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Experiences of a Little Cuban Town in Quarantine Because of Covid-19: Trade of Agricultural Products in the Search for Food Security

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Abstract: Food systems and trade of agricultural products have been affected by States measures in response to the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cuba, a Caribbean island, is equally hard hit by Coronavirus pandemic. Cuba's reality becomes much more complex when it has to face the economic and financial blockade imposed as a unilateral coercive measure by the US government, causing the impossibility of buying raw materials abroad to produce first need products and food. This essay, framing the global problem of Covid-19, aims to understand how trade of agricultural products is regulated in Cuba in times of pandemic for quarantine areas, taking specific municipality experiences as a model. It is necessary to disseminate the good experiences following three main constitutional principles: right to adequate food, food safety and municipal autonomy. Main results are based on demonstrating if there is an appropriate articulation between local government, producers and trader's direct benefits to strengthen the food security of population will be obtained.

Keywords: Camajuaní, Cuba, food security, quarantine area, trade of agricultural products

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1 Introduction

In difficult times appropriate measures are needed. Coronavirus pandemic, Covid-19, has changed styles and ways of thinking around the world. Because of the recent global health crisis States are forced to create immediate solutions seeking the virus prevention. Currently, the main responsibility lies in each country's health system, although it is not the only path for stopping the spreading of the virus. Food trading to guarantee the human right to food is a fundamental piece of puzzle in times of pandemic.¹ This essay, framing the global problem of Covid-19, aims to understand how trade of agricultural products is regulated in Cuba in times of pandemic for quarantine areas, taking specific municipality experiences as a model. In times of natural disasters, citizens tend to stock up on resources in order to overcome the difficult situation, a common reaction which causes shortages and breaks in the commercialisation and supply chains²; and Cuba is not an exception. Covid-19 has generated the biggest crisis of humanity within the last 100 years.³

Cuba, a Caribbean island, is equally hard hit by Coronavirus pandemic. The country has a free, universal health care system that is an undeniable strength to face this pandemic. Cuba's reality becomes much more complex when it has to face the economic and financial blockade imposed as a unilateral coercive measure by the US government more than 50 years ago. The main issue at present is how to access to medical supplies and inputs necessary for combating the disease. Nevertheless, the Cuban government has implemented a system of prevention and control of the disease, that has so far proved their effectiveness. Another situation arising from the blockade, which is seriously affecting Cuba, is the impossibility of buying raw materials abroad to produce first need products and food. In the middle of this complex context, measures and policies have been taken for trade of agricultural products in order to contribute to the strengthening of the human right to food and to prevent the spreading of the new Coronavirus.

Since March 23rd, specific measures have been implemented in Cuba for each economy sector, contributing to social distancing as a response to the Covid-19

1 FAO. 2020. *COVID-19 y exportaciones de alimentos en América Latina y el Caribe: comercio intrarregional e interregional*. Santiago. <https://doi.org/10.4060/CA9268ES>. p. 1.

2 WTO. 2020. *Covid-19 and agriculture: A story of resilience*. World Trade Organization. 26 August 2020. Geneva, Switzerland. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/agric_report_e.pdf. pp. 1–12.

3 FAO & CELAC. 2020. *Seguridad Alimentaria bajo la Pandemia de COVID-19*. Santiago. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8873es>. pp. 2–24.

epidemic. Trade in agricultural products remained a priority to ensure the right to adequate food, but it was necessary to reformulate the former ways. To understand the Cuban experience, it is essential to take into account that the trade functioning of agricultural products varies according to three different stages: previous to Covid-19, Covid-19 times; and during quarantine.

In order to develop this study, Camajuaní, which is a municipality located in the central region of Cuba, belonging to the province of Villa Clara was taken as a model. This small town, with a population of no more than 70,000 people, has gone through unique experiences in the country, two restrictive quarantines due to the Covid-19 outbreak. It is necessary to disseminate the good experiences of this town when confronting the pandemic and its ways of carrying out trade of agricultural products; always loyal to Article 77⁴ of Cuban Constitution of 2019 to guarantee the food security of its population in such a difficult situation.

2 Which is the Common Working of Trade of Agricultural Products to the Population?

In Cuba the forms of land production are mainly concentrated in agricultural cooperatives, smallholders and state enterprises. There is a production plan established for each of the forms of production (Cuba has a planned economy,⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Cuba). In each of cases what is produced must be delivered according to the plan of ACOPIO (the company in charge of trading agricultural products).⁶ ACOPIO, as a group of companies, distributes the agricultural products in priority centres (educational, health and assistance) and the rest of it in agricultural markets.

4 Article 77: *Everyone has the right to healthy and adequate food. The State creates the conditions to strengthen the food security of the entire population.* Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (2019). Published in the Extraordinary Official Gazette. No. 5. Of 10 April 2019. GOC-2019-406-EX5.

5 Article 18: *In the Republic of Cuba, a socialist economic system is in force, based on the ownership by the entire people of the fundamental means of production as the main form of ownership, and the planned direction of the economy, which takes into account, regulates and controls the market in accordance with the interests of society.* Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (2019).

6 Decree No. 361 of 2019 of the Council of Ministers on the Higher Organisation of Business Management of the ACOPIO Business Group. **Article 1:** *To consider the Unión de Acopio, hereinafter called the Grupo Empresarial de Acopio, as a higher business management organisation subordinate to the Council of Ministers and a national entity, for all the purposes provided for in the legislation in force.* **Article 2.** *The Stockyard Business Group shall be assisted by the Minister of Agriculture.* Published in Official Gazette No. 56 Ordinary of 2nd August 2019. GOC-2019-677-O56.

There are essentially two types of agricultural markets, the supply and demand market and the agricultural market of capped prices.⁷ Productive forms can participate on agricultural markets to sell production that exceeds plan demand. Usually, in most of the country's territories, the so-called agricultural fairs are held on weekends in open spaces, converging all forms of production and a large number of people. There is a gradual decentralization of food production, giving a greater autonomy to municipalities to enhance the agricultural trade⁸ (see Article 169 in relation to Article 168, municipal autonomy, Constitution of the Republic of Cuba).⁹

3 How is Trade of Agricultural Products Handled in Times of Pandemic?

In view of the high number of people attending agricultural fairs during Covid-19 crisis, the country and local governments took several measures for trade of agricultural products. First of all, the closing of agricultural fairs on weekends was decided to ensure social distancing and to concentrate the supply of agricultural products in the various agricultural markets or sales points created for this purpose. Products are concentrated in these agricultural markets which are numerous and scattered in territories, contributing this way to the reduction of people gathering. In relation to movement restriction, people can visit agricultural markets, always respecting limits and avoiding concurrence. The challenge lies in adopting form to achieve equitable supply in all markets, knowing that agricultural production is subjected to natural factors such as climate change.¹⁰

There are areas in Cuba that due to local indigenous transmission of Covid-19 have been declared in quarantine. These quarantine areas restrict population movement and force citizens to stay in their homes at all times.

⁷ Joint Resolution No. 01 of 2000 of the Ministries of Agriculture and Internal Trade. Regulation for trade of agricultural products and the competition of producers in agricultural markets.

⁸ **Article 169:** *The autonomy of municipalities includes the election or designation of their authorities, the power to decide on the resources using and the exercise of the powers that correspond to them, as well as to make the necessary agreements and regulations for the exercise of their powers, in accordance with the provisions of Constitution and law.*

Related to **Article 168**, which declares the municipality to be the primary and fundamental political and administrative unit of the organisation of the nation. Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (2019) Published in the Extraordinary Official Gazette. No. 5. Of 10 April 2019. GOC-2019-406-EX5.

⁹ Mc. Cormack, M. 2007a. *Selección Legislativa de Derecho Agrario Cubano*. Tomo I. Edit. Félix Varela. La Habana. Cuba. pp. 10–83.

¹⁰ Schimdhuber, J., J. Pound, and B. Qiao. 2020. *COVID-19: Channels of Transmission to Food and Agricultura*. Rome: FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8430en>. pp. 2–12.

4 How did Trade of Agricultural Products Work During Quarantine?

4.1 Experiences from the First Quarantine in Camajuaní

Due to the increasing number of people infected with Covid-19 in the municipality of Camajuaní, its Defence Council decided on April 16th, 2020 the establishment of a restrictive quarantine in a specific area of the Camajuaní (People's Council II), and also in an agricultural cooperative located in the south of the municipality. The selection criteria of zones were carried out through a mapping taking into account the most contaminated locations. The quarantine, which had never been documented before in the territory, set the beginning of restrictive measures for restraining the movement of citizens and closing all stores and markets. Around 1400 households were affected by the imposed quarantine measures, lasting exactly one month from 16 April to 16 May.

How did the trade in agricultural products work in this stage? ACOPIO collected all smallholders and cooperatives productions, taking into account the policies of payment for the quality of delivered products.¹¹ After the harvesting process, food bags were made in ACOPIO's central warehouse, bearing in mind the pounds *per capita* for each family, for a final number of approximately 1400 bags. Once the bags had been prepared, they were taken to the red zone (the area bordering the quarantine) following health protocols, being later moved from one transportation mean to another in order to be distributed to each household. The price of bags was coordinated with the established prices at national level for their trade; and ranged from 30 to 35 Cuban pesos. The frequency of delivery to households was determined to be from 7 to 8 days. The greatest challenge in this process was to ensure food availability not only for people in quarantine, but for the rest of the inhabitants of the municipality at agricultural markets or sale points. Taking into account the frequency rate of food delivery each house in the quarantine zone received four bags of basic food for maintaining an adequate diet during confinement.

Dimensions of food security¹² are taken as evaluation parameters to determine the effectiveness and efficiency in the fulfilment of a right to adequate food.¹³ The

11 Mc. Cormack, M. 2007b. "Selección Legislativa de Derecho Agrario Cubano." In *Tomo II*, edited by Cuba. La Habana: Edit. Félix Varela. pp. 5–96.

12 Production, food availability, access to food both economically and physically, safety and cultural preferences.

13 Bianchi, E., and C. Szpak. 2014. "Seguridad Alimentaria y el Derecho a la Alimentación Adeuada." Programa de Cátedras OMC. Red LATNO. [https://doi.org/10.1175/1520-0442\(2004\)017<3203:CCOALD>2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1175/1520-0442(2004)017<3203:CCOALD>2.0.CO;2).

Dimensions	Affectionation probability (A. P) 1–4	Impact (I) 1–5	General expected risk = (A.P × I)	Final result (risk management)	Risk reduction index (General risk – Final result)
Production	3 (Climate change: severe drought January–April and heavy rains start in May)	4	12	2	10
Availability	3	5	15	1	14
Physical access	4	4	16	1	15
Economic access	2 (Wage measures taken by the country for protection of workers in times of pandemic ¹⁴ + affordable prices of products according to ACOPIO system ¹⁵)	2	4	1 Family Care System (SAF) ¹⁶	3
Safety standards	3	5	15	1	14
Cultural preferences	2	1	2	1	1

No impact on food supply to quarantine areas. There was no infection of Covid-19 through the sold food and the required quality and quantity by a family was guaranteed for one week.

Note: Affectionation Probability (A.P), occurrence of the event or affectionation: 1-Impossible, 2-Possible, 3-Probable, 4-Almost-Safe/Impact: 1-Insignificant, 2-Minor, 3-Moderate, 4-Major, 5-Severe/General expected risk: 1–4: low risk; 5, 6, 8 and 9: medium risk; 10 and 12: high risk; 15, 16 and 20: extreme risk/Final result: 1-not affected, 2-some affected, 3-total affected, 4-failure to comply (final result is obtained from information and data provided by the municipal delegation of agriculture).

following chart illustrates the possible risks to occur. It provides an overview of the risk reduction achieved by combining local management with policies and legal regulations at the provincial and national levels. It is supported by the experiences

14 Resolution No. 148 of 2020 On wage guarantees. Ministry of Finance and Prices. Official Gazette No. 22. Extraordinary of April 27, 2020. GOC-2020-285-EX22.

15 Resolution No. 506 of 2019. On the maximum collection, purchase and retail prices of agricultural products. Ministry of Finance and Prices. Official Gazette No. 9 Ordinary of February 5, 2020. GOC-2020-104-09.

16 Family Care System (Spanish: Sistema de Atención a la Familia, SAF) was created in 1996 and it is designed to supplement the diet of elderly people, people with disabilities, high-risk pregnant women and critical social cases, with insufficient income wages and no family members able to provide assistance. See Resolution No. 96 of 2017, 10 May 2017 of the Ministry of Domestic Trade. MINCIN. Available at: <https://www.mincin.gob.cu/familia>.

Dimensions	Affectation probability (A. P) 1–4	Impact (I) 1–5	General expected risk = (P.A × I)	Final result (risk management)	Risk reduction index (General risk – Final result)
Production	4 (Climate change: hurricane season in Cuba, one Tropical Storm during quarantine)	4	16	2	14 ¹⁷
Availability	3	5	15	2	13
Physical access	4	4	16	2	14
Economic access	2 (Same wage measures taken by the country for protection of workers in times of pandemic ¹⁸ + affordable prices of products according to ACOPIO system ¹⁹)	2	4	1 Family Care System (SAF)	3
Safety standards	2	5	10	1	9
Cultural preferences	1	2	2	1	1

Some impact on food supply to quarantine areas due to population size, corrected over time. There was no contagion of Covid-19 through the sold food and the quality and quantity were guaranteed, without specifying whether the quantity purchased was enough to cover the family's food needs or not.

Note: Affectation Probability (A.P), occurrence of the event or affectation: 1-Impossible, 2-Possible, 3-Probable, 4-Almost-Safe/Impact: 1-Insignificant, 2-Minor, 3-Moderate, 4-Major, 5-Severe/General expected risk: 1–4: low risk; 5, 6, 8 and 9: medium risk; 10 and 12: high risk; 15, 16 and 20: extreme risk/Final result: 1-not affected, 2-some affected, 3-total affected, 4-failure to comply (final result is obtained from information and data provided by the municipal delegation of agriculture).

in agricultural production in the territory and the willingness of smallholders and agricultural cooperatives in the agricultural production process. The achieved results are remarkable in the trading of agricultural products within quarantine zones and in a high risk reduction index.

¹⁷ There is a notable risk reduction thanks to the contribution of other municipalities in the province of Villa Clara, which contributed with more than 40 tonnes of agricultural products.

¹⁸ Resolution No. 148 of 2020. Op. cit.

¹⁹ Resolution No. 506 of 2019. Op. cit.

4.2 Experiences of the Second Quarantine in Camajuaní

Camajuaní municipality reported no cases of Covid-19 since the closure of the restrictive quarantine on 16th May until the first days of August 2020. However, due to the disease outbreak in the country in August itself and the appearance of positive cases in the municipality (alarming appearance and increasing of positive cases and associated contacts) the municipal Defence Council took a decision in agreement with the province and the country authorities in order to set a second quarantine period. The municipality had accumulated experience in management of resources at times of restrictive measures, although the dispersion of cases led to the quarantine of the municipal capital with more than 20,000 inhabitants. It was a challenge to draw up new plans for feeding and trading agricultural products due to the affected population density.

Furthermore, trade of agricultural products during this period considered sectoral divisions of zones and districts which are based on local management and elected delegate representation by people to represent them in political and government bodies. On this occasion, the production of bags with agricultural products per household was unfeasible due to the number of people under quarantine.

The Food Subgroup, subordinated to the Municipal Defence Council, started trade of agricultural products in mobile markets to bring the products to each area and neighbourhood, avoiding citizen's mobility. In this case, there was an articulation between several government entities for the implementation of this plan. A daily evaluation of the results of agricultural products trade process was obtained, taking into account citizens opinions about resources management, amount of distributed families, and quality and variety of products.

Within the efforts to support the work of the mobile markets its necessary to highlight the labour of sales points and agricultural cooperatives that trade their products within the location community together with the contribution of "*organopónicos*" (city vegetable gardens). The mobile markets kept capped prices according to the country's pricing policies and managed to cover all the demarcations of the quarantine areas on two occasions. As a result, 63 tonnes of viands, 37 tonnes of vegetables, 15 tonnes of grains and 32 tonnes of fruit were sold for a total of 149 tonnes of agricultural products sold by the State, in addition to 145 tonnes sold by outlets sales of agricultural cooperatives, giving an index of 15.4 pounds *per capita* for isolated citizens.

During the process of agricultural products collecting, all the necessary sanitary measures were taken as well as when selling them to the population to prevent pandemic contagion and propagation. The quality of the products offered was assessed by ACOPIO specialists in accordance with phytosanitary standards

but this was not the only opportunity, since the municipal inspection system is later responsible for carrying out another evaluation. Products were sold every 14 days, although, in some places rotation took less time for an approximately of 10 days. In addition, the SAF continued supporting the most needed people, providing free bags of agricultural products to their homes. These measures ran from 8th August to 6th September, 2020.

It is necessary to recap the analysis in the following table to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the right to adequate food in the municipality during the second quarantine in order to guarantee food security.

5 Conclusions

Food systems and trade of agricultural products have been affected by States measures in response to the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cuba, as many countries all over the world, has received the direct impact of Sars-Cov2, being practically forced to take restrictive measures in communities and territories where the spread of the disease was on a rise. These measures taken by the country have led to a reconsidering of the ways in which agricultural products are managed and sold to the population in order to avoid crowding and to encourage social distancing.

Adopted measures in Camajuaní, Villa Clara province located in the centre of Cuba, highlight the good practices and actions of government bodies in managing the pandemic. A reduction in the risk index has been demonstrated in the face of all encountered difficulties in agricultural products trade to the population in such a harsh time such as pandemics or natural disasters. The closure of the two quarantines in this town without further infection, together with a high level of population satisfaction about the food management during the confinement, have shown an existence of a proper articulation between local government, producers and traders and at the same time has brought direct benefits to strengthen the food security of population and to enhance the importance of achieving food sovereignty.

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