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Community Health, Education and Safety

FUNIDES Claims Weaknesses in Zero Hunger Program

Jul 14, 2007 – Nicaragua Network Hotline

The Nicaraguan Foundation for Social and Economic Development (FUNIDES) criticized the "Zero Hunger Program," with which the government will try to remove 75,000 families from poverty during the next five years.



Javier Argüello, executive director of FUNIDES, said that the program shows some weaknesses because it lacks a clear definition of objectives. The Zero Hunger Program proposes to make peasant families food self-sufficient by giving them plants and animals valued at US\$2,000.

Each family will pay back 20 percent of the value. The premise is that each peasant family is able to produce its own milk, meat, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and cereals, and in the medium-term, to establish local markets to sell the excess. Each nuclear family will receive a pregnant cow, a pregnant pig, six chickens, seeds, fruit and medicinal plants, revolving credit, a biodigester, and other agricultural inputs.

Biodigestors convert manure into methane cooking gas thus relieving the need to cook with wood. The program is based on the successful program developed by the Nicaraguan NGO CIPRES which has made more than 5,000 peasant families food self-sufficient in recent years.

Argüello said that 48% of the Nicaraguan population lives in poverty and 14.9% percent lives in extreme poverty. Based on such numbers, he estimates that the Zero Hunger Program will not cover all of the people who live in conditions of extreme poverty on a dollar or less a day. Official statistics indicate that the Nicaraguan population is reaching the 5.1 million people.

With obvious funding constraints it seems self-evident that the Zero Hunger Program alone can't meet all the needs of a rural population ignored since 1990 by successive neoliberal governments and denied credit by IMF structural adjustment conditions on international assistance. The removal of 75,000 families from the ravages of hunger seems to us to be something to celebrate not to criticize because there isn't enough money to bring everyone up from poverty.

Argüello also insisted that the success of this type of program is tied to "external monitoring" by international institutions. Silvana Flinn, investigator of FUNIDES, said that families selected to benefit under the Zero Hunger Program must be chosen by technical and nonpolitical criteria. "It is important that we to know the beneficiary selection process and that the program is not politicized, to assure its effectiveness," he added.

FUNIDES also criticized the government's treatment of the program budget. "It is necessary to present the budget, which permits us to make an analysis of the structure of costs." Argüello added that the budgetary structure of the program is not known. He indicated that the released budget shows that over 25% will go to administrative expenses, which he considers a little high, and hopes that lowering it will improve the logistic capacity.

He also said that the beneficiary families need training in order to know how to administer the productive assets that they will receive and so that they can do more with them and not consume them immediately due to their own necessities. Also, due the families' present conditions, there is a danger that a permanent

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dependency on the State is created. The CIPRES program involved intensive training and follow-up with recipients. It is not clear whether the Zero Hunger Program includes the same level of training.

The Nicaragua Network Hotline is prepared from the [Nicaragua News Service](#) and other sources. To receive a more extensive weekly summary of the news by e-mail or postal service, send a check for \$60.00 to: Nicaragua Network, 1247 E St., SE, Washington, DC 20003. To receive the Hotline by e-mail, please send an e-mail to: nicanet@afgj.org from the address which should receive the Hotline.

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