

Impacts of the Food Acquisition Program (FAP) on the Empowerment of the Farming Families of the Municipality of Paula Candido / Minas Gerais / Brazil

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Abstract – This article aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Food Acquisition Program (FAP), in terms of its repercussions in the empowerment of farming families benefited by the program of the municipality of Paula Cândido, Minas Gerais, southeast region of Brazil. As a methodological procedure, we used the bibliographical research with techniques of semi-structured and narrative interviews. Data processing occurred with the assistance of the SPSS and IRAMUTEQ software. The results indicate that the meaning of the FAP attributed by the farmers refers to income, freedom and security. In the farmers' perception, there were different changes in their life trajectories, ranging from increased capacity, access to information, social participation, increase of income and well-being until their independence and autonomy, which are factors that influence directly the empowerment as a process. However, in order for the empowerment to be sustainable, it is necessary to increase the Government's investment in education services, health and better income distribution, as well as overcome the structural limits related to the operation of the FAP.

Keywords – Public Policy, FAP, Farming Families, Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Public policies are a form of state intervention to address social, economic, structural and environmental demands, as well as a way for governments to legitimize themselves. Thus, public policies are divided into projects and programs, which interfere in a given reality; in other words, "the formulation of public policies is the stage at which democratic governments translate their purposes and electoral platforms into programs and actions that will produce results or changes in the real world." (SOUZA, 2006, p.26).

Thus, public policies such as the Food Acquisition Program (FAP)¹ can affect the lives of its beneficiaries, making them stronger, united, with greater possibility of access to information and knowledge and financial resources, so that they may have changes in their trajectories and life projects. That is, all of these factors

can contribute to people becoming more independent and even empowered.

Thus, the issue is how far the insertion in the FAP contributes to the empowerment of the farming families. In order to know if this process was effective, we decided to operationalize this concept from three dimensions, namely, social, political and economic, according to the theoretical-conceptual basis proposed by Iorio (2002) and Romano (2002).

These authors consider empowerment as a process, which implies the conjugation of different external and internal factors, such as access to public policies, work and income guarantee, social participation, access to information, skills, increased self - esteem and self-perception, in order to be effective. In addition, they emphasize the importance of institutions and their agents to boost this process; that is, when well articulated, the network becomes an important space for empowerment.

Thus, the core of the problem is to respond to the following question: Does the Food Acquisition Program contribute to the empowerment of provider families? That is, the objective was to analyze the FAP effectiveness, considering its repercussions on the empowerment of beneficiary families.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

We initially carried out a bibliographic research, complemented with a semi structured interview with 36 farmers benefiting from the FAP, in the municipality of Paula Candido/ Minas Gerais, located in the Southeast Region of Brazil. According to Gil (2008) and Marconi and Lakatos (2011), interviewing is an important technique of data collection for being flexible, allowing a social interaction between the researcher and those individuals who are part of or are affected by the object of the study.

In a second moment, we used the narrative interview, with farmers participating since the beginning of the program, considering that they would have more knowledge on the FAP and with conditions to better measure the changes it provided in their families. Thus, from the total number of farmers (36), we extracted a subsample (10) to participate in the narrative interview, having as key question: I would like you to talk about your life, "before and after the FAP", listing the main

¹ Grisa and Porto (2015) ensure that the Food Acquisition Program, established by article 19 of Law 10.696/2003, has acquired relevance at the national and international level for articulating in the same public policy the strengthening family farming, the construction of markets for the commercialization of foods from their production, and the promotion of food and nutritional safety of families in situations of social and economic vulnerability.

modifications and how they interfered in your empowerment.

According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2002), the narrative interview is a method of collecting data that allows respondents to report their opinions and thoughts about a given topic freely, without the interviewer's influence.

As regards the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, we used the SPSS (Software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and the Iramuteq Lexical Analysis (Interface for Multidimensional Analysis of Texts and Questionnaires), respectively.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Meaning of Empowerment

According to a theoretical-conceptual framework, empowerment is a complex process and as such has different factors for its effectiveness. Therefore, for families to feel empowered, they must meet a variety of needs, ranging from addressing objective issues such as access to basic health services, care and education to subjective issues such as self-esteem and self-perception.

Therefore, we initially tried to understand farmers' perception on empowerment. For this purpose, the Free Association Test (FAT) allowed the participants of the research to express themselves freely on the topic. We asked them to say three words when they heard the term empowerment.

Data were organized in an open Office spreadsheet and later transposed to Iramuteq, where we carried out a prototypical analysis of the words said by the respondents, which allowed identifying the social representation of the individuals on empowerment, as shown in Fig. 1.

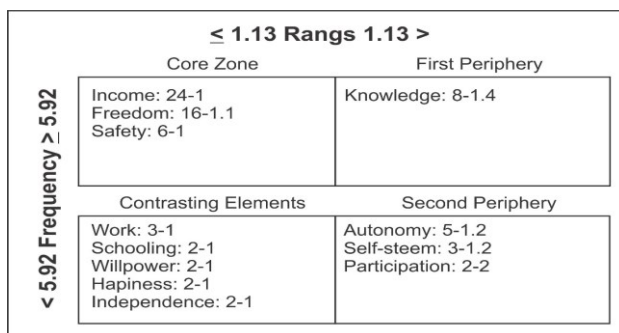


Fig. 1. Free Association Test (FAT) on empowerment
Source: Field survey data (2017), analyzed by Iramuteq.

According to Camargo and Justo (2016), in the first quadrant (upper left) are the words more frequent than the average and more readily evoked, which are the probable indicators of the central nucleus of farmers' representation on empowerment, which are income, freedom and/or security.

Thus, the results presented in the central nucleus meet the assertion of Amartya Sen (2000), which considers that certain freedoms certainly influence the attainment of freedoms of other genders, since the farmers' perception is that by acquiring more income, besides having the

guarantee of good feeding and comfort in their houses, they have more freedom and plans for the future of their families.

In the second quadrant (upper right), there is the first periphery, with the word with a high frequency, but which was not so readily evoked, namely: knowledge. In the third quadrant (lower left) are the elements that were promptly evoked, but often below average, whose words originated: work, education, willpower, happiness, tranquility and independence. The words exposed in these two quadrants reinforce the central nucleus, for being mentioned by the farmers during the narratives at various times.

Finally, in the fourth quadrant (lower right), are the elements with less frequency and greater order of evocation: autonomy, self-esteem and participation.

Another question on empowerment process based on the definition of Gita Sen (1997), cited by Romano (2002), stating that, in order for the empowerment process to be sustainable, different actors, governmental and non-governmental, that surround this process should investment.

Thus, we studied if the Food Acquisition Program raised some type of investment to favor the empowerment process of farmers and their families, either by the farmers' group, internal actors, or even by external actors such as EMATER and City Hall. From the data collection, EMATER was the main investment and incentive agent, as seen in the following statements:

“Regarding the investments with the FAP, it was done by the EMATER team, an external agent, through active search and incentive (Respondent 1)”.

“In the case, EMATER made these investments, giving us the opportunity to participate in these programs, to sell what we plant. (Respondent 10)”.

“If it were not for EMATER we wouldn't even know about these projects; they come after us (Respondent 16)”.

Manfiolli (2014) corroborates with the previously result on the importance of EMATER for family farmers. According to the author, technical assistance, besides being crucial for production guidelines, it also contributes to the dissemination of information and knowledge to this category. Therefore, the providers of technical assistance can be an important agent in the empowerment process.

Thus, accessing public policies can provide greater information and knowledge for its beneficiaries, contributing to greater autonomy in their lives. In the FAP case, besides information and knowledge, it also provides income safety for the farming families, as seen in the following reports:

“When you have more money, you have autonomy (Respondent 27)”.

“Yes, because if we consider our ancestors, they were rich and had land, then they were rich and had money, today, a rich person has knowledge and information (Respondent 29)”.

“When I heard about this program, I was like, this program is better than Bolsa Familia Program, because we will get paid for our work. We will produce and have somewhere to sell (Respondent 17)”.



These statements can be compared with the results previously presented on FAT, in which income was the main word evoked by the respondents when referring to the meaning of empowerment. They also reaffirm the importance of knowledge/ information in the opportunities of choice and decision-making process. Hentz (2016) corroborates this statement by presenting as part of the results of his study that, upon entering the Food Acquisition Program, farmers are investing more in knowledge and skills, which contribute to positive changes in productive processes, allowing them greater security for marketing their products, as well as greater freedom of choice.

Still on the gains provided by the FAP, the respondents were asked if the program had given them greater access to training, another fundamental element for implementing the empowerment process. For that matter, there was a balance in the answers, since 18 (50.0%) farmers said yes, while 17 (47.2%) reported no, and only one (2.8%) did not know or did not answer the question. According to the statements, training is generally offered by the National Rural Learning Service (SENAR), Center of Alternative Technologies of Zona da Mata (CAT) and EMATER, whose content ranges from good manufacturing practice techniques to learning new skills, such as courses related to the integral use of food.

According to Romano (2002) another important variable for the understanding of the empowerment process is the analysis of existing power relations, since empowerment and power are inseparable factors. In this regard, we asked them about the extension of their capacity to exercise power, taking into account the different forms of existing power; that is, *the power over, power for, power with, power from within*. In addition to answering whether they had this increased power, they also reported what kind of power they considered to have. From the totality of the respondents, 28 (77.8%) stated that FAP increased their power capacity, while seven (19.4%) said that the program did not contribute and only 1 (2.8) said that this amplification of power was partial.

Regarding the form or type of power, the reports were diverse. Some reports stated that the program has provided more security of income and, consequently, greater purchasing power which, according to Romano (2002), is the *power over*; in this case, over financial resources. They also explained that because they are gathered through associations, exchanging experiences and knowledge, they feel more powerful for having better negotiation and decision conditions, with the classification of *power with*.

3.2 Perceptions of Farmers on the FAP

One of the main objectives with the FAP creation was to strengthen the family farmers, assisting the old claims of this category. This strengthening would come from the opening of markets for those workers who make their living from the land. In addition, this program covered other indirect benefits such as the economic and social inclusion of families, as well as the rescue of traditional community practices.

Several studies, such as those by Vogt and Souza (2009) and Moreno (2012), verified the program importance for

the strengthening of family farming, which, in addition to economic issues, have contributed to greater proximity between producers and consumers and consequently more commitment between them, as well as bringing about more union between the farmers, who have been politically strengthened through their organizations and associations.

All farmers stated that FAP promoted the strengthening of family farming through different factors, such as greater union among farmers through associations; guarantee of commercialization and recognition of the importance of family farming for the promotion of good food, as stated in the following reports:

“The strengthening of family farming happened because we now have greater visibility (respondent 1)”.

“The strengthening of family farming occurred because now there is greater bonding with everyone (respondent 3)”.

“The strengthening of family farming was due to the guarantee of commercialization (respondent 5)”.

Another item the study evaluated concerns the economic and social inclusion of family farmers. Of the 36 respondents, 34 consider FAP an important mechanism for the implementation of this inclusion, and only two farmers did not know or did not answer the question. Of those who answered affirmatively to the question, they indicated that, in addition to having their purchasing and negotiating power increased, they also had an expansion in their networking, as observed in the following reports:

“There was the economic and social inclusion of farming families (respondent 5)”.

“I think that social inclusion happened with the expansion of contacts and values from the FAP (respondent 8)”.

Vogt and Souza (2009) allude to the importance of the FAP for social inclusion of family farmers by reporting that this program values and stimulates the union of its beneficiaries through associations and cooperatives, thus contributing to the expansion of contacts and closer social relations.

We also verified whether the FAP had repercussions on self-esteem, motivation and self-perception on the course of their lives and social opportunities of the family farmers. Of the 36 respondents, 32 stated that the program had provided these benefits to participating farmers for different reasons, such as a sense of belonging to their community and greater financial security, enabling them to plan for the future of their families. Only 4 farmers did not know or did not answer the question.

Finally, we analyzed if, services with the FAP, the families had basic resources; access to other public policies; information; training; social and political participation; sufficient improvement of capacities to initiate empowerment process and become agents of their own destiny. Of the 36 residents, 26 were positive, 4 replied that the program did not provide these gains and 6 did not know or did not answer the question. Those who answered affirmatively stated that in addition to increasing family incomes, the program contributes to a better harmony among them, as well as fostering the exchange of



knowledge and experiences. Those who said they did not recognize these benefits reported that the delay in project approval and resource release, as well as the low quota per farmer, considerably reduces the contributions of the FAP to the development of families and, consequently, for their empowerment.

3.3. *Implications of the FAP on Farmers' Empowerment*

By analyzing the narrative interviews, we aimed to identify whether internal factors such as improved self-esteem and motivation were mentioned, as well as external factors such as access to resources and basic services, which are fundamental for empowerment process effectiveness.

The results indicated similarities and differences in the participants' speeches. Regarding the similarities, all of them consider the FAP an important marketing channel for their production and, at the same time, a source of income for the family. For some, this income is an extra; although some respondents described it as being crucial for the maintenance of their families, according to the reports:

“Oh, a lot has changed, because to begin with we have some income. We had nothing before, or had only when we harvested coffee, things like that. Once the CONAB project has started, we started having an income, which is a help at home. It changed, because after that we built the balcony. We have tile in the house. I think it has changed a lot! (Respondent 3)”

“Look, it was something positive, because it is as I said, it is an income supplement, when it comes, it's always welcome. People who say they do not need money are lying. It should not be like this, but money moves everything. I already had a good structure, but it got better (Respondent 7)”

In this sense, Agapto et al., (2012) also describe the FAP as an important means of increasing the income of the farming families. In the words of the authors: "There was also a significant improvement in the income of the families of the farmers, and in some cases, the resources coming from the FAP assume a priority function in the maintenance of the families." (AGAPTO et al., 2012, p. 18)

Other issues mentioned by the respondents considered as internal factors were the elevation of self-esteem and motivation, as well as the sense of security and freedom occasioned by their inclusion in the FAP. Although being cited by men, these feelings were mostly reported by women, who showed great satisfaction in having the opportunity to work at home, reconciling the activities of the FAP with the care of housing and children. In addition to having their own income, they are no longer economically dependent on husbands, as seen in the following report:

“For me, at the time I had no products, when I was not part in the program, I just stayed at home, taking care of the boy. I had no money for anything, for myself, so when I had this opportunity it was good because I had an income that I did not have so far. I could have things that sometimes I wanted to buy but couldn't. Yes, it was very good (Respondent 9)”

Cavalcanti (2016) corroborates the premise that women are responsible for the main reports of financial independence, since women farmers declared that, with the possibility of marketing their production by the FAP and obtaining their own income, they were able to acquire material goods for themselves and their family, in addition to contributing to their homes improvements, which was only in charge of the men before the program. Therefore, they said they feel more useful, pleased and with greater autonomy.

In addition to the positive aspects, there were also some negative points regarding the FAP. There was a unanimous report on the high bureaucracy for membership and permanence in the program, as well as the delay in releasing payments and lack of continuity. These factors, according to the respondents, often discourage them, since they also cause losses to the farmers who have the program as the main means of selling their production. With the delay in the approval and release of the projects, the produced food is lost when not absorbed by the markets.

In general, in narrative interviews, there was an oral manifestation of both internal and external factors to the empowerment process, since they reported issues such as access to public policies and income growth, external factors that directly interfere with internal issues, such as elevated self-esteem and motivation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the repercussions of the FAP on the empowerment process of its beneficiaries has taken into account that access to public policy has a positive impact and contributes to increasing the social opportunities and capacities of individuals. The program significance, according to the social representation of producers, refers to commercialization and income safety, as well as greater union among the farmers, their recognition and visibility by the community. All these factors reflect on the increase in self-esteem and self-perception of its beneficiaries.

In general, the FAP provided greater access to information /knowledge and participation, through meetings of farmers, in addition to access to training, which contributed directly to an increase in the quality of produced food, as well as to the improvement of production practices.

In addition, the increase in family income has provided more safety and tranquility for them, as well as more comfort in their homes; as well as changes in existing power relations, either because farmers have more income or for being collectively strengthened.

Thus, there were positive changes in different dimensions of the lives of farmers and their families and, in many cases, the FAP even leveraged the empowerment process of many of them. However, sustainability of empowerment will only be achieved if investments are made on a continuous basis by the various actors, which are part of the empowerment process, mainly in terms of educational, health services and better income distribution. And finally, the shortcomings inherent in the operation of

the FAP, in terms of bureaucratic requirements and program discontinuity, need to be overcome in order to make the program more effective.

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