

Research Article

Food Security as a Contribution to Knowledge in Organizational Studies: The Venezuelan Public Sector

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Abstract

This research presents a reflective analysis regarding the relevance of food security within the Venezuelan public sector, specifically framed within organizational studies. The primary objective is to contribute to knowledge generation in social sciences by examining the intersection of organizational contexts and food security. The study explores the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the current social situation in Venezuela, highlighting the vulnerability of the food sector as a direct consequence of prevailing public policies and institutional transformations. Methodologically, the work is designed as a qualitative, documentary, critical, and hermeneutic review. It aims to encourage deeper academic inquiry into food security as a strategic pillar for global development and a matter of urgent human need. The analysis traces the institutional changes that have shaped the agri-food sector since the 1990s, noting how economic factors play a significant role in production and consumption. Furthermore, it addresses the impact of the 2015 oil price drop and subsequent hyperinflation, which reached 200% by 2023, severely restricting access to basic products. Data from the World Food Programme indicates that 24.4% of the population suffers from moderate food insecurity. By integrating perspectives from management and organizational theories, the study seeks to build a symbiosis between citizen participation and organizational entities. Ultimately, the research calls for the development of humane leadership styles and innovative organizational models for decision-making to address the ongoing socio-economic crisis.

Keywords

Food Security, Organizational Studies, Public Sector, Venezuela, Food Sector Qualitative Research, Public Policies

1. Introduction

In the 1990s, Venezuela began a process of redefining the state, embodied in a new constitutional framework, regulations, programs, and initiatives that established guidelines for transformation, ranging from objectives to mechanisms for the design and implementation of public policies [1]. These changes created a highly complex political scenario, resulting

from resistance from sectors opposed to the new visions of government and state administration.

The new political framework and the institutional transformations it generated required the incorporation of innovative strategies in the public policy formulation phase. This was

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particularly true in the agri-food sector, given that it is a complex and varied field of study, whose object involves very diverse phenomena and relationships. In effect, the food and nutrition function can be placed at the intersection of “the biological,” “the social,” and “the cultural.” [9]. Likewise, the activities and processes necessary to achieve a continuous supply of products within food systems are developed through the participation of multiple agents from different economic sectors.

Most countries generally operate within market economies, which gives economic factors a significant role in explaining food issues, both in terms of production and consumption. This gives rise to food security, which consists of ensuring, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life [4]. In contrast, “food insecurity” is said to exist when people are undernourished due to physical unavailability, lack of social or economic access, and insufficient food consumption [15].

This research aims to present a reflective analysis of the relevance of food security in the Venezuelan public sector in organizational studies, as a contribution to generating knowledge in the social sciences and in the organizational context. It seeks to understand the epistemological and ontological dimensions of food security and the current social situation in the country, highlighting the vulnerability of the food sector in Venezuela, which is a consequence of the public policies currently in place.

It will be developed as follows:

1. Introduction.
2. Epistemological and ontological overview.
3. Country situation.
4. Social symbiosis.
5. Hermeneutic analysis.
6. References.

2. Epistemological and Ontological Overview

Over the last decade, agricultural development and food security strategies in the country have been severely affected by recurring economic and political crises, which have had a critical impact on both agri-food production and access to basic foodstuffs for the population. This critical situation has been exacerbated by the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Venezuela by North American and European countries, mainly the US, which have created considerable obstacles to oil production and marketing, the country's main source of income and foreign exchange.

Thus, beginning in 2015, the crisis deepened with the sharp drop in oil prices, which severely limited the flow of foreign exchange and the capacity to import food. This scenario triggered an uncontrolled rise in inflation, further restricting the

population's access to basic products. As a result, the food crisis worsened, leading to an increase in cases of malnutrition and encouraging the proliferation of illegal markets where food was sold at exorbitant prices.

Likewise, the result of macroeconomic and agri-food policies and institutional changes caused a sharp decline in agricultural and agro-industrial production. This was compounded by a drastic decrease in agri-food imports [8]. In this context, the government implemented public policies to supply specific items, such as corn, with the aim of guaranteeing food security for the population.

In 2016, the government established the National Planting Plan in response to this food crisis, with the aim of increasing domestic food production. In addition, the National Institute of Nutrition (INN) designed and implemented the National Nutritional Vulnerability Plan, which provided micro and macronutrient supplementation to children aged 0 to 5, pregnant women, and lactating women, as well as food assistance through the school cafeterias of the School Feeding Program (PAE). In the same year, control and execution of the Great Sovereign and Secure Supply Mission (GMASS) was handed over to the President of the Republic and the military, which involved administering price controls, imports, and food distribution.

By 2017, the shortage of medicines and food had worsened, leading to the implementation in 2018 of the Patria System, a control mechanism for the distribution of subsidized food, and price adjustments for some basic products. Then, in 2019, transactions in dollars began to access food and other goods, as well as the implementation of the Plan of the Nation 2019-2025 [7].

In 2020, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, problems such as poverty and inequality worsened, making access to, production, and distribution of food even more difficult. To mitigate the social crisis, the government increased the allocation of vouchers through the Fatherland Card, including: the economic war voucher, the voucher for people with disabilities, the voucher for the elderly, and the voucher for heads of household. In 2021, the dollarization process continued, and there was an increase in the production of items such as corn, rice, and vegetables, along with a reactivation of the private sector, which increased its participation in food production and distribution.

For its part, the World Food Program reported that 24.4% of the population suffers from moderate food insecurity, while 7.9% suffers from severe food insecurity [13]. It also notes that the federal entities that record the prevalence of severe food insecurity by federal entity are as follows: with less than 6.6% are the states of Lara, Carabobo, Aragua, Cojedes, Miranda, Vargas, Sucre, and Nueva Esparta; between 6.6% and 10.8% are the states of Táchira, Mérida, Barinas, Portuguesa, Trujillo, Monagas, Anzoátegui, and Bolívar; and with more than 10.9% are the states of Zulia, Falcón, Delta Amacuro, and Amazonas.

Food insecurity has led to food shortages and high rates of

undernourishment in the country, demanding new public policies that not only address access to food but also economic and social aspects which, when related to organizational studies, could give rise to valuable tools for interpretation, visions, and subjective constructions of the population that can build knowledge and help in understanding society. Public policies are defined as a set of measures designed to achieve priority social goals or solve problems of collective interest, thus guaranteeing the well-being of the population.

3. Country Situation

It is estimated that some 2.3 billion people worldwide were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024. Globally and in almost all regions, the prevalence of food insecurity is higher in rural than in urban areas, and affects more women than men [5]. However, the actions taken by communities to guarantee their food supply, as well as their organization to counteract food insecurity as a social phenomenon from their own spaces, are unknown, and where OEs represent a fundamental pillar not only for their research and knowledge generation.

On the other hand, in Venezuela, in May, the Total Basic Basket stood at (US\$1149) and with a minimum wage of 130 bolivars, less than \$1 according to the current exchange rate, which exceeds 154 bolivars per dollar [2] and with bonuses assigned by the state to public officials, without affecting their salaries, of up to \$130 per month [3], which is an insult to Venezuelans and a problem that needs to be resolved urgently, highlighting food insecurity and the pressing need to study and address it in a comprehensive manner.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 1,179 cases of acute malnutrition were recorded in children under five during January and February 2022. In its latest report, OCHA highlights that the cases were located in 20 of the country's 23 states, with Bolívar and Miranda accounting for 45% of the total. All these children received treatment through United Nations partner organizations. Thus, the country shows that acute malnutrition stands at 10% in some localities in Barinas, Delta Amacuro, and Táchira [10].

Meanwhile, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) reported for 2023 that, despite some economic improvements that had helped to curb hyperinflation, the food security situation in Venezuela remained “disturbing” [14].

By 2023, according to Statista, Venezuela had an inflation rate of 200%, affecting access to food [11].

4. Social Symbiosis

However, from the perspective of Management and Organizational Theories, food security aims to present an interpretive paradigm, while also guiding the argument from an ontological,

epistemological, and methodological worldview. This information is useful not only for investigating the effects of policies and programs aimed at improving food security, but also for highlighting the symbiosis between food security and citizen participation and OEs as the richness of this fusion that goes beyond food production, which implies recognizing the right of organized communities in the design of public food policies [6].

Therefore, public policies on food security in Venezuela should be approached from an interpretive, critical, and hermeneutic paradigm, which involves viewing organizational transformation as a continuous process of reconstruction and joint construction of economic, cultural, and social aspects [8], all of which is related to organizational studies insofar as it involves understanding the social visions and behaviors related to the food issue, which, in turn, demands a new way of looking at social reality [12].

This interpretive approach is useful for investigating the effects of policies and programs aimed at improving food security in the country.

5. And for Reflection

Addressing food security in organizational studies requires proposals that are generated through the participation of the people, respecting their culture, history, and social context, in order to understand the interaction and real needs of communities. As evidenced by the public sector, it has been hit hard by government decisions implemented over the last 15 years, which have failed to respond to the country's moral, economic, political, and social crisis. By allowing for plurality and transdisciplinarity in all sectors, both public and private, a process of restructuring the country will begin. Finally, new organizational models urgently need to be developed for decision-making. These new models lead to more humane leadership styles, without losing sight of the strategic aspects of achieving not only food security as a specific problem but also problems that arise from its absence.

Understanding that the need to feed oneself is part of being cognizant and that its epistemology transcends the sacred right to choose food, it is this reality that warrants research into that individual experience for the production of new constructs that arise from the interpretation of a profound observation of human actions, with a vision that promotes research into food security within organizational studies and can contribute innovative knowledge that.

Abbreviations

BCV	Central Bank of Venezuela
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GMASS	Great Sovereign and Secure Supply Mission
INN	National Institute of Nutrition
OE	Organizational Entities

OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PAE	School Feeding Program
WFP	World Food Programme

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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