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Parallel Information

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Executive Summary

The Right to Food and the Fight against Hunger in Nicaragua

The Zero Hunger Programme – One year later

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Executive Summary

Upon invitation of the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights, FIAN International made an analysis to get to know the present situation of the Alimentary Productive Programme (PPA), generally known as “Zero Hunger”, one year after implementation.

The investigation was carried out in Nicaragua from July 19th until August 8th, 2008 with the purpose to observe the programme’s advances, limitations and problems. The general objective was to verify in which way the Zero Hunger and its application as public policy of Daniel Ortega’s government to combat hunger and poverty in the country does comply with the government’s international rights obligation incurred with the ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PIDESC) with regard to the progressive fulfilment of the Right to Food as stipulated in Article 11 of this Covenant.

The methodology applied in this first look at Zero Hunger has taken into account various elements: First there were interviews with different State and civil society actors in Nicaragua. Then, there was a workshop held on July 4th at the CENIDH main office with the opportunity to hear about the progress of the Zero Hunger programme as presented by Ing. Gustavo Moreno, Executive Director of said programme, also allowing a round of questions and answers. In the afternoon of this day there was an ensuing analysis session with representatives of different civil society organisations that gave the chance to hear their opinion about experiences with Zero Hunger (the programme is being widely published by government institutions under this name). Afterwards field visits were carried out in 16 communities in the provinces of Matagalpa, Estelí, Chinandega and Masaya, interviewing benefited women and their families who in their testimonies talked about their experiences. During these field visits there was also the opportunity to talk to technical personnel of the MAGFOR (Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry) and with other persons who were not beneficiaries. To further support this report there were other meetings with NGOs and international institutions and also quite a number of publications, press articles, web page of the PPA and further documents have been researched in order to ascertain more substantiated conclusions about the programme and to formulate the final conclusions.

According to the information provided, by Ing. Moreno, Zero Hunger is being implemented in all provinces of the country and has reached a distribution of the productive package (a parcel of goods and animals) to 23,000 women benefited since June 2007 up to July 2008. The goal until end of 2008 is to hand over 30,000 of these parcels at a cost of 825 million Cordobas, which is 30,000 Cordobas per unit. However, the IEEPP Institute reported that there has been an under expenditure of the Zero Hunger budget in 2008, which according to MAGFOR has been due to difficulties in handing over the package during the summer. In addition to these climactic reasons the programme’s director admitted that there were a number of problems in the implementation of the programme due to its general magnitude and its distribution all over the country. The field visits allowed conclusions with regard to the focusing of the Zero Hunger, the selection criteria of the beneficiaries and the participation of the communities, of communal leaders, mayors and the Citizen Power Councils, which had been created by the Ortega Government.

The main criticism expressed by women beneficiaries have been the missing help to persons suffering extreme poverty, the deficient quality of the animals handed over, that the saving which has to be made of 20 % of the total package amount (about 5,500 Cordobas) should be used for a communal purpose and not be only savings for those

already benefited, and that there should be a programme component which allows women to buy land.

As the success of the Zero Hunger depends to a large degree on the capacity of the technical personnel of the MAGFOR which gives assistance, training and follow-up to the programme, a certain weakness has been noted as there is not sufficient personnel in quantity and quality for the implementation of the programme.

The final evaluation shows that the field visits confirmed in general the observations and conclusions made by NGOs which have been working in similar projects for years, and also from international agencies and institutions. One of the main complaints is the little transparency in the whole management of Zero Hunger and the almost not existing integration of the different organised actors of civil society. As already mentioned there also were doubts whether MAGFOR can really attend to 15,000 families per year as planned. Another widely criticised aspect is the creation of the Citizen Power Councils which have assumed a decisive paper in the Zero Hunger and which take an open partial stand thus violating human rights with regard to the non discrimination mandate as established not only in the Constitution but also in the International Covenants ratified by Nicaragua.

Above all the big question mark remains whether Zero Hunger, as emblematic strategy of the Ortega Government, can fulfil its main objective to combat hunger and to abolish poverty in Nicaragua.

In this context it has to be said that even though the Government of Daniel Ortega in its political statements shows a focused diction on sectors like energy, drinking water, health and education, and a more pro-poor tendency than former governments -, it remains to be seen whether the Zero Hunger will develop a sustainability which will reach further than handing out goods and animals, whether it will promote the Law for Alimentary and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty in a harmonized way to be approved finally in the National Assembly, and whether the Government can develop a strategy in a progressive way so that the State of Nicaragua will fulfil its duty under the Right to Adequate Food in such a way that “every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.” In view of this analysis a number of short, middle and long term recommendations have been formulated which possibly might help improve the Hunger Zero programme and some others which might give certain guidelines for the fulfilment of the State of the Right to Adequate Food in Nicaragua. They are as follows:

Short term:

- The Government should exercise utmost possible participation and transparency in designing and implementing public policies with regard to the Right to Food, land questions and rural development.
- It is recommended to establish an independent monitoring and evaluating observatory constituted by civil society, which will allow to solve any kind of problem and to improve the Zero Hunger programme and thus will assure its success and sustainability. This observatory should also include some kind of instance where claims can be presented by the population with regard to the programme.
- Any kind of discrimination has to be eliminated in the implementation of Zero Hunger as established under the Constitution of Nicaragua, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other International Covenants ratified by the country. The original project executed by CIPRES (Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural y Social) proved that tolerance as strategy had an important impact, as thereby the need to feed oneself

and to overcome poverty were top priorities and families abandoned political and biased antagonism and became members of the PPA organisations.

- Clear criteria should be established in order to determine which women should be beneficiaries and which ones not; the simple term of “impoverished” is not sufficient to give priority to persons most in need.
- The political pressure to implement the programme with 15,000 packages distributed over a year should not impede to hand over animals of good quality, to prepare well the whole family to receive them, to carry out an integrated training in all the subjects necessary, especially when one third of the cost of the package is budgeted for this work (US \$ 500).

Middle Term:

- It is recommended that in the implementation of Zero Hunger knowledge and experiences of organisations working in agricultural and organisational projects should be used in order to guarantee its success and a sustainable development for the benefited families.
- The Zero Hunger programme only attends families who own more than 1 manzana¹ of land. MAGFOR talks about a so called “Backyard Package” for families who own less land. This aspect should get priority over handing out cows so that very needy families will be attended to. One and a half manzana land (necessary to graze a cow according to agricultural experts) cultivated in an intensive diversified way could feed several families.
- In order to empower women it is not sufficient to hand over animals as their property. It is recommended to include the gender subject in such a way that the whole family will be involved to assure success. And in this context one has to be very careful that handing over the Package does not turn into an additional work load for the women benefited.
- It is recommended to develop a strategy as part of the Zero Hunger to promote that women will be at least co-owners of the land or owners of the piece of land on which the house stands to really empower them.

Long Term:

- In order to fulfil the obligation of the State of Nicaragua with regard to the Right to Food for all Nicaraguan women and men it is necessary to develop a progressive strategy, apart from the Zero Hunger Programme in order to fight and abolish hunger, considering the highly marginal population which lives in extreme poverty.
- The Government should adopt policies, norms and projects which guarantee and fulfil the Right to Food which refer to agrarian reform measures, access to water resources, creation of jobs, especially for vulnerable marginal groups.
- The question referring to land property has not been solved yet. The Government should readopt a land policy in an overall agrarian reform framework, in which also the women should be included, as only 10 % of them are land owners and only less than 10 % receive rural credits. For the overall situation of peasant women the Zero Hunger is a mere palliative measure.
- The justiciability of the Right to Food should be assured by the State of Nicaragua which means that any individual person can claim this right if necessary in court. Therefore, the Government should undertake the necessary steps so that the Law for Alimentary and Nutritional Security and Sovereignty will finally be approved in an agreed upon way by the National Assembly and that the Zero Hunger Programme will include mechanisms of justiciability in order to assure the Right to Food.

¹ 1 manzana = 0,7 hectar