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IDRC GRANT / SUBVENTION DU CRDI : - BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

TOWARDS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE

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Report Type: Final Technical report

Date: October 1st. 2022

IDRC Project Number: 109035-005

IDRC Project Title: Building a Community of Practice for Healthy Food Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Country/Region: Latin America and the Caribbean

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* This report is presented as received from project recipients. It has not been subjected to peer review or other review processes.

* Acknowledgements: The following organizations and individuals contributed as consultants to this project: FIC Argentina; En-Comunicación, Costa Rica; Diego Rodríguez, Uruguay

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ABSTRACT

Supporting **Colansa**, the Community of Practice for healthy food systems, CLAS promoted evidence-based advocacy and policy change. In nine months over 2021-22, we set out to (1) position healthy and sustainable food systems among authorities and stakeholders; (2) support improved interaction between advocates and academics; (3) evaluate public awareness among stakeholders to improve communications; and (4) develop a strategy for reaching policy makers. Methods included group consensus, convening key actors, expert opinion, education for adults, and exploring social listening. To position the topic with authorities, Ministers of Health (MoH) and Finance were added to an electronic platform. MoH received a letter informing them about Colansa and its Manifesto. The “Regional NCD Agenda 2022-2030” included the collaboration with Colansa. To support interactions between advocates and academics, 2 videos and an interactive 2-day virtual session engaged them. The 51 participants discussed challenges of research for policy change, Mexico and Brazil experiences, and communicating research to non-academics. We convened and surveyed communication specialists and explored social listening in Central America showing there was a need for more frequent information and translating science into easy-to-understand concepts. Finally, a policy brief on Front of Package labelling for decision makers was developed responding to frequently asked questions.

KEYWORDS:

Food systems, advocacy, public policy, capacity building, Latin America, social listening

ii) The Research Problem

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have experienced an alarming increase in obesity and overweight in the past decades. Regionwide in 2016, the estimated prevalence of overweight and obesity was 62.5% (64% in men and 61% in women), the highest among all World Health Organization (WHO) regions. The estimated prevalence of obesity in adults was 28% (26% in men and 31% in women) in the Americas, again the highest among all WHO regions. The prevalence of obesity in adults was higher among women than men, except for Canada.ⁱ Obesity and overweight contribute to higher risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

NCDs kill 5.5 million people each year in the Region of the Americas. Each year, 2.2 million between the ages of 30 and 69 years in this region die from an NCD; over 85% of these "premature" deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, followed by cancers, respiratory diseases, and diabetes. Unhealthy diets, together with tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, and untreated hypertension and diabetes, all increase the risk of dying from an NCD.ⁱⁱ

Healthy nutrition is critical in the prevention of diet-related risk factors, such as overweight and obesity, and associated NCDs. Consumption of foods and beverages high in critical nutrients (salt/sodium, sugar, saturated fats and trans fats) has been associated with an increased risk of diet-related risk factors and associated NCDs. Through policies, legislation and strategies on healthy nutrition, malnutrition in all its forms can be prevented.ⁱⁱⁱ

This project aimed to further strengthen the role of COLANSA, the new community of practice on nutrition and health, by building capacity in advocacy and policy change, advancing public awareness about the need to reform food systems, promoting Front-of-Package food Labelling (FOPL) as a key strategy, and positioning these issues in the LAC political agenda. Building capacity is essential to improve interaction between academics and advocates so that each sector contributes to the transfer of knowledge from research to policy. Public awareness contributes to the process of advancing policies. This project considered the current level of awareness among target groups and contributes to increasing the public's understanding on the need to promote sustainable and healthy food consumption. Developing a regional strategic consensus on FOPL will provide a model to influence policies and can be used to advance other effective policies needed to improve food systems. Finally, high-level political authorities are a significant sector that should be engaged and can encourage a transformation towards healthy and sustainable food systems in LAC.

Changes in the economic, social, and political environment. Since the beginning of this project, COVID-19 has become a less salient concern. Most countries of the region have abandoned lockdowns and long periods of social isolation that were common earlier in the pandemic. Vaccinations and the illness itself have immunized many people. But the economic and social crises have persisted, and the threat of new COVID-19 variants continues. According to a June 2022 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)^{iv}, the region confronts domestic contexts marked by a sharp economic slowdown, rising inflation and a slow and incomplete recovery of labor markets—markets that are increasingly facing poverty and extreme poverty levels. As a result, 7.8 million people are forecast to

join the 86.4 million others whose food security is already at risk, in a region with an estimated 667 million population^Y. This context must inform the actions of CLAS and COLANSA.

iii) OBJECTIVES:

General Objective

To establish a regional community of practice aiming to develop the field of healthy and sustainable food systems and to influence intersectoral practices and policies in LAC, by establishing collaborative relationships between key players active in research and advocacy.

Specific Objectives:

1. Positioning healthy and sustainable food systems.

Support the role of the Community of Practice on Nutrition and Health (COLANSA) by promoting healthier and sustainable food policies among government authorities and regional stakeholders and more inclusive and healthier food responses to the pandemic emergency.

2. Regional capacity building.

Develop training opportunities and materials to support improved interaction between advocates and academics, so that research and evidence can best inform public policy in the LAC region.

3. Public awareness.

Evaluate the level of public awareness among selected regional stakeholders regarding healthier and sustainable food consumption patterns; define COLANSA communication priorities; and pilot one or more mechanisms to promote increased public awareness in LAC.

4. Front-of-Package Labeling (FOPL).

Develop a best practices strategy in the promotion of evidence-based front-of package labeling (FOPL) policies, as a regional model for implementing other policies to improve healthier food systems.

iv) Methodology

Each objective and activity required different methodologies and they are addressed in the description of the activities, outcomes, and outputs of each, as appropriate. However, some methodologies were common to all and are described here.

1. Group consensus. Advancing change requires a confluence of knowledge and expertise that no single person has. This project relied on the identification and convening of individuals and organizations known to have competencies to achieve the desired objective. For example, the FOPL policy brief for decision makers was developed by a team that had both researchers and advocates, representing academic institutions, health organizations, consumer protection entities, and government authorities, among others. Details appear as part of Objective 4.

2. Identifying and convening key actors. Almost every activity required identifying and convening key actors to ensure we brought to bear knowledge and expertise to the task at hand. CLAS uses a platform for maintain information on contacts to allow for better communication. This platform is updated almost daily to incorporate new contacts. All objectives required this method.
3. Expert opinion. Almost every activity required expertise from specialized professional groups. For example, we convened communication experts to provide leadership and feedback on best ways to communicate with various audiences and learn about issues associated with social media and media campaigns. A survey was conducted that appears as part of Objective 3.
4. Interactive education for adults. There is much evidence about best practices for adult education. There is an emphasis on interaction and bringing out the experiences from students themselves. These principles of adult education and training were used in Objective 2 to inform the development of the workshop on advocacy for researchers. Agenda and scripts appear as part of Objective 2.
5. Nonsystematic literature review. In an initial exploration of social media, we surveyed the literature broadly to identify key themes. It is nonsystematic as the objective was to obtain a general understanding of issues, not to conduct systematic research. Details appear as part of Objective 3.

v) Project Activities, Outputs and Outcomes by Objective

Each of the four project objectives is followed by an introduction, activities, outcomes, and deliverables as indicated in the proposal. Each is then followed by the report showing what was done, the outcomes from each activity, and deliverables. Detailed documents are shown as links to a Google drive where they reside.

1. Positioning healthy and sustainable food systems. Support the role of the Community of Practice on Nutrition and Health (COLANSA) by promoting healthier and sustainable food policies among government authorities and regional stakeholders and more inclusive and healthier food responses to the pandemic emergency.

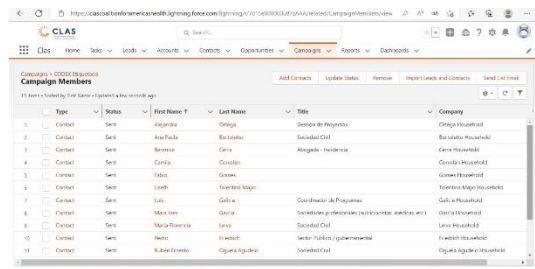
Introduction. In December 2020, CLAS launched “Healthy America 2030,” an initiative to bring together political, academic, and civil society actors, with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This effort sought to encourage a commitment by high-level authorities to health and create opportunities for interconnectedness and action, with a focus on improving the health and development of the LAC region. NCD Alliance, The Union, Senator Guido Girardi (who had a leading role in food policies in Chile) and his team, were key partners. This initiative is now in its second cycle with an intention to incorporate municipal authorities working with Vital Strategies’ Healthy Cities program. In 2021-22, CLAS, working with members and partners, developed a “Regional NCD Agenda 2022-2030” to support NCD prevention and control and show a way forward to greater resilience post-pandemic. In addition, we organized an advocacy campaign around the PAHO Directing Council Meeting of Sept 20-24, 2021, to influence this Council towards a stronger response to NCDs.

These activities by CLAS provide an opportunity for positioning COLANSA and healthy and sustainable food systems in the agenda of high-level authorities and the health sector, including Ministries of Health and PAHO. The COVID-19 emergency was a major disaster that had to be stopped. But NCDs and the

obsolete food system that contributes to the “underlying conditions” that increase the risk of illness and death from COVID must be addressed with urgency, particularly as they sicken people and planet.

Activity 1. Working with key advocates, identify high level authorities supportive of improving food systems. Update existing database. Working with COLANSA, develop a message and communications scheme to reach high level authorities, some of whom are members of Healthy America 2030.
Outputs 1. Identify authorities most committed to issues of nutrition, obtain contact info and twitter handles. Inform high-level authorities regarding efforts to reform food systems to be healthier and more sustainable.
Deliverable 1. Message to high-level authorities, delivered by e-mail and twitter

- a. Identified and recorded e-mails, and where possible Twitter handles, for Ministers of Health and Ministers of Finance of our region using the Salesforce platform. Updated list of authorities that are allies of promoting healthy food systems. Initiated a list of Codex Alimentarius connections.



- b. Sent a formal letter to all Ministries of Health introducing Colansa as the organization working towards promoting healthy, sustainable, equitable and inclusive food systems and provided Colansa’s Manifesto. [Sample letter](#).

Activity 2. Define a position about healthy and sustainable food systems aimed at PAHO Directing Council and Ministries of Health using the COLANSA Manifesto, showing support from civil society and specific actions for the coming 1-3 years.
Output 2. Communication of position after PAHO Directing Council meeting in Sept. to promote action by Ministries of Health and PAHO.
Deliverable 2. A position statement regarding COLANSA and food systems to Ministries of Health.

- c. With civil society organizations from Latin America developed a “[Regional NCD Agenda 2022-2030: Toward post-pandemic recuperation and resilience in Latin America to prevent and control NCDs](#)” that included the collaboration with Colansa in topics of food systems. Link to English version [here](#). In particular, the Regional NCD Agenda indicates the following actions regarding food systems: to expand the coalition to include communities such as those interested in the health of the planet and climate change; to promote FOPL in the region; to build capacity among civil society groups to advance advocacy for healthy and sustainable food systems; to develop and implement a communication initiative to increase awareness of the problem and solutions aimed towards the media (social and traditional) and the public; to promote national dietary guidelines based on the consumption of plants and minimally processed foods; and to promote the elimination of trans fats. The Agenda goes further to note support for family agriculture, justice towards farmers, and to prioritize local producers in public food procurement. The Agenda is a collective effort of civil society organizations that are committed to its implementation.
- d. Conducted an event on September 14, 2021, the week prior to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Directing Council Meeting, focused the need to give priorities to NCDs at a time

when all resources and emphasis was on the COVID-19 pandemic. A [declaration](#) from civil society to members of the Council, which include Ministries of Health and aides, noted the significance of focusing on NCDs and their risk factors. The statement included “Increase national resources and develop specific policies to address risk factors for NCDs, including the commercial determinants of health, through fiscal policies such as taxation of unhealthy products (tobacco, alcohol, sugar sweetened beverages and ultraprocessed foods.)

2. **Regional capacity building.** Develop training opportunities and materials to support improved interaction between advocates and academics, so that research and evidence can best inform public policy in the LAC region.

Introduction. One of COLANSA’s key areas of action is advancing research skills and promoting researchers’ leadership and collaboration in knowledge transfer, interacting with advocates, policy makers, and the community. This capacity building effort was virtual and produced materials such as agendas, videos, and presentations. This experience was expected to provide a model for future capacity building efforts. There were two principal activities under this objective: one was to support the SLAN (Latin American Society of Nutrition) regional congress that took place in late October, and the first week of November 2021; and the second one was the development of a workshop jointly with FIC Argentina, to improve knowledge and exchange between academics and advocates.

Activity 1. Support the Leadership Workshop on Advocacy organized by the Latin American Society of Nutrition (SLAN) and COLANSA

Output 1. Agenda development, identify and recruit speakers

Deliverable 1. A Leadership Workshop on Advocacy for nutritionists on Oct 28th to 30th 2021, as part of SLAN Congress, organized by SLAN Paraguay, contributing to work by other COLANSA members.

- a. Supported the SLAN Leadership Workshop on Advocacy for nutritionists on October 28th to 30th 2021, organized by Paraguay, providing advocacy training to young leaders. [Presentation 1](#), [Presentation 2](#), [Agenda Advocacy Workshop](#), [Session S20 on Colansa](#), [Session S11 on FOPL](#).
- b. The SLAN workshop on Advocacy was useful to increase awareness among an audience of young nutritionists and emerging leaders regarding advancing nutrition policies and the influence of the food and beverage industry. There were examples about this industry’s strategies and the need to avoid conflicts of interest.

Activity 2. Develop and implement a workshop to strengthen capacity in advocacy and communications about healthy food systems, understand what COLANSA is, and translate scientific evidence for the public, targeting regional and national audiences. Identify audience. Develop 2 short videos (maximum 30 min) and a virtual workshop.

Output 2. Better understanding between academics and advocates aiming to transfer scientific knowledge and inform civil society and policy decision makers. Understanding of best practices and lessons learned from actual experiences. An assessment of the advocacy training workshop and of its potential to be replicated by COLANSA.

Deliverables 2.

Video 1: on the relevance of scientific knowledge to the development of a strategy for political advocacy based on evidence. Questions and cases.

Video 2: on the development of a communication strategy. Questions and cases.

Two-day workshop, with 2-3 hrs. per day, aimed to a public with limited expertise in advocacy, to work on practical cases according to each participant's context. Showcase examples of positive relations such as IDEC and Univ of Sao Paulo.

Report describing the experience, evaluating the outcomes and what was learned from the experience. Develop training opportunities and materials to support improved interaction between advocates and academics, so that research and evidence can best inform public policy in the LAC region.

- c. Developed a training program with FIC Argentina to strengthen capacity in advocacy and communications about healthy food systems targeting researchers and nutritionists. The program which was agreed with members of the Colansa coordinating group, included 2 videos to be viewed prior to a two-day virtual workshop. The content of the videos is described below:

Video 1: The role of academia as a political actor. Should academia be a political actor? Discussions and controversies around the subject. The need for evidence-based policy and the implications of "advocacy science". Scientists who were committed to advocacy: Marion Nestle and Andrés Carrasco.

How to link research results with an advocacy strategy. Different approaches: implementation research-policy oriented research-evaluative research-epidemiological/medical research. Differences and similarities.

How to "use" research results in the advocacy process. Different factors that facilitate the use of research findings in the advocacy process: a. Interaction among researchers and decision makers during the design, development and dissemination of research; b. Dissemination of results considering different audiences; c. Availability of data for different audiences; d. Knowledge about the political context. How to overcome the main obstacles for linking research and advocacy. The need for identifying windows of opportunities. Exchange information via networking with other types of knowledge and organizations.

The meaning of advocacy. Advocacy for whom. Steps for advocacy: 1. Define our objective, what do we want to change; 2. How to carry out a legislative mapping and its purpose; 3: How to identify the spaces to carry out advocacy; and 4. How to identify partners.

"Strategic windows of opportunities": What are they? How can we identify them? What can we do in such circumstances? Case to study: Health Food Promotion Law in Argentina.

How can academia work with civil society for policy advocacy? The case of the Tax Reform in Argentina (2017).

Video 2:

Main characteristics of communication for advocacy in public health policies

Communication strategy: what are our goals? how to generate communication messages? how to segment the public and choose the appropriate communication channels?

Use of scientific evidence and correct sources in our communications campaigns: newsworthy content and adaptations to the characteristics of each channel

Political context: when is it convenient to launch a communication action?

The case of the FOPL campaign in Argentina

- d. A dissemination strategy for the launching of the course was developed. This strategy was planned by FIC Argentina, COLANSA and CLAS. The following materials were developed: Application form; first flyer;

second flyer (workshop); agenda; Certificate; satisfaction survey. The visual identity of materials was developed for this course in agreement with all the organizations involved.

- e. The workshop, attended by 51 participants, included three modules. (1) to discuss the videos and the main challenges of research focus on the promotion of public policies; (2) to discuss regional experiences from INSP Mexico (Lizbeth Tolentino Mayo), El Poder del Consumidor-México (Liliana Bahena) and IDEC-USP-COLANSA (Ana Paula Bortoletto); and (3) a practical activity about the communication of research results for non-academic audiences. The program of the workshop (in Spanish) can be found [here](#); and the video of the workshop is available [here](#): Code: Taller01@
- f. A full report of this experience might be found [here](#). The various documents developed for the Workshop (in Spanish) may be found [here](#).
- g. Principal lessons learned: the model of pre-workshop videos and a virtual workshop to discuss cases and respond to questions was very successful, judging from the evaluations and expert opinions. Participants were primed to consider the topic prior to the virtual workshop. The videos were entertaining and easy to follow. FIC Argentina has much experience in advocacy as well as research and presented the issues clearly. Case studies were helpful to broaden the comprehension of the topic and generate questions. This model is worth using in the future in other capacity building situations. It requires careful organization and preparation, but the cost was reasonable, given that there was no travel or venue to finance.

3. Public awareness. Evaluate the level of public awareness among selected regional stakeholders regarding healthier and sustainable food consumption patterns; define COLANSA communication priorities; and pilot one or more mechanisms to promote increased public awareness in LAC.

Introduction. Public opinion and support are crucial to advance food policies aimed at healthier and sustainable food systems. Present data about knowledge, attitudes, and practices about nutrition are fragmented, particularly about the importance of food policy to improve nutritious and sustainable food consumption patterns. Some information is available via household surveys, risk factor studies, and polls. Other sources of information come from public awareness campaigns for specific topics, such as sugar-sweetened beverages in Mexico or FOPL in Argentina. There is agreement among advocates and researchers that the public and decisionmakers have little understanding of the issues or the urgency in reforming food systems.

This objective sought to evaluate key stakeholders and audiences, topics, media channels, and influencers that drive present narratives, using different methodologies. Based on this information, this project explored communication priorities, and a mechanism to improve public, media, and decision-maker awareness. An initial literature review helped the team better understand the social media environment. Additionally, we explored the persons and organizations most engaged in influencing public opinion regarding food systems. This was done via survey and interviews with communications experts from different countries that have been working in this area.

This project anticipated that while all media are important, social media is most likely to support efforts to increase awareness among key stakeholders in our region. While not all have access to the internet, mobile internet or social media, a significant number of people do. Information from CEPAL's COVID-19 Observatory shows that approximately 2/3 of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean have

access to the Internet, with important differences in access by income and between urban and rural areas. Regarding mobile internet, Latin America and the Caribbean have seen continuous increases over the past 5 years in the proportion of the population using mobile internet, with more than half of the population connected in 2019. However, 39% of the population are still not using mobile internet. A 2020 study of 24 countries in LAC by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Interamerican Development Bank, and Microsoft determined that 71% of the urban population has connectivity options, while, in rural areas, less than 37% have them. A recent report by Comscore regarding social networks in Latin America shows that nearly 82% of the population had access to social media during 2020.

Given the wide use of the internet and social media in our region, the communication efforts would also have a significant social media component. However, social media users are not representative of the population as a whole and this is a disadvantage to note. The population with social media access skews toward urban and toward younger age groups.

Activity 1. Evaluate current situation among key stakeholders regarding healthier and sustainable food consumption patterns, including political mapping, literature search, dialogue with civil society experts, pilot of a social listening tool to analyze social media. Consider Social Listening tools that usually cover blogs, news sites, forums, videos, reviews, images, and social networks, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Output 1. Preliminary political mapping to identify key influencers and opinion leaders, which will be improved over time. Better understanding of existing information regarding public awareness. Dialogue with civil society communications experts in the LAC region to identify topics, influencers, key media outlets. Exploration of analytical tools to evaluate social media impact. •

Deliverables 1. Mapping of opinion leaders, literature survey, report describing social media analytical tools, such as Brandwatch and TalkWalker and recommendations as to usefulness in this setting. Report of findings.

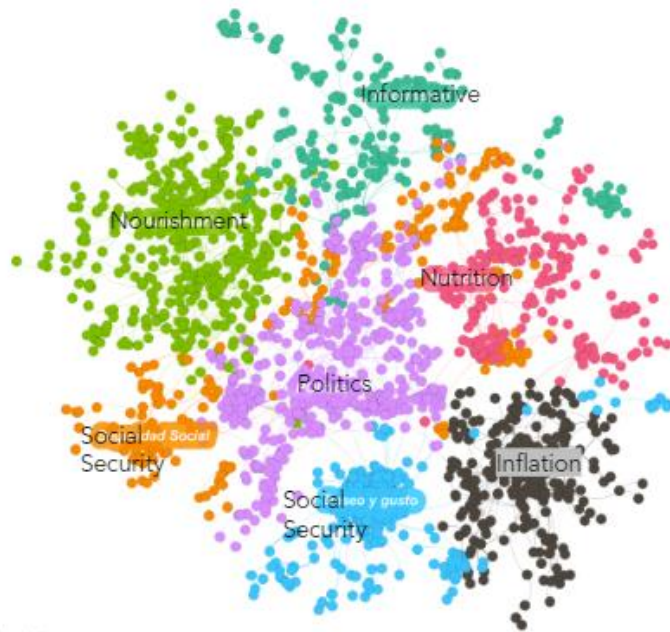
- a. Convened Communications experts from the region of Latin America in a WhatsApp group that includes representatives from 14 countries.
- b. A Survey of Communication experts received 26 responses from 13 countries. [Results here](#). This survey was intended to learn perceptions, opinions and suggestions from these professionals who work daily to install topics in the public agenda and carry out campaigns to advance public policies.

Main findings: We learned about the typical target of communications: an urban woman or man, age 18 to 45, interested in health and nutrition. Other audiences were academics and other communicators. Nutrition related campaigns related to Front of Package Warning Labels, elimination of trans fats, and taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages. Survey participants reported the media and journalists with whom they worked most frequently.

Communities

According to the conversation, these are the clusters detected

- 4.38%. Politics.
- 4.07%. Nourishment.
- 3.19%. Cravings.
- 2.67%. Inflation.
- 2.2%. Social Security.
- 2%. Nutrition.
- 1.89%. Informative.

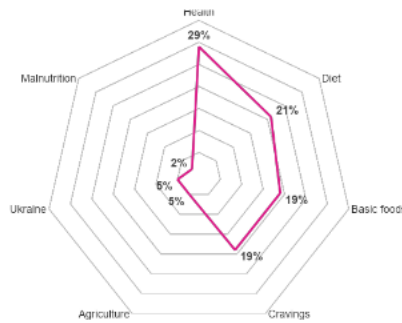


* Weight of the community in the conversation.
 ** The weight of these communities represents 20.4% of the analyzed universe.

- a. Exploration of tools of Social Listening. We reviewed a few services including Talkwalker, Bradwatch, and Meltwater. We decided to explore a tool offered by the Mexican company StreamicsLab. We agreed to “listen” to Twitter in 5 Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama), during a month from May 10 to June 9, 2022. We provided keywords related to Frontal of Package Warning Labels. With these data it was possible to assess the volume of communications around the provided keywords, themes discussed such as nutrition, diet, food basket, cravings, etc.

Themes

- Health (29%):** Content related to population's health issues such as chronical diseases like hypertension and diabetes play a leading role in people's health.
- Diet (21%):** Users sharing information on how to properly incorporate various products and dishes for better nutrition
- Basic foods(19%):** Information related to the economic situation, as well as the increase in the price of basic foods and the impact on the diet that this situation produces.
- Cravings (19%):** Content where users express some type of craving, mainly sweet things.
- Agriculture (5%):** Mentions regarding agricultural production and food security.
- Ukraine (5%):** Follow-up of the world economy derived from this conflict, where countries are affected by the rise of various products.
- Malnutrition (2%):** Concerns about people in food poverty, mainly children and older adults, and how this impact their health (nutrition)



It was also possible to identify clusters or “communities” around particular topics

See detailed results for each country [here](#).



Activity 2. Develop/ update COLANSA communication priorities for specific key stakeholders, such as parents of school age children, young women with children, youth groups, decision makers at different levels.

Output 2. With COLANSA and civil society communication experts, consider key audiences and priorities for each.

Deliverable 2. Event with civil society communications experts and key opinion leaders to determine priorities. Short document with proposed communication priorities.

- b. In a subsequent meeting on May 24, 2022, communications specialists discussed the results of the surveys and responded to questions about communication priorities for Colansa, main audiences, key channels of communication, and identified topics. They suggested creating closer links with journalists that are frequently provided information and training events by the food and beverage industry. [Detailed results here](#). This information was later presented to the Colansa coordinating group and to Colansa members for their feedback.

Activity 3. Selection and pilot implementation of one or more mechanisms to promote increased public opinion, such as blog, short hot topic webinar, or others. Identify evaluation indicators.

Output 3. Pilot of regional communication tool.

Deliverable 3. Report describing the experience with lessons learned with recommendations for follow-up.

- a. Another team was organized to consider communication tools to improve communication for advocacy. Although we began with the idea of organizing a Blog on healthy and sustainable food systems, the working group convened for this purpose converged on the concept of exploring Communications for Advocacy. In our region, communication about healthy and sustainable food systems is fragmented and not sustainable on a regular basis, neither is it frequent enough. This team proposes to convene communication experts from civil society and partner organizations and promote improved communication connecting local, national, and regional levels to support advancing policy change. We hope to plan and organize a regional communication space that creates synergies, empowers local advocates, and articulates the efforts of various groups.
- b. The following expected outcomes were identified:
 - Collaboration among civil society organizations to increase the synergy between communications at national and regional level,
 - To translate studies, reports, and other sources into narratives that the public, the media, and authorities can understand and act upon, and
 - Greater use of social media, articulated with traditional media for greater impact.

4. Front-of-Package Labeling (FOPL) Develop a best practices strategy in the promotion of evidence-based front-of package labeling (FOPL) policies, as a regional model for implementing other policies to improve healthier food systems.

Introduction. The Community of Practice project team agreed early on that FOPL policies in our region offered an opportunity to showcase the collaboration between academics and advocates within this community. The Hub on FOPL, led by INTA-INSP-CLAS, has organized discussion groups, and COLANSA has incorporated discussions of this Hub in its member meetings. This project enhanced this work by producing a short policy brief on FOPL to encourage policy makers to take on the process of approving these policies in countries that have not yet approved them.

Activity 1. Development of a policy brief on FOPL for the region, with best practices and a series of case studies showing successes and challenges. The process will include organizing a small group to outline the brief, developing consensus with key stakeholders and COLANSA coordinating committee, publishing the brief with support from major institutions.

Output 1. A synthesis of the experience regarding FOPL in our region, developed with the academics, advocates and high-level authorities that make them happen

Deliverable 1. A Policy Brief

Developed a best practices strategy in the promotion of evidence-based FOPL policies, as a regional model for implementing other policies to improve healthier food systems.

A team of researchers and advocates, convened by CLAS, met and discussed means to provide short, clear, appropriate information to decision makers about FOPL to promote policy change. They zeroed in on a [policy brief](#), which is based on the questions most often posed by politicians and authorities regarding these policies. This document uses information from PAHO and other sources as well as the experiences in the region to respond to these questions in a short, direct manner. The link for English is [here](#).



Etiquetado Nutricional Frontal de Alimentos

Política de salud pública para proteger a la población
Documento de referencia para decisores políticos

1- ¿Por qué el consumo de alimentos no saludables es un problema para los gobiernos?

La mala alimentación guarda una estrecha relación con la hipertensión, hiperglucemia en ayunas, con el sobrepeso y la obesidad. La mortalidad en la región de las Américas está principalmente asociada a estos tres factores de riesgo. En gran parte, las enfermedades no transmisibles (ENT) son consecuencia de la ingesta excesiva de azúcares, grasas totales, grasas saturadas, grasas trans y sodio, los denominados "nutrientes críticos". Este tipo de consumo, en gran medida, se debe a la amplia disponibilidad, asequibilidad y promoción de productos alimentarios procesados y ultraprocesados, que contienen cantidades excesivas de azúcares, grasas y sodio.

Por otra parte, también es recomendable evitar la ingesta de edulcorantes. El consumo habitual de alimentos de sabor dulce (con o sin azúcar) promueve la ingesta de alimentos y bebidas dulces, incluso los que contienen azúcar. Eso es particularmente importante en los niños pequeños, porque el consumo a una edad temprana puede definir los hábitos de consumo de toda la vida.

Los hábitos de alimentación no saludable representan uno de los principales factores de riesgo modificables, que han incidido en el aumento de la prevalencia de las ENT (enfermedades cardiovasculares, cáncer, diabetes, entre otras), responsables del 81% del total de muertes

The policy brief has been well-received and used in Central American countries working towards FOPL policies. It was also distributed to Colansa and CLAS members.

viii) Overall Assessment and Recommendations

1. The component of the COLANSA project for which CLAS was responsible provided an excellent opportunity for exploring a variety of means of advancing advocacy to promote healthy, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive food systems. Positioning COLANSA in the future might include seeking a place within institutions that know little about Colansa, such as PAHO.
2. The training program, organized with FIC Argentina, combining pre-event videos and a very interactive workshop was a model that might be applied to many other subjects. It has the virtue of being virtual, reducing cost of travel.
3. The work on Objective 3 resulted in surprises that provided many insights regarding ways of increasing awareness with the public, media and authorities. While we started considering a blog, the team quickly concluded that a blog was not the right answer for the communication problems we noted (fragmentation, inadequate communication, “preaching to the choir,” among others. The discussion took us to a much broader solution to increase frequency of information and to transform the many sources of information we have into material (postings, videos, articles, etc.) easy to understand by the public, media and decision-makers.
4. Colansa and CLAS must address issues of inequities and poverty, in addition to gender. Food systems must respond to the needs of vulnerable populations that are frequently motivated by low-cost, over health. The “basic food basket” was identified and Objective 3 as an issue worrying consumers.
5. The work of CLAS to promote FOPL in Central America, under a Resolve to Save Lives LINKS grant, provided an opportunity to learn about training needs, research needs, conflicting research and advocacy priorities, challenges of coalition building, and low public awareness regarding food systems. All these issues played in real life, while COLANSA was in the process of organization.
6. Focusing on the relationship between advocates and researchers helped highlight some of the issues that are challenges to advancing policy change. For example, the need to publish research results delays the use of vital information needed for decision-making. In one situation, a congressional Commission for the Defense of Consumers requested local information but, although it existed, it could not be fully shared because it had not been published. In another instance, a research institution was seeking to do further research on FOPL in a country that was on the verge of approving a legislative proposal on this policy. Had it been publicly known that more research might be needed, it would have provided an excuse to the opposition forces to request delays in the process.
7. The opportunities to discuss the project with the IDRC Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, consistently helped keep the focus on achieving objectives, outcomes and providing deliverables. There was an important level of flexibility that allowed the project team to explore and follow leads that were very rewarding. Probably Objective 3 on improving communications is the most obvious case. The funding was not sufficient for a proper regional Market Study or Awareness Survey. Yet, it was possible through a variety of methods to recognize the weaknesses in our present communications and begin formulating a creative solution with the “Regional Communication for Advocacy” concept. As the idea was presented to various audiences, it has improved and gained widespread sense of ownership from communication specialists, Colansa members and others.

8. The IDEC leadership, with its emphasis on participative management and transparency within the Colansa Coordinating Group, was an asset that allowed important discussions and the building of collegiality and trust within the group.
9. One thing we would do better in future projects is to complete the final technical report earlier. Unlike research institutions, CLAS is frequently asked to respond quickly to complex political situations. As a result, CLAS is “on-call” 24-hours a day, which conspires against proper planning.
10. This project was valuable due to its exploratory nature, which allowed for much learning and development of new concepts. It called for convening different groups with different ideas and interests, which in turn created opportunities for exchange of information as well as the development of new relationships.

ⁱ <https://www.paho.org/en/enlace/overweight-and-obesity>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/noncommunicable-diseases>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/nutrition>

^{iv} <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/47913-repercussions-latin-america-and-caribbean-war-ukraine-how-should-region-face-new>. Viewed on Sept 4th 2022

^v <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-population/>