has the weakest FNS institutional framework of the three Central American countries covered in this study.

As causes of food and nutritional insecurity, the Honduras SPFS programme cites the unavailability of food in some zones of the country, which are in conditions of ecological vulnerability (owing to droughts and flooding) and, consequently, at permanent risk of suffering damage to their harvests (FAO, 2011a: 11f). Other zones

52 INE Honduras, Permanent Household Survey, May 2010.

face risks related to low agricultural productivity; lack of access to sufficient and varied food, owing to low incomes from agricultural activities (either their own or third party) or nonagricultural activities; problems of nutrition and biological utilization; lack of knowledge, infrastructure and institutional support for adequate utilization of the food consumed; instability of supply owing to vulnerability to natural events; lack of savings and reserves (grains) which would make it possible to overcome the disastrous consequences of such events; and weak institutional capacities to steer and coordinate FNS-related actions.

History of the programme and key changes

The Honduras SPFS programme has been operating since late 1999, when it started as a pilot project whose main aim was to validate the GPs and address the components of availability, stability of supply and access. The guidelines came from FAO, Rome, and each country operated in its own way. In Honduras, the programme based its previous and parallel experiences on a project entitled “*Lempira Sur*”, which sought to increase food security through sustainable production systems (agroforestry systems, forestry-grazing systems) and, as a strong point, the establishment of microcredit systems.

Then two fundamental changes were made, one related to the integration of the “consumption and biological utilization” component, which was an outcome of reflections and provisions of the directors of SPFS programmes in Central American countries as part of the Special Central American Food Security Programme (PESACAM) and FAO in general, and in keeping with the demands from communities for access to clean water as one of its priorities. At the outset, in Honduras, there were problems with human resources to deal with this topic, because there were no nutritionists in the country. In 2006, these professionals were contracted, and the “food and nutrition” component was named, through which the aim was to improve housing and increase capacities through food education (Interview with the National Honduras SPFS programme team). The second key qualitative step was to attempt to mainstream the gender perspective. This was motivated both by the donor, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which always gave importance to the issue, and by FAO itself. A systemization was made in 2008 to see to what extent this perspective was present in programmes in the field; and in 2009, based on that systemization, the gender perspective was mainstreamed and also introduced as a specific component.

Objectives and focuses

For the period 2011-2015, the main objective of the Honduras SPFS programme is to contribute to food security among the most vulnerable families living in the municipalities most affected by poverty; the aim is to provide special support to the most vulnerable groups such as children, expectant or breast-feeding mothers, and households with women heads of family (FAO, 2011a: 22).

The intermediate results concern: (1) improving production and saving, and consequently FNS aspects such as availability, stability of supply and access; (2) improving the family's nutrition and biological utilization; (3) strengthening FNS-related institutions in the design and implementation of policies, programmes and projects at both the local and national levels.

To achieve result (R1) it is proposed to: (a) disseminate good practices related to sustainable production, which allow for integrated management of soils and water (agroforestry systems), with positive impacts on the productivity of basic grains; (b) increase agricultural diversification by incorporating vegetables, fruits, root crops, herbs and oilseeds in the land plots; the creation of family vegetable plots, the promotion of school vegetable plots, and the use of backyard animals (poultry); (c) disseminate GPs on post-harvest management and processing to avoid the consumption of toxic foods; (d) increase access to microcredit, stressing leadership and participation by women.

Result (R2) targets food education at different levels: technical workers, teachers, men and women, boys and girls. To that end, the aim is to: (a) strengthen the capacity of health units in helping families improve their nutritional practices, child care and support for malnourished people; (b) incorporate food and nutritional education into the national education system; (c) adopt healthy behavioural practices in households (related to water and sanitation, healthy walls and floors), always with a gender perspective, motivated, in this case, to encourage men to also assume FNS responsibilities in the home.

Result (R3) concerns the strengthening of FNS-related public institutions in the establishment of policies and programmes, the establishment of an early-warning system at the municipal and national levels, and the strengthening of community technical institutes as suppliers of extension and rural development services.

Five strategies should guarantee programme sustainability; the promotion of sustainable productive systems adapted to climate change, the consolidation of "social capital" by creating rural saving and loan associations; the promotion of FNS integration in municipal development plans; the incorporation of FNS into the formal education system; and the inclusion of and support for FNS-related public institutions (such as UTSAN), to consolidate and strengthen the political, institutional and budgetary framework at the national and local levels.

Territorial expression and strategy

In general terms, the design of the Honduras SPFS programme stands out for three aspects that differentiate it from the other countries: the *sine qua non* condition of the capitalization of incentives and the creation of rural saving and loan associations as the basis for its action in practice; the special boost given to the gender perspective; and the direct execution of rural development actions, which take on the outreach task and are characterized by a particularly weak public institutional framework in the

Honduras state, and which is not considered. Thus it should not be the SPFS programme that supports public entities (as in Guatemala or Nicaragua); on the contrary, public entities should financially support the programme — the Agriculture Department, for example, collaborates with 10 percent of project costs.

In the field interventions (results R1 and R2) the main organizational strategy applied is capitalization of incentives in the creation of the rural saving and loan associations (equivalent to interest groups in Guatemala). In addition to providing sources of microcredit, the rural saving and loan associations are expected to promote the creation of solidarity networks, the savings culture, and a mutual commitment between community members.

The rural saving and loan association is formed from seed capital contributed by *caja* affiliates capitalizing incentives. This means that they contribute nearly 70 percent of the value of the investments that the SPFS programme contributes, for inputs or infrastructure. In very poor families, the contribution may be less, and part of the capitalization may be social — the application of GPs in relation to clean homes, taking the children to medical checkups, hygiene in the vegetable plot, etc.; but at least 50 percent must always be capitalized in cash (Interview with the person responsible for SPFS extension). Then the participating group (only one family member may be an affiliate of the savings and loan association) elects a board of directors, a supervisory committee and, sometimes, a credit committee, to manage the *caja* and make the loans. The loans are granted at an interest rate of between 1.5 percent and 5 percent per month, which is well below the rates charged by ordinary financial intermediaries. As the affiliates know the members of the community, they also know how much they can lend to each person. As a result there is a low arrears rate, which enables many of the *cajas* to grow rapidly. The SPFS programme encourages part of the capital of the saving and loan association to be used as solidarity funds for needy community members (elderly, families affected by malnutrition, etc.); but this is not a requirement (Interviews with the national team and the person responsible for extension in the Honduras SPFS programme).

In some cases, the municipal saving and loan associations create second-tier savings banks linked to the formal national financial system. In other cases, they are linked to cooperatives. This makes it possible to grant larger loans as a savings bank and thus finance investments at the community level. Currently, the topic of contingency is being studied; a leverage fund that could provide insurance to the *caja* in the event of users being unable to repay the loans owing to the (weather) events outside human control that can occur (Interviews with the national team and the person responsible for extension in the Honduras SPFS programme).

Participation as an affiliate of the saving and loan association is the SPFS programme requirement to gain access to goods and services.⁵³ The rest of the community that does not participate in the *cajas*, can make use of other services (training) in principle, but are excluded from obtaining physical goods.

As in the other countries, the institutional links promoting the sustainability of the process, which aim to work on FNS from a multisector approach, are at the centre of the Honduras SPFS programme strategy. With these institutional links, the aim is to strengthen relations with the Ministry of Education to incorporate FNS into the national curriculum and also strengthen the community technical institutes as extension agencies. A further aim is to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Health, to increase community intervention in activities that are merely health-related (such as weight-size measurement), and also in other areas more closely related to food and nutrition (consumption, clean homes) (FAO, 2011a; interview with the Honduras National SPFS team). At the local level, there is close collaboration with the municipality, by encouraging it to make FNS a priority issue (by assigning it a budget and issuing orders in its favour), and forming the Municipal Development Committees (CDMAs). The latter provide the vehicle for planning and coordinating FNS actions in the municipalities, and serve as the mechanism for transferring the SPFS program methodology to the technical experts present there.

53 The services in question basically involve training in agricultural GPs, food and nutrition GPs, and management of the saving and loan associations.



Annex 3: Description of SPFS Nicaragua

When phase III of the SPFS programme was being designed, poverty in Nicaragua affected 48.3 percent of the population, and extreme poverty affected 17.2 percent, the problem being more acute in rural areas, where 70.3 percent of poverty incidence was concentrated. Between 2001 and 2005, levels of extreme rural poverty have worsened (from 27.4 percent to 30.5 percent) and the general poverty rate has risen by 2.5 percentage points, despite sustained economic growth.⁵⁴ This unequal growth was evidenced in the second census of schoolchildren's height of 2004, which showed an increase in the prevalence of child growth retardation (27.2 percent), 5.2 percent above the rate recorded in the 1986 census.

When phase III began, Nicaragua did not have legislation or an institutional framework for FNS; but recently, the government of Daniel Ortega had launched the Zero Hunger programme as a strategy to combat poverty and achieve national food and nutritional sovereignty and security. The National Assembly was about to approve a Draft Law on Food Sovereignty and Security, and this finally occurred in 2009, providing a framework for institutionalizing a National Food Sovereignty and Security System (SINASSAN) and laying the foundations for addressing the FNSS problem in all of its dimensions.

The following were identified as causes of food and nutritional insecurity: (1) environmental vulnerabilities owing to climate change and the rapid reduction in biodiversity owing to deficient management and conservation of natural resources; (2) low productivity and

54 Per capita GDP head grown on a sustained basis since 2002, and at the end of 2006 it was estimated at US\$ 958.60 per capita per year, whereas per capita GDP in the rural area was US\$ 471.22 (FAO, 2007c).

high production costs; (3) lack of diversification of production; (4) scant presence of governmental and social institutions (FAO, 2007c; FAO/SPFS, 2012).

History and key changes to the programme

The SPFS programme in Nicaragua, as was the case in Honduras and Guatemala, began (formally) in late 1999, with financial support from the Spanish government. Its primary objective was to improve the FNS conditions of poor families, by introducing good agricultural practices to intensify and diversify food production (FAO, 2007c).

Under this approach, and also in keeping with the other SPFS programmes, in the period 2000-2004, the programme prioritized two of the four pillars of food security: availability and access. As in Guatemala, irrigation projects were implemented, and work was done on the captation and distribution of water suitable for human consumption, and on diversification by introducing backyard animals and family vegetable plots. The level of action concentrated on the community domain. The initial social participation tools focused on setting up organizations of farmer groups for production under the irrigation system.

Shortly before phase II began, the programme was expanded (both in terms of the number of “beneficiaries”, and in the number of municipalities supported); nutrition-based approaches started to be introduced, and social organization was identified as a key factor for success. As from 2005, with the start of the second phase of the SPFS programme, this maintained its intervention methodology and community territorial approach, but expanded its action in the consumption and biological utilization pillars, basically by strengthening FNS planning and measurement tools. An important instrument for this was the analysis of nutritional behaviour patterns as a basis for taking the most appropriate decisions.

During the second phase, the focus of the SPFS programme underwent a number of fundamental changes, including expansion of the sector vision (complementary actions are included in education — school vegetable plots and the integration of FNS in school curricula — health — generating a direct link in the field work with the community health and nutrition programme of the Ministry of Health — and the environment), the expansion of the territorial vision, supporting municipal development planning processes and providing assistance to strengthen the application of FNS actions nationally, and the contribution to setting up the inter-University Council on FNS (CIUSSAN), for training and awareness raising, and the creation of technical capacity in various sectors (FAO, 2007c).

That was the experience that led the programme to its phase III (Strengthening of the National FNS system on the basis of the right to food, food sovereignty and reduction of poverty to support the Zero Hunger programme with the successful experiences of the

Special Programme on Food Security (SPFS) of Nicaragua". Unlike the other two countries, which have so far stressed the FNS concept, the title of Nicaragua's project goes beyond the concept itself, incorporating other concepts that have different connotations and implications, such as the right to food and food sovereignty. Nonetheless, these concepts are not developed in the project document.

Objectives and focuses of the programme

The general objective of phase 3 of the SPFS programme was to *support the national system and programme of food sovereignty and security to reduce extreme, rural and urban poverty, and chronic malnutrition* (FAO, 2007c: 11).

The specific objectives referred to: (1) support for governmental programmes on the dissemination and institutionalization of methodologies and strategies to achieve FNSS; (2) improvement of food availability through the dissemination of good agricultural practices among poor peasant farmers; (3) greater diversification of the food diet; (4) strengthening of local social networks by increasing the organizational and productive capacity of rural communities; (5) contribution to the definitive reduction of chronic malnutrition (FAO, 2007c: 11).

Unlike the SPFS programmes in Honduras, which emphasizes direct execution, and Guatemala, which pursues an major strategy for influencing national policies but is limited to two key aspects, the programme in Nicaragua puts much greater emphasis on national work. There is collaboration and influence with the Ministry of Agriculture (MAGFOR), the Nicaraguan Agricultural Technology Institute (INTA), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and CIUSSAN. In terms of local interventions, a strategy was implemented in three mutually complementary steps. Firstly, the communities were consulted with a view to validating successful practices; then steps were taken to ensure that those practices and experiences were integrated into national and municipal laws and policies (municipal ordinances); and, lastly, that the methodologies were applied by public entities related FNS. In the final (current) stage, the programme returns to the field level, but now not in the role of executing agency, but as adviser to the public entities (and/or non-governmental organizations). The communities are not seen alone, but always accompanied by members of the production offices or the COMUSSAN (Interview with the National SPFS team). As in Guatemala and Honduras, the strategy of strengthening FNSS structures in the municipality and mayoralty have been crucial.

The direct "beneficiaries" are mainly technical workers from the aforementioned institutions (promoters, teachers, men and women) and, at the community level, "male and female producers", without specifying their characteristics.

In terms of sustainability, the strategy involved implementing the law, formulating policy, creating the FNSS institutional framework, and institutional adoption of the good FNSS practices developed by the SPFS programme.

Territorial expression and strategy

At the local level, the intervention strategy, as in Guatemala, is centred on the promoters, which play a key role as extension agents. Around each promoter, elected in community assemblies, interest groups are formed for the different projects: agroforestry systems, integrated patios, vegetable cultivation in car tyres, school food (Interview with the Nicaraguan National SPFS team). In the case of actions related to the management of resources (through the capitalization of incentives), management committees are created (for example seed banks); and, as an innovative element, the creation of rural communication firms for development is promoted by groups of young people. The FNS model is defined as a system that articulates the actions and results of GPs for agricultural development, education and health, centred on community organization and the promotion of organized participation.

At the start of the process, a community assembly is held in which the interest groups are formed. Then, participatory diagnostic studies are carried out as a basis for guiding the productive decisions, the most important ones being the participatory rural diagnostic and the analysis of nutritional behaviour patterns. This analysis is particularly important, because it helps participants become aware of their consumption patterns (generally poorly diversified) and the amount of money spent in relation to this (generally high owing to the lack of exploitation of local crops). The participating families, delegates of local government and technical workers from the SPFS programme all participate in this.

Once the actions have been defined, knowledge and skills of the promoter network are strengthened, as the central part of the process, with frequent training events, exchange of experiences and technical visits. The aim is thus to strengthen community structures and multiply the experience facilitated by the SPFS programme technical team. Technical support from the promoters is provided in the land plots through the “learning by doing” modality. One of the promoters serves as community liaison with the programme’s technical workers. As in the other two countries, the “campesino to campesino” exchange of experience is a tool that is particularly appreciated for improving the capacities of the promoters in a participatory way, and always closely aligned to context.

Annex 4:

Key topics and information sources

Topics	Information sources
Context, history, key changes and principal strategies of the SPFS programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project documents: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • United Nations documents • Systematization: San Juan de Limay • Report on key messages • SPFS national director and/or national team: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • Regional coordinators • National stakeholders
Selection of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project documents: Guatemala • Methodological guidelines (Milpa, Patio-Household, <i>Apreciando lo Nuestro</i>) • Target community groups • Municipal stakeholders
Technical actions/main strategies/implementation of actions in the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project documents: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • Methodological guidelines • SPFS national teams: Honduras, Nicaragua • SPFS technicians: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • Community focus groups • Municipal stakeholders
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person responsible for gender: SPFS Honduras • PESACAM consultant • SPFS technicians • Community focus groups • Municipal Women's Offices

Temas	Fuentes de información
Indigenous peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person responsible for gender: SPFS Honduras • PESACAM consultant • SPFS national team Nicaragua • Municipal Coordinator, Yorito, Honduras
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project document Guatemala • SPFS technicians • Target community groups
Accountability/knowledge of the right to food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project documents Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • SPFS National Director, Guatemala • Municipal stakeholders • Target community groups
Interagency coordination and sector links/implementation of the SPFS programme at the municipal level/transfer of SPFS programme actions/political and institutional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal stakeholders • SPFS programme technicians: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua
Planning, monitoring, evaluation and systemization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS III project documents: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua • Systematizations: Huité, Guatemala; and San Juan de Limay, Nicaragua • SPFS programme national directors and teams • SPFS programme technicians • Target community groups • Municipal stakeholders
Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS technicians • Municipal stakeholders • Target community groups
Difficulties and achievements (perceptions on reducing food-nutritional insecurity and poverty)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPFS national director and teams • SPFS programme technicians • Target community groups • Municipal stakeholders
Supports and achievements/weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal stakeholders • National stakeholders • FAO representations

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For more information contact: righttofood@fao.org
or visit our website www.fao.org/righttofood

