

Final Report

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1. Executive summary

This project aims to establish and sustain a community of practice for healthy food systems in Latin America and the Caribbean for collaborative learning and quality information exchange among different individuals, groups and organizations involved with research and/or advocacy, including policy makers, academic researchers and civil society, in order to provide new forms of engagement and networking and to reinforce international cooperation to promote healthier food systems and prevent non-communicable diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The community of practice intends to strengthen research and advocacy tools and regional capacities, enhance regional collaboration and develop strategic directions in food systems through the establishment of inter-country and multi-actor knowledge hubs, to embed gender analysis and promote women empowerment, to implement a regional strategy on front-of- package labeling (FoPL), as a pilot of collaboration for other priority action lines and to raise public awareness and influence policies on food systems for NCD prevention and promote healthier food systems in LAC.

IECS was responsible for actively participating in all the planning activities, and specifically for developing the conceptual and political framework of the Community of Practice (CoP), and the mission and vision statements to be approved and agreed upon by the participating institutions. IECS was also responsible for developing models for integrating a gender equity approach into research and advocacy efforts in the CoP, and circulating the findings among the participating institutions. According to the original plan, during the first period, we have generated the mission and vision statements of the CoP, and agreed upon them with the members of Colansa. We have finalized the foundational document on the gender approach for the community, which has been discussed with all the members of the community in the CoP meeting. We have participated in the planning and delivery of dissemination activities in the region. During the last period, we have also developed and validated a comprehensive tool to assess advocacy and research projects from a gender perspective. The tool will be freely available to be used both offline and as an automatic online app. We have participated in the organization of all the internal and external meetings with the CoP members.

2. The research problem

Despite the progress made on hunger and undernutrition, obesity and other malnutrition problems have risen in the past decades in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Over 50% of the adult population of the region is overweight and 23% is obese. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are among the leading causes of death in almost every country of the region. The double burden of disease that associates families in which problems of overuse and malnutrition coexist has also increased. The availability of sugar is greater than that observed in developed regions and the availability of fats per capita is greater than the recommended range for a healthy diet.

Between 2000 and 2013, annual sales per capita of ultra-processed products increased steadily in LAC. Confronted with these facts, several institutions and professionals with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, via dialogue and consultation mechanisms, have agreed that fundamental changes are necessary to strengthen, preserve and recover food systems, ensuring sustainability and the capacity to provide a healthy food environment. In November 2014, the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and its accompanying Framework for Action member countries committed to “enhance sustainable food systems by developing coherent public policies from production to consumption across relevant sectors to provide year-round access to food that meets people’s nutritional needs and promotes safe and varied healthy diets”. This has also been the objective of a workshop in Mairiporã-SP, Brazil, that took place in June 2017, organized by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in partnership with the Brazilian Institute for Consumers’ Defense (Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor – Idec). Concrete ways to address needs and take advantage of opportunities identified during the workshop led

to the idea of developing a regional platform with the purpose establishing and sustaining a community of practice, a network for collaborative learning and quality information exchange among different individuals, groups and organizations involved with research and/or advocacy, such as policy makers, academic researchers and civil society, and whose interests and goals are similar or complementary in the field of healthy food systems.

Additionally, in LAC, women undertake important roles in attaining healthy food systems, especially via availability, access, and utilization, from agricultural production, to food preparation, to food distribution within the household and the community. However, their roles are generally undervalued and constrained by limitations on their access to resources, services and labor market opportunities. A lack of data, combined with gender-biased perceptions, have limited awareness and appreciation of women’s productive roles and contributions to healthy food systems in the region. Poor education and health indicators for women limit their access to resources and opportunities. Therefore, active interventions are needed to gain gender equity and empower women and other minority groups, including social protection policies that address the structural causes of poverty and vulnerability, providing health equity in the region.

There has been growing policy interest in social justice issues related to health and food and it is important to further understand the state of knowledge on relationships between health equity and food systems.

In this project the partner organizations are working in the creation and organization of a community of practice, an organized group of people who have a common interest in a specific domain: healthy food systems. They will interact regularly to share information, methodologies and experiences, improve their skills, and actively work on advancing the general knowledge of the domain. The community of practice will connect ongoing efforts in research, advocacy and policy aiming to develop and consolidate the field of food systems for NCD prevention and influence policy action in the region.

The community of practice will therefore act in the intersection between research activities, advocacy efforts and politics to produce public health policies. The unique knowledge and skills of the community of practice extends to building bridges between key stakeholders in public health and NCD prevention. The community of practice will provide valuable advice, strategies, insights, experiences, synergic opportunities and helpful connections to diverse but related stakeholders.

Challenges. An important event that needs to be summed to the context previously presented is the COVID pandemic, that started at the end of the 2019 in China and was rapidly spread all over the world, especially in the beginning of 2020. Since March, the LAC population is facing deaths, health complications, lack of medical equipment, supplies and hospital beds, besides the social and economic issues related to the social distancing and isolation. Because of that, many people are facing difficulties to have access to healthy foods, which is also justified by the power influence of ultra-processed food industries on marketing and donations, and the waste of fresh foods cultivated by family farmers who have no way to deliver their production to the population. In parallel, there are a lot of evidence showing that the covid-19 symptom and mortality is worsen by excess weight and NCD, which makes healthy eating even more important in these days.

3. Rationality and objectives of the project

General objective:

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

Specific objectives:

1. To enhance regional collaboration and develop strategic directions in food systems research and advocacy through the establishment of inter-country and multi-actor hubs based on a common conceptual framework and the analysis of the state of research and policy.
2. To strengthen research and advocacy tools and regional capacities to address the priority action lines of the community of practice.

3. To embed gender analysis and promote women empowerment as part of the regional research and advocacy agenda of the community of practice.
4. To provide support to raise public awareness and influence policies on food systems for NCD prevention by strengthening research to policy links and developing a regional communication plan for the community of practice.
5. To develop and implement a regional strategy on front-of-package labeling (FoPL), as a model of collaboration for other priority action lines.

4. Methodology, management and project implementation

Objective 1

Strategy 1: “To build in a participatory manner the conceptual and political framework that guides the community of practice, from the elaboration of a document that ensures the incorporation of the perspectives of gender, equity, culture and vulnerable populations with a focus on strengthening a responsive and transformative agenda and providing the guidelines for embedding these perspectives in our priority action lines.”

Development of the Conceptual Framework for the Community of Practice using a participatory methodology. Following a review of successful communities of practice and its methodology, the IECS team produced the *first version* of the conceptual framework for Colansa and shared it with the Steering Committee. In the document we described the domains of the community of practice, and its goals to contribute to the development of healthy, sustainable, equitable and inclusive food systems in the regions along with their components. The discussion and feedback between the members and organizations was an important input to develop the *preliminary version*.

The following step was sharing the conceptual framework with the community members via email and during the first Workshop of members of Colansa. During that virtual event held on April 21st, 2021 a participatory activity about “Practices” of our CoP was implemented, divided first in subgroups and then with all the members (See the memory of the workshop in Annex IECS 1). Oral and written feedback was received, compiled and analyzed. With this input, we have developed a *final version* of the Conceptual framework for the community of practice (Annex IECS 2). The document is available online at http://colansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Marco-Conceitual_COLANSA.pdf

We have also developed a preliminary list of the mission and vision statements, which were shared with the partner organizations. The mission of Colansa was then discussed and well defined in a document prepared by Colansa named “Manifiesto” (<http://colansa.org/library/manifiesto/>).

Objective 3

Objective 3: To embed gender analysis and promote women empowerment as part of the regional research and advocacy agenda of the community of practice.

Besides the objective 3-strategy 1, we incorporated a new objective, approved by IDRC, concerning the generation and validation of an evaluation tool for advocacy and research projects from a gender perspective.

Development of the Colansa Gender Approach Framework using a participatory methodology.

The first steps included the constitution of the teamwork at IECS and the inclusion of two permanent consultants: Lic. Luciana Castronuovo from FIC Argentina and Lic. Alejandra Ortega from INTA, Chile. We reviewed different alternatives proposed by international organizations such as WHO, World Bank, Gender at Work, and others. Based on a concept matrix created during the first year of the project, we have developed the *first version* of the foundational document of the CoP containing the Colansa gender approach, which was shared and briefly discussed with the Steering Committee.

The following step was sharing the gender framework with the community members via email and during the fourth meeting of members of Colansa held on October 20th, 2021. During the virtual event a participatory activity about “Gender and Food Systems” was implemented including 15 minutes of introduction about the Colansa gender approach framework and one hour to discuss how to incorporate the gender perspective in Colansa projects and initiatives and how to evaluate the gender perspective in our activities and processes (30 minutes of subgroup work and 30 minutes of sharing and discussion with the whole group). (See the memory of the workshop in Annex IECS 3). In addition we have invited all the members of the CoP to give their feedback about a preliminary list of milestone progress indicators regarding the gender equity perspective in Colansa (Annex IECS 4).

Oral and written feedback was received, compiled and analyzed. With this input, we have developed a final version of the Conceptual framework for the community of practice (Annex IECS 5). The document is available online at <http://colansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Marco-perspectiva-de-genero-final-ESP.docx.pdf>

See related dissemination and training activities below

Generation and validation of an evaluation tool for advocacy and research projects from a gender perspective

Based on the Colansa gender approach framework, we first looked for available tools that could collaborate in the classification of research and advocacy projects from the gender perspective in order to adapt them to our goal. There were a few available tools, which were evaluated for pertinence, but they were not suited for our purpose for different reasons (e.g. not for being used in research and advocacy projects with diverse study designs, not set to assess protocols and reports after the implementation period, or they required advanced expertise).

Development: The team developed a matrix of definitions and characteristics for projects to be considered gender-negative, -blind, -sensitive, -specific and –transformative, according to the Colansa framework. Then, a first version of the tool was developed as well as its manual of use.

Validation process:

The tool was reviewed by three experts in gender issues and the questionnaire was revised taking into account their recommendations.

Interrater agreement was assessed by using a set of 45 projects and case studies, each one reviewed by two independent evaluators. Projects and case studies, related to food systems, nutrition and/or health were particularly selected to cover all the range from gender negative to gender transformative.

Classification. We assessed interrater reliability of two classifications: one with five categories and another including two categories as is shown below:

2 categories	Without gender perspective		With gender perspective		
5 categories	Gender negative	Gender Blind	Gender sensitive	Gender specific	Gender transformative

Interrater agreement was assessed by using the Kappa Statistic. Interpretation of strength of agreement was based on Landis and Koch classification¹. All the analyses were conducted using Stata/SE 12.0 (StataCorp LP, USA).

Nineteen researchers and advocators from Latin America, most of them members of Colansa, participated in the validation process. After the invitation to participate, a set of projects, the tool and its manual were sent by email and they were asked to send back the tool completed for each project. In addition, some of the evaluators were individually interviewed via Zoom meetings in order to collect information about their comments and suggestions. These suggestions were very useful to add clarifications to some of the questions in the questionnaire, as well as examples and the answer to the frequently ask questions in the last version of the manual for users.

The tool developed with the input of experts on gender and health showed moderate (5 categories) to substantial (2 categories) interrater reliability. Please see Annex 10 for details.

Online tool:

During the last months the team was working on the development of an online tool that will facilitate its use.

Coordination and Steering Committee Meetings

We maintain regular online meetings with the partner organizations

¹ Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2529310>

Diffusion and training activities

- **LILANUT 2021**

A training activity “Gender perspective in research and public policies” was developed in the “Programa de Liderazgo Latinoamericano de Nutrición (LiLaNut 2021)”, a program oriented to young leaders in food and nutrition in the region, held within the Latin American Congress on Nutrition (SLAN 2021). <http://colansa.org/events/1o-taller-virtual-lilanut-2021/>. (Agenda in Annex IECS 6)

The activity was moderated by Vilma Irazola/Colansa and speakers were Luciana Castronuovo and Alejandra Ortega.

- **Congreso Virtual SLAN 2021**

We have co-organized two symposiums at the Latin American Congress on Nutrition:

- *S20 Encuentro anual de la Comunidad de Práctica Latinoamérica y Caribe Nutrición y Salud (Colansa)*, where Vilma Irazola has presented “Enfoque de género en sistemas alimentarios saludables y sostenibles”
- *S64 INFORMAS: el estudio de ambientes alimentarios en Latinoamérica y el Caribe*, where Natalia Elorriaga has presented Food availability in food retail in Buenos Aires

- **Colansa Workshops for members**

As was previously mentioned we have introduced and discussed Conceptual and political framework and gender framework with Colansa members

- *Colansa Workshop held on April, 2021*
- *Colansa Meeting held on October 2021*

- **Latin America and Caribbean INFORMAS eSymposium**

Working group sessions. 1: Integrating a gender lens in food environments monitoring, 29 June 2022

Schedule

The project schedule includes all the specific activities corresponding to objectives addressed by IECS with two relevant modifications:

1. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, face-to-face meetings out of the country were not conducted. We conducted remote meetings instead.
2. We incorporated a new objective, approved by IDRC, concerning the generation and validation of an evaluation tool for advocacy and research projects from a gender perspective.

3. In response to these changes, we have requested approval for a no-cost extension for five months, from February 2022 until June 2022. This extension was key to conclude all the activities related to the consolidation of COLANSA, some of which had suffered a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the original timeline of the project had been affected because CLAS (represented by Beatriz Champagne) was not able to develop the work plan as planned at the beginning of the project. The activities that were developed by IECS in the additional months included participating in the organization of regular meetings with the members of COLANSA together with IDEC as well as regular Steering Committee Meetings with the coordinating institutions; contributing to the implementation of communication and capacity building activities, and planning the strategic plan for sustainability of the community of practice; and conducting specific activities on the Gender Perspective for COLANSA, including the design and full validation of an evaluation tool for research and advocacy projects, which our new project, not planned initially. To conduct these activities we need to reallocate the funds originally thought for travels into these new components to be carried out in the last period, including the no-cost extension period, during which we completed all the activities mentioned above.

5. Project outputs

1. Colansa Frameworks and statements

- Conceptual and political framework for the community of practice (Annex IECS 2).

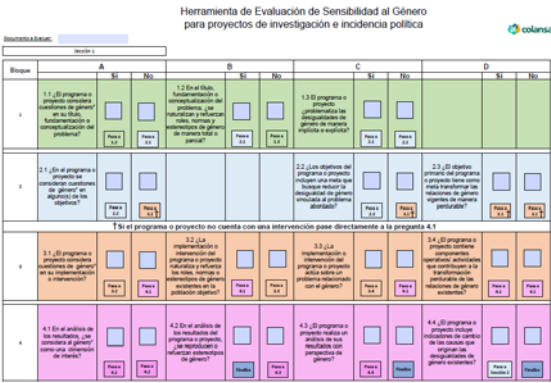
Comunidad de Práctica Latinoamérica y Caribe Nutrición y Salud (Colansa): Marco conceptual y político. Marzo 2021. Available at http://colansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Marco-Conceitual_COLANSA.pdf


- Gender perspective framework (Annex IECS 5)

Comunidad de Práctica Latinoamérica y Caribe Nutrición y Salud (Colansa): Marco conceptual-Enfoque de Género. Diciembre, 2021. Available at <http://colansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Marco-perspectiva-de-genero-final-ESP.docx.pdf>

Comunidad de Práctica Latinoamérica y Caribe Nutrición y Salud (Colansa): Marco conceitual- Enfoque de género. Dezembro, 2021. Available at http://colansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Marco-perspectiva-de-genero-final_PORT.docx.pdf

2. Tool for assessing projects from a gender perspective

Output	<p>Herramienta de Evaluación de Sensibilidad al Género para proyectos de investigación e incidencia política</p> 
<p>Tool for assessing projects from a gender perspective. Pdf form (Annex IECS 7)</p>	<p>*Considera cuestiones de género: hace alusión a las desigualdades o asimetrías entre las personas de diferentes géneros. Para más información ver Manual de uso sección "Pautas".</p>

<p>Tool for assessing projects from a gender perspective. Online app (Annex IECS 8) Available at https://forms.zohopublic.com/mvlopez/form/Heramientadeevaluacindesensibilidadalgnero/formperma/FZbuELhBoD6HZnkvICMUgo7dC_qLGgZZjAcBMVKuxJo</p>	
<p>User Manual. V July, 2021 (Annex IECS 9) Tool for assessing projects from a gender perspective. User Manual. July, 2021</p>	
<p>Validation Study. Brief Report (Annex IECS 10)</p>	

3. Capacity

- Three postgraduate students and young researchers have been mentored during this project:
 1. M. Victoria Lopez (Female, from Argentina)
 2. Milagros Garcia Diaz (Female, from Argentina)
 3. Marion Figarella (Female, from Venezuela)
- More than 30 participants at the Latin American Nutrition Leadership Program in Nutrition (Taller LILANUT 2021) were trained in the recognition of projects in the field with and without the gender perspective.
- A workshop was conducted among Colansa members. Colansa gender framework was presented and participants discuss possibilities to introduce the gender perspective in projects and Colansa. Twenty-two members actively took part in the discussion using a participatory methodology. (Annex 3)
- Dra. Vilma Irazola leaded a working group session around integrating a gender and equity lens to research that monitors food environments at the INFORMAS e-symposium. (<https://informas-esymposium-latin-america-and-the-caribb.heysummit.com/talks/working-group-sessions/>)

4. Liaison with other networks

On 2022, we have had meetings to explore future collaborations with the Cochrane Nutrition field.
<https://nutrition.cochrane.org/>

5. Other planned outputs

The following outputs will be completed by September 2022

On the next August 25th, a virtual workshop will be held oriented to Colansa members in order to build capacity in using the tool to assess projects from the gender perspective. See the introductory presentation in Annex 11. The training session will be recorded and the recordings will be available after the session.

A scientific manuscript will be submitted for publication (Development and validation of the Gender Evaluation Tool for advocacy and research projects)

6. Project Outcomes

We had contributed to establishment of a clear, solid and shared conceptual framework for the LAC community of practice to develop, sustain and advance its objectives.

After sharing the first versions of the gender framework with the members of the CoP, awareness of its importance and interest of introducing the gender perspective in projects and organizations have been manifested by researchers and advocates. During the first workshop some actions and strategies has been proposed in order to facilitate that the community of practice was able to incorporate a gendered perspective into its research and advocacy actions:

1. Learning: Capacity building and intern diagnosis of the situation (Workshops for training and education in gender perspective in order to incorporate it in researchers and evaluator works, an event with diverse experts on gender issues, diagnosis inside the institutions that make part of Colansa)
2. Conceptual framework and guideline for the use of not sexist language (Developing the gender approach framework and dialoguing with other groups to discuss specific topics of food system and gender, providing a document to guide the use of not sexist language)
3. Internal Organization of Colansa:
 - Colansa should promote gender and conflict of interest as cross-cutting topics
 - Creation of a transversal hub of gender approach
 - It would be a good practice of Colansa to offer a space for reviewing gender issues in different documents that members are producing
 - It is proposed that Colansa lead a research project that makes visible healthy eating and gender)
 - Guarantee the participation and representation of women in events, congresses, public spaces-

awareness of Colansa's own institutions

4. Guidelines for research: representativeness and data collection considering gender

- To incorporate a gender perspective, valuing participatory and qualitative methodologies, looking for representatives of diverse gender identities who can participate in the entire process.
- Importance of the definition of gender and how to include the representation of gender diversity in research projects.
- Gender perspective from producers and farmers.
- Data collection and data analysis considering gender.

5. External positioning

- Consider the gender perspective in Colansa's positions and in the public policies that we defend.
- Colansa can draw attention to the 2030 global agenda, join efforts to achieve global and regional goals.
- Position qualitative methodology as valuable in research and design of public policies.

6. Role and involvement of men

- Involve men and other actors not directly affected in discussions.
 - In research, there is the majority of men. Consumption is associated with nutritional deficiencies associated with the selection of preparations and portions associated with stereotypes and customs. Incorporate the perspective and role that men play in caring for the home.
- We have to learn how to incorporate the gender perspective with examples of gender-responsive and non-responsive projects.

Thus, researchers and advocates are motivated to integrate this approach and to continue working on this issue.

During the last period we had developed and validated a tool to assess projects from a gender perspective. Most of the participants in the validation study were members of Colansa, and according to their preliminary comments, we think that the tool will be used to help in the developing and evaluating their own projects in the future. This development will be important, particularly for researchers and advocates that are not necessary experts on gender issues.

The free online app also will facilitate its use. The use of the app does not replace the expert judgement. Instead, it is expected that the tool introduces important elements to take into account when designing and evaluating projects.

Our team and our organization has grown up regarding the knowledge about gender issues during the project. At the end of the project we are highly motivated to continue the work in another projects and particularly with the network of researchers and advocates connected with Colansa

List of annexes

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