

An Agenda for Action – Transitioning to a Healthy Sustainable Food System in Latin America

Political Economy Analysis

Executive Summary

Brazilian Institute of Consumer Protection

Caio Pompeia

This political economy analysis addresses challenges concerning the implementation of interventions aimed at promoting healthy and sustainable food systems. Food systems are understood here as configurations that encompass individuals, institutions, inputs, environments, activities and infrastructures by which food is produced, stored, processed, distributed, consumed and disposed of.

Operating around two axes, an environmental one (linked to the contribution of the food systems to the destabilization of the Earth System), and a food-related one (concerning their influences on the prevalence of obesity and other noncommunicable diseases), the political economy analysis privileges the dominant food systems operating in Brazil. It is organized into five sections:

1. Imbalances in the international food systems and Brazil's insertion in the global commodity markets;
2. The political-institutional arena of the food systems in Brazil;
3. The representativeness of the dominant organizations;
4. Programs and political leverage;
5. Possibilities of transitions and resistances.

According to the scientific literature, food systems contribute, taken together, to approximately 30% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, and often imply other environmental problems, such as land degradation and biodiversity erosion. Moreover, close to 2 billion adults are currently overweight and obese, conditions strongly associated with the commercial determinants of health.

In Brazil – a country that is one of the main players in the global commodities markets –, this scenario is particularly challenging, given, among other factors, the growing prevalence of obesity and the rising levels of deforestation – an important contributor to climate change. Concerning this last aspect, the analysis highlights the

relative increase in the participation of China and other Asian countries in the import of agricultural commodities produced in Brazil. In fact, these South-South relations have been increasingly relevant in influencing the dominant food systems operating in Brazil. Simultaneously, one should take into consideration other factors that may influence these systems, such as the political difficulties in closing trade agreements – one example being the EU-Mercosur one – and the pressures from tertiary actors – such as financiers and retailers.

The work then examines the main political organizations related to the dominant food systems in Brazil, emphasizing, especially, the role of the *Instituto Pensar Agropecuária* (IPA), a leading forum responsible for an unprecedented concentration of representativeness, financial resources and technical capacity in the hands of agricultural and industrial corporations in the country. The IPA has also been a key motor in deepening the interactions between private agents and parliamentarians of the so-called “rural caucus. By the way, the main organization of the food industries, the Brazilian Association of Food Industries (Abia) has created a strategic relationship with IPA as well.

At the same time, the analysis underlines other organizations that are presently growing in importance in Brazil. Mobilizing far-right positions and an environmentally unsustainable agenda, the Democratic Ruralist Union is one to pay attention to, for its leverage with the Executive. Differently, the Brazilian Coalition on Climate, Forests and Agriculture has been advancing important claims for decarbonization concerning the food systems operating in the country. Observing such differences, the political economy analysis classifies the main socio-environmental positions of the agro-food political representations in Brazil: “climate change deniers”, “conservatives”, “volatiles”, “decarbonizers” and “European” groups. If this investigation highlights the advances that some “types” can express, it does not ignore paradoxes and manipulations that also occur in this process.

Regarding the food and health nexus, the work identified a distinct situation: the predominance of attitudes, from leading political representations of the food systems in Brazil, criticizing the *NOVA* classification and the Dietary guidelines for the Brazilian population and promoting a collective effort to fight regulatory initiatives that might contribute to fostering healthier food environments in the country.

After evaluating the representativeness of the different leading and ascending organizations, the political economy analysis placed emphasis on actions that may be

vital to transitioning to healthy and sustainable food systems, while also noting challenges regarding them. This examination involved the influence of international actors, the possible alterations in the Executive and Legislative in the country, from 2023 on, the relevance of the public participation and the socio-environmental and nutrition education actions, the opportunities and challenges involved with science, the necessity of political articulations and the current state biases related to taxes, research and public policies.