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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR: SPECIFICS OF FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

Aim. To identify and characterize the features of the formation and implementation of the food sovereignty policy in the Republic of Ecuador.

Methodology. With the help of a retrospective analysis, the author identified the reasons for the integration of the concept of Food sovereignty into the legal space of the Republic of Ecuador. The method of unity of the logical and historical was used to determine the role of the New social movements in the process of institutionalization of the idea of Food sovereignty. Using the method of comparative analysis, the author determined the discursive similarity between the idea of Food sovereignty and the principles of Andean cosmogony. Using the method of secondary data analysis and an institutional approach, official documents of the state were studied and classified, authorized executive authorities were identified, specialized programs contributing to the implementation of the food sovereignty policy were described.

Results. According to the results of the study, the author concluded that the policy of food sovereignty is contradictory, characterized by asymmetry in land ownership, financial prioritization of large agri-industrial business, monopolization of sales markets and export-oriented production of "flex crops".

Research implications. The author identified the key aspects of the state's food sovereignty policy, noted its strengths and weaknesses, outlined the contours of further development. The forecast of four alternative scenarios for the development of the Ecuadorian food system until 2030 is presented.

Keywords: Ecuador, Latin America, food sovereignty, food regime, food security, globalization, international relations, world politics

ПОЛИТИКА ПРОДОВОЛЬСТВЕННОГО СУВЕРЕНИТЕТА В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ ЭКВАДОР: СПЕЦИФИКА ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ И РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ

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Аннотация

Цель. Определить и охарактеризовать особенности формирования и реализации политики продовольственного суверенитета в Республике Эквадор.

Процедура и методы. С помощью ретроспективного анализа были установлены причины интеграции концепции продовольственного суверенитета в конституционно-правовое поле Республики Эквадор. Опора на метод единства исторического и логического способствовала определению роли «Новых социальных движений» в процессе институционализации идеи продовольственного суверенитета. При помощи метода компаративного анализа была зафикс-

сирована дискурсивная близость между идеей продовольственного суверенитета и принципами Андской космогонии. С помощью метода анализа вторичных данных и институционального подхода были изучены и классифицированы официальные документы государства, определены уполномоченные органы исполнительной власти и описаны профильные программы, способствующие реализации политики продовольственного суверенитета.

Результаты. По итогам исследования сделан вывод о непоследовательной траектории политики продовольственного суверенитета, характеризующейся асимметрией в землевладении, финансовой приоритезацией крупного агропромышленного бизнеса, монополизацией рынков сбыта и экспортоориентированным производством «гибких растительных культур».

Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость. Отмечены ключевые аспекты политики продовольственного суверенитета, выявлены её сильные и слабые стороны, очерчены контуры дальнейшего развития. Представлена прогностическо-иллюстративная модель четырёх альтернативных сценариев развития продовольственной системы Эквадора до 2030 г.

Ключевые слова: Эквадор, Латинская Америка, продовольственный суверенитет, продовольственный режим, продовольственная безопасность, глобализация, международные отношения, мировая политика

Introduction

Today, despite scientific and technological progress, about 800 million people on our planet do not have enough quality food for their active and healthy life [7, p. v]. The problem of food shortage remains relevant for 6.5% of residents of such a dynamically developing historical and geographical region as Latin America and the Caribbean [8, p. 6]. The Republic of Ecuador is one of the leaders of this negative regional trend owing to the fact that 15% of its population suffers from hunger and malnutrition [9, p. 144]. The state authorities used the strategy of Food sovereignty [3, c. 667–668; 19, c. 164; 20, c. 91; 21, c. 113] as an experimental solution capable of correcting the current negative situation. Actually, this article will be devoted to the study of the main components of the food sovereignty policy.

The political and economic background

The institutions of Global governance, using the formulas of the Green Revolution and Structural adjustment programs (SAPs), stimulated the inclusion of Ecuador in the system of international division of labor, giving it the status of an exporter of “exotic goods” [14, p. 112]. The Ecuadorian authorities, observing the principles of the Washington Consensus, activated the De-regulation

option, which favored the import of basic foodstuffs. Thus, in the period between the 1980s and the 1990s, Ecuador confidently advanced towards the modernization of the domestic agricultural sector based on the cultivation of monocultures and the consolidation of “agri-food elites” engaged in the export of such exquisite goods as cocoa, shrimp, bananas and flowers [13, p. 1204]. In the process of large-scale reconstruction of the agricultural sector, state support for small farmers (whose activity was aimed at producing food for the domestic market) sharply decreased, following a decrease in prices for their products. The changed vector of national interests of the Ecuadorian government led to the exclusion of peasants from the general process of “renovation” of the agri-food sector of the state, reoriented to capital-intensive technologies and market competition. For a country where a third of the population historically lives in rural areas (Fig. 1), the process of “agri-food globalization” has accelerated the marginalization of villagers.

A long cycle of neoliberal transformations aimed at privatizing ecosystems and opening up the domestic economy for the benefit of market conditions ultimately caused a surge of public indignation and provoked an impulse of large-scale social mobilization.

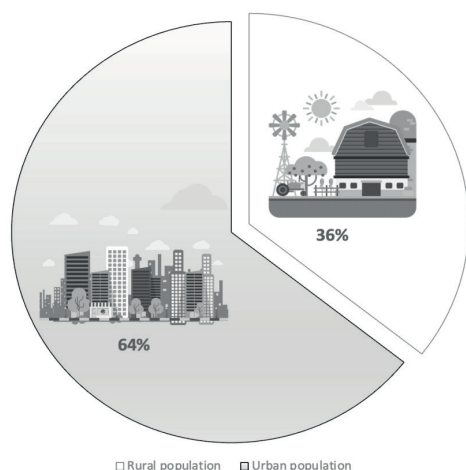


Fig. 1 / Рис. 1. The proportion of urban and rural population in The Republic of Ecuador in 2021 / Соотношение городского и сельского населения в Республике Эквадор (в % на 2021 г.)

The source: FAO. The Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database.

Abstract at: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/58> (accessed: 19.03.2024)

Food sovereignty: from social mobilization to constitutional integration

In the 1990s, the so-called “New social movements” expressed a concentrated public distrust of the policies conducted by the Ecuadorian authorities [11, p. 41]. The participants of the “New social movements” were new elements previously excluded from the socio-political process: representatives of indigenous peoples, environmentalists, supporters of gender equality. The key factors that raised the degree of social tension, accelerated the process of social involvement, were: financial debt; reduction of social security spending; uneven distribution of wealth; tax evasion; the collapse of the domestic food market; widespread corruption; oppression and deportation of indigenous peoples; destruction of the ecological fund of the country [13, p. 1204]. The main claims of the new associative interest groups affected the following range of problems: access to land, legalization and protection of ancestral territories, bilingual education and the

polyethnicity of the nation [4, p. 337–357]. In this ultimatum context, the idea of Food sovereignty has been established as a general political guideline for the so-called “Mega bloc” – a quartet of the most authoritative public organizations in the country (*FENOCIN*, *CONFEUNASSC*, *CNC-EA*, *FENACLE*) [24, p. 39].

The rallying of the leaders of this association led to the establishment of the Agrarian Committee (*Span.* – *Mesa Agraria*) – a special organization that became a political associative space (*Span.* – *Espacio de encuentro*) [27, p. 29]. The culmination of *Mesa Agraria*’s political activity was the signing of an “electoral pact” with the future President of the country (R. Correa), who promised to carry out an “Agrarian revolution” based on the principles of Food sovereignty [15, p. 33–55]. The symbol of the restrained promises was the fact that in the twentieth Constitution of Ecuador, food sovereignty was enshrined as a legal instrument (Article No. 281), with the help of which the new President R. Correa launched the project of “Integral Agrarian Reform” – a comprehensive solution to historically dramatic problems for the country related to social, economic, natural-ecological, ethnic and cultural-linguistic aspects [23, p. 49–54].

Food sovereignty as a component of the Andean cosmogony

The process of incorporation of the principles of Food sovereignty into the legal space of Ecuador was synchronized with the procedure of institutionalization of the concept of “Good life” (*Span.* – *Buen Vivir* [1, p. 50; 25, p. 77]), based on the basic American Indian principles (justice, equality, honor and solidarity) [26, p. 104]. In accordance with the Andean cosmogony (religious and scientific ideals of the ancient Indians of Latin America), the concept of *Buen Vivir* translates the widespread moral sanctions of the joint life of individuals and produces a model of harmonious coexistence of man, society and nature (*Fig. 2*).

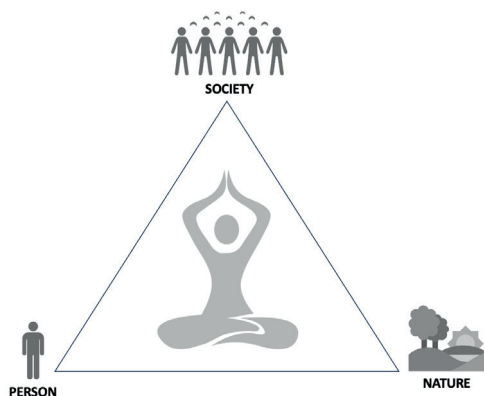


Fig. 2 / Рис. 2. The trinitarian model of harmonious coexistence of man, society and nature / Тринитарная модель гармоничного сосуществования человека, общества и природы

The source: compiled by the author

This is an innovative ontological understanding of the relationship between human will and the supernatural force of nature, recognizing their mutual penetration and suggesting overcoming the so-called “Metabolic rift” (the distance between a rural producer and an urban consumer of food [10, p. 380]), which is an integral part of capitalism. According to this point of view, “Nature” becomes a subject of law and exists not as an “external” factor of production, subordination and exploitation, but as an “immanent” element of heritage, respect and reproduction of life. It is necessary to add that the achievement of *Buen Vivir* implies overcoming the discursive hegemony of such classical Western ideas as development, consumer individualism and accumulation due to economic growth.

Conceptual resistance leads to the fact that *Buen Vivir* is understood not as an “alternative development”, but rather as an “option to the idea of development” that goes beyond the framework of modern Eurocentrism. Thus, the Indianist idea of *Buen Vivir*, based on the triumph of the “economy without growth”, as well as on the principles of ecocentrism, communitarianism, egalitarianism, pluralism and biological socialism, seems to be an organic complement to the strategy of food sovereignty, based on the principles of coevolutionism, polycentrism,

multiculturalism, environmentalism, protectionism, anti-liberalism, alter-globalization and anti-imperialism.

Food sovereignty: a course towards institutionalization

It is not surprising that the idea of food sovereignty has become a legal instrument used by the Government of Ecuador to achieve a *Buen Vivir* for the entire population of the country. Thus, the status of food sovereignty in cooperation with *Buen Vivir* was officially enshrined not only in the “Constitution of the state” (Article No. 281¹) and in the “Organic law” (Article No. 22²), but also in the “National development plans” by three presidents of the state: Rafael Correa (in 2007³, in 2009⁴ and in 2013⁵), Lenin Moreno (in 2017⁶) and Guillermo Lasso (in 2021⁷). At the same time, spe-

¹ Constitución de la República del Ecuador 2008. Abstract at: <https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2008/6716.pdf> (accessed: 31.08.2023).

² Ley Orgánica del Régimen de Soberanía Alimentaria (LORSA), No. 583 de 5 de mayo de 2009. Abstract at: <https://foalex.fao.org/docs/pdf/ecu88076.pdf> (accessed: 31.08.2023).

³ Gobierno Nacional de la Republica del Ecuador. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007–2010. Quito. 2007. Abstract at: <http://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/09/Plan-Nacional-Desarrollo-2007-2010.pdf> (accessed: 31.08.2023).

⁴ Gobierno Nacional de la Republica del Ecuador. Plan Nacional de desarrollo Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2009-2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural Versión Resumida. Quito. 2009. Abstract at: [http://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/07/Plan_Nacional_para_el_Buen_Vivir_\(version_resumida_en_espanol\).pdf](http://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/07/Plan_Nacional_para_el_Buen_Vivir_(version_resumida_en_espanol).pdf) (accessed: 31.08.2023).

⁵ Gobierno Nacional de la Republica del Ecuador. Buen Vivir Plan Nacional 2013-2017. Quito. 2013. Abstract at: https://www.unicef.org/ecuador/Plan_Nacional_Buen_Vivir_2013-2017.pdf (accessed: 31.08.2023).

⁶ Gobierno Nacional de la Republica del Ecuador. Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2017-2021. Quito. 2017. Abstract at: https://extranet.who.int/countryplanning-cycles/sites/default/files/planning_cycle_repository/ecuador/ecu_plan_nacional_buen_vivir_2017_2021.pdf (accessed: 31.08.2023).

⁷ Gobierno Nacional de la Republica del Ecuador. 2021. Plan de Creación de Oportunidades 2021-2025. Quito. 2021. Abstract at: https://observatorioplanificacion.cepal.org/sites/default/files/plan/files/Plan-de-Creación-de-Oportunidades-2021-2025-Aprobado_compressed.pdf (accessed: 31.08.2023).

cial executive authorities were authorized to implement the goals outlined in official documents.

The main ministries, departments and committees focused on the formation and implementation of food sovereignty policy are 1) Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries (*Span.* – MAGAP); 2) Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (*Span.* – MIES); 3) The National Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy (*Span.* – IEPS); 4) National Secretariat for Planning and Development (*Span.* – SENPLADES); 5) Department of General Coordination of Commercial Networks (*Span.* – CGRC); 6) Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Food Sovereignty (*Span.* – COPISA); 7) System of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty (*Span.* – SISAN).

Political projects based on the principles of food sovereignty

The main profile programs of executive authorities and expert groups are

1. National food storage system (*Span.* – UNA). Objective: regulation of the system of purchase, storage and marketing of basic agricultural products (for example: corn, rice, soybeans);

2. The National Programme of Inclusive Rural Business (*Span.* – PRONERI). Objective: to link small agricultural producers and their associations with the agri-industrial complex and the main food distribution companies [28, p. 115–134];

3. School of the Agrarian Revolution (*Span.* – ERA). Objective: transition to agrieological methods of production and provision of educational support to small producers, including the advantages of traditional and innovative knowledge;

4. Lands Plan (*Span.* – *Plan Tierras*). Objective: to provide small family producers with access to land resources.

Metabolic rift: ways to overcoming

Government support for the purchase, processing and commercialization of peas-

ant food has been converted into the popularization of food fairs, peasant markets and farm shops. The decision to reduce the “Metabolic rift” and provide basic food to vulnerable groups of the population was the establishment in Ecuador of the so-called “Community food baskets” (*Span.* – *Canasta Comunitaria*).

Canasta Comunitaria is an association of urban food buyers, consolidated on the basis of various social institutions (religious, educational) or on the principles of neighborhood. The members of each *Canasta Comunitaria* are moving towards affordable, environmentally friendly and healthy food and join forces for the wholesale purchase of food, which gives them significant savings by minimizing costs [17, p. 22–24]. The priority of the *Canasta Comunitaria* project is to inform customers about the origin of food and create a system “from farm to fork”. Since 2000, the *Canasta Comunitaria* has been developing rapidly and reached about 1,500 urban buyers, about 600 agrieological farms, as well as representatives of government structures and leaders of various international non-profit organizations (such as *Heifer*, *Swiss Aid*, *World neighbors*).

Today, *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía* is the most popular “Community food baskets” in Ecuador, inspiring the formation of various national organizations and social movements [12, p. 9–11]. Respect for agrieological practices and solidarity with the principles of food sovereignty contributed to the creation of large-scale public actions. The national campaign “How rich is she!” (*Span.* – ¡Que Rico Es!) is one of such projects. The purpose of the event (held twice a year) is to raise the level of consumer responsibility by highlighting the advantages of domestic agrieological products. Thus, the slogan “How delicious and healthy to eat from my land!” (*Span.* – ¡Que Rico Es Comer Sano y de mi Tierra!) is an integral element of the national campaign to promote food sovereignty – ¡Que Rico Es! [2, p. 125–126].

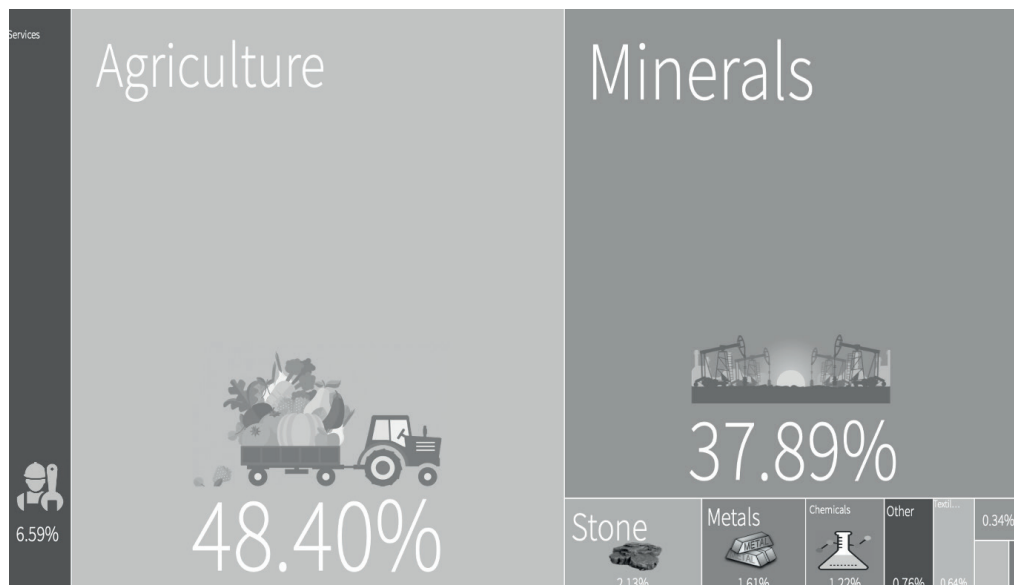


Fig. 3 / Рис. 3. The share of the agricultural sector in the total contingent of Ecuadorian exports in 2021 / Доля сельскохозяйственного сектора в общем контингенте эквадорского экспорта, 2021 г.

The source: ATLAS of economic complexity. Center for International Development at Harvard University. Abstract at: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/67/export-basket> (accessed: 19.03.2024).

Deviation from the strategy of food sovereignty

Since the 1970s, the sown area for traditional plant crops for domestic consumption (beans, lentils, cassava) has been reduced in favor of export-oriented goods (bananas, coffee, cocoa). The consistent intensification of the country's agri-industrial complex has led to impressive results, reflected today in the total volume of Ecuadorian exports (Fig. 3).

Due to the high competitiveness and growing added value of agribusiness products [22, p. 147–168], the Ecuadorian government returned to helping large agri-industrial producers who focused their commercial attention on the cultivation of such “flex crops” as the African oil palm, soybeans and sugar cane. The government's step towards the development of the model of industrial agriculture (*Span.* – fomento agropecuario) was qualified as evasion from the constitutional way (food sovereignty) of ensuring the *Buen Vivir* [14, p. 116].

The change in the agricultural course of the country was officially reinforced by the position of the former president of the country. During his TV show, R. Correa (September 1, 2012) made a statement about the need for legal rehabilitation of transgenic seeds and genetically modified crops. Thus, R. Correa defended genetic engineering and biotechnology and recognized constitutional article No. 401¹ as a mistake [27, p. 92].

The public speech of the former President of Ecuador caused a violent public reaction and was condemned by members of social movements. However, due to “the bureaucratic co-optation” of the leaders of social organizations, this criticism had no past expressiveness. Thus, the collapse of the active social core weakened the mobilization impulse of social movements capable of holding the government accountable for violating the law.

¹ Constitución de la República del Ecuador 2008. Abstract at: <https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2008/6716.pdf> (accessed: 31.08.2023).

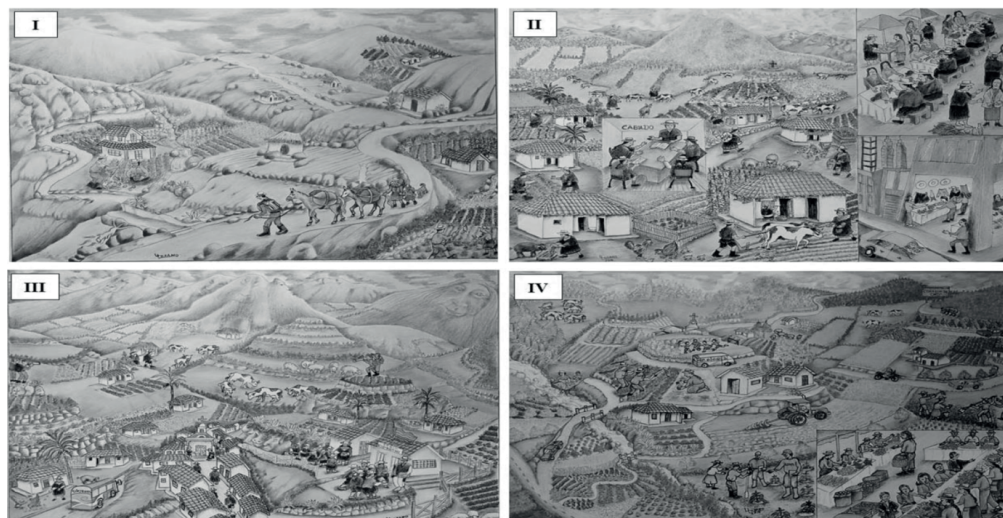


Fig. 4 / Рис. 4. Ecuador's food system: designing socio political forecast scenarios up to 2030 / Продовольственная система Эквадора: разработка социально-политических прогнозов до 2030 г.

The source: illustrated by Luis Lozano [24, p. 140]

As a result, the protection of the commercial interests of the “agri-industrial aristocracy” turned out to be a priority for the authorities, who ratified the law avoiding the constitutional ban on cultivating genetically modified plants for research purposes.¹ It should be added that the successor of President R. Correa (L. Moreno) institutionalized the officially presented unconstitutional position of his predecessor. This decision, adopted in June 2017, became a symbol not only of the transit of power, but also an expression of a certain legislative determination of L. Moreno.

Ecuador's food system: designing socio political forecast scenarios up to 2030

The ambiguity of the country's agri-food policy stimulated the construction of various forecasts. For example, one social group of representatives of the indigenous “Saraguro

people” modeled four scenarios for the development of the agro-food future of their country until 2030 (Fig. 4).

The constructed scenario plans consist of a tactical set of tools capable of anticipating a total agri-food disaster in Ecuador. At the same time, one of the long-term plans is “negative”, and the other three plans are “favorable”. In the first scenario, the agri-food policy of modern Ecuador does not change. This means the following:

1. Government support for small agri-food producers continues to decline;
2. Industrial production is expanding;
3. The diffusion of power is being abolished;
4. Urbanization is turning ecosystems into an industrial metropolis;
5. An “Environmental bankruptcy” is declared due to deforestation, soil erosion and lack of fresh water;
6. The government signs additional free trade agreements that encourage food imports
7. Local markets are flooded with imported products, which leads to the “capitulation” of a small agroecological producer [24, p. 141–148].

¹ Ley Orgánica de Agrobiodiversidad, Semillas y Fomento de la Agricultura Sustentable, Decreto No. SAN-2017-0119 de 5 de junio del 2017. Abstract at: <https://www.ecolex.org/details/legislation/ley-organica-de-agrobiodiversidad-semillas-y-fomento-de-la-agricultura-sustentable-lex-faoc168628/> (accessed: 29.08.2023).

The other three scenarios have not only a similar “optimistic” ending, but also have similar strategic characteristics. In this regard, we will limit ourselves to indicating their related features. And so, the Second, Third and Fourth scenarios are focused on the following signs:

1. Saving Orthodox culture and strengthening the identity of the Saraguro people by organizing gastronomic festivals, popularizing Andean recipes, promoting the Quechua language, spreading indigenous knowledge and promoting ethno-tourism;

2. Defense of a local food system based on self-sufficiency and the sale of agricultural surpluses on world markets;

3. Conducting agricultural activities near their homes at the expense of orchards and plots of land sown with corn, beans and pumpkin;

4. Environmentally friendly circulation of biological substances: farm animals are fed with household fodder (consisting of food waste), and organic waste derivatives (excrement) are fertilized;

5. Reducing rural migration: young people move to cities, but then return with ideas that promote a “Good life” in the countryside [24, p. 141–148].

Conclusion

Despite a significant rise in food self-sufficiency [5, p. 66–69], and a reduction in agricultural imports, the overall agri-food situation in Ecuador cannot be qualified as favorable. The reason for the current situation was the incorrect fulfillment of presidential promises to return the “Agrarian debt” to the population. The obligations were violated at the moment when former President R. Correa reoriented the largest part of state resources (intended to support small agriecological producers and promote local markets) in favor of the development of the agri-industrial sector.

The manifestation of a similar systemic contradiction, characterized as “Functional dualism [6, p. 82]”, was the dispersion of the potential of the peasantry with the simultaneously increasing power of agribusiness [5, p. 68].

The situation with the legal use of mutually exclusive legislative acts looks no less contradictory. A reflection of the so-called “normative dualism” was the signing by the former President of the country (L. Moreno) of the “National development plan” and the “Organic law on agrobiodiversity, seeds and the promotion of sustainable agriculture”. The first official document establishes the inviolability of the constitutional course on food sovereignty. The second legislative act, in turn, legalizes the cultivation of genetically engineered crops, which is unconstitutional and categorically unacceptable by the idea of food sovereignty.

Moreover, despite modern government initiatives, about 85% of family farmers have ownership rights to only 20% of agricultural land [18, p. 37]. The solid volume of natural resources concentrated by the “agri-food aristocracy” allows large private investors to exploit the country’s natural fund most efficiently and profitably for the state treasury. At the same time, the Government’s agricultural policy encourages the cultivation of monocultures, which makes small producers more dependent both on alienated means of production and on the conjuncture of global markets.

According to the author’s opinion, a new impulse of civil mobilization based on the legal platform of food sovereignty (regularly conceived as one side of a binary [16, p. 396]), as well as the mass popularization of the organizational model of *Canasta Comunitaria*, can seriously compete with the “corporate oligarchy” of Ecuador and quickly eliminate the “Metabolic rift” in society.

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