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Sustainable Development and the Challenge of Fight Hunger in the Pandemic Context: a study of the Mesa Brasil SESC Program

Desenvolvimento Sustentável e o Desafio do Combate à Fome no Contexto Pandêmico: um estudo do Programa Mesa Brasil SESC

Desarrollo Sostenible y el Desafío del Combate al Hambre en el Contexto de la Pandemia: un estudio del Programa Mesa Brasil SESC

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KEYWORDS

Food Insecurity. 2030 Agenda. Sustainable Development. Covid-19.

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the procedures and actions adopted by the Mesa Brasil SESC food bank, during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to ensure the maintenance of activities to combat food and nutritional insecurity. It's based on the literature that directly relates the issue of sustainability with food security and the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda, insofar as access to adequate food is a basic condition for human survival. This study is characterized as an applied research, as it generates knowledge for practical application. This is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of interviews, documents and reports from the Mesa Brasil SESC program, from Porto Alegre/RS. The main results indicate that the program was successful in its actions due to its timing and structure. The relevant contribution of food banks as a promoting agent for the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda is also evident. This research makes a contribution to the literature on sustainable development and food insecurity, while empirically examining whether food banks are significant actors in the fight against hunger. The interpretation of the data collected also contributes to the strategy and decision-making by managers of similar entities, not only in the context of pandemics, but also in other unexpected events.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Segurança alimentar.
Agenda 2030.
Desenvolvimento
sustentável. Covid-19.

Resumo: Este estudo tem o objetivo de investigar os procedimentos e ações adotados pelo banco de alimentos Mesa Brasil SESC, durante o período da pandemia da Covid-19, para garantir a manutenção das atividades de combate à insegurança alimentar e nutricional. Trata-se de um estudo descritivo e de abordagem qualitativa, realizado a partir da análise de entrevistas, documentos e relatórios do programa Mesa Brasil SESC, na cidade de Porto Alegre/RS. Os principais resultados evidenciam que o programa obteve êxito em suas ações por conta de sua ação imediata e infraestrutura. Da mesma forma, evidencia-se a relevante contribuição dos bancos de alimentos como agente promotor para o cumprimento da Agenda 2030. Esta pesquisa contribui para a literatura sobre desenvolvimento sustentável e a insegurança alimentar, ao examinar empiricamente se os bancos de alimentos são agentes significativos para o combate à fome. A interpretação dos dados coletados também contribui para a estratégia e tomada de decisões por parte dos gestores de entidades similares, não somente em contexto de pandemias, mas também em outros eventos inesperados.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Seguridad Alimentaria.
Agenda 2030. Desarrollo
Sostenible. Covid-19.

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar los procedimientos y acciones adoptadas por el banco de alimentos Mesa Brasil SESC, durante el período de la pandemia de Covid-19, con el fin de garantizar el mantenimiento de las actividades para combatir la inseguridad alimentaria y nutricional. Se basa en la literatura que relaciona directamente el tema de la sostenibilidad con la seguridad alimentaria y el logro de las metas de la Agenda 2030, en la medida en que el acceso a una alimentación adecuada es una condición básica para la supervivencia humana. Este estudio se caracteriza como una investigación aplicada, ya que genera conocimiento para su aplicación práctica. Se trata de un estudio descriptivo con abordaje cualitativo, basado en el análisis de entrevistas, documentos y relatos del programa Mesa Brasil SESC, en la ciudad de Porto Alegre/RS. Los principales resultados indican que el programa fue exitoso en sus acciones debido a su oportunidad y estructura. Asimismo, se evidencia la relevante contribución de los bancos de alimentos como agente promotor para el cumplimiento de la Agenda 2030. Este estudio hace una contribución a la literatura sobre desarrollo sostenible e inseguridad alimentaria, al tiempo que examina empíricamente si los bancos de alimentos son actores importantes en la lucha contra el hambre. La interpretación de los datos recolectados también contribuye a la estrategia y toma de decisiones por parte de directivos de entidades similares, no solo en el contexto de pandemias, sino también en otros eventos inesperados.

Introduction

Food security issues are directly linked to the theme of sustainable development, as access to food is one of the basic needs for human survival. It is estimated that more than 50% of the Brazilian population lives with some degree of food insecurity (Galindo et al., 2021; Rede PENSSAN, 2021) and the arrival of the new coronavirus has further aggravated existing inequalities, highlighting concerns about the population's exposure to food and nutritional insecurity (FNI) (Rede PENSSAN, 2021, Pinheiro et al., 2023).

The Covid-19 pandemic has directly affected more than 200 million people worldwide, and Brazil ranks second among the countries with the most deaths from the virus, behind only the United States (Nações Unidas, 2021a). Among the necessary measures to contain its spread, travel restrictions and the shutdown of basic services have contributed to increased unemployment and restricted access to food and other essential goods (FSIN, 2020; Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2020), intensifying families' exposure to poverty and hunger. The rapid spread of the virus and the severity of the disease have certainly brought and continue to bring worrying consequences for all spheres of society, and one of the most serious implications is the reduction in household income, which consequently increases the number of people affected by hunger (Neves et al., 2021; Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2020).

Given this context, it's clear that the crisis caused by the pandemic could negatively impact the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the 2030 Agenda back in 2015 (Júnior et al., 2020). Specifically, SDG 2, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (Nações Unidas, 2021b; Rede PENSSAN, 2021), appears to be threatened when considering the scenarios expected beyond the pandemic.

The increase in food insecurity levels and lack of healthcare, whether due to travel restrictions or inadequate healthcare systems, could raise malnutrition rates, compromise the immune system, and increase the risk of people developing severe symptoms of Covid-19 and other illnesses, especially among children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly (FSIN, 2020). This

situation highlights the need for actions aimed at ensuring the human right to adequate food, both in quantity and quality, ensuring food and nutritional security (FNS), and the right to life for all individuals.

An important point to highlight is that while some people face a daily lack of basic food, wastage has been a factor exacerbating food insecurity and hunger worldwide (Organização das Nações Unidas para a Alimentação e Agricultura (FAO), 2019; Schneider, 2013). Approximately 13.8% of all food produced in 2016 was wasted from post-harvest to, but excluding, retail, with roots, tubers, and oilseeds being the group with the highest level of losses, followed by fruits and vegetables (FAO, 2019).

According to Schneider (2013), there are many reasons why modern society has increased food waste, ranging from bad weather to hygiene conditions and individual behavior, where people prefer foods that look better. Given this situation, food banks emerge as a strong alternative with potential to promote mindful consumption and mitigate the effects of food losses that are still fit for consumption (FAO, 2019; Ministério da Cidadania, 2020).

Therefore, considering that the Covid-19 pandemic may worsen food insecurity rates and that reducing food waste can contribute to combating hunger, this article aims to investigate the procedures and actions adopted by the Mesa Brasil SESC food bank during the pandemic. The Mesa Brasil SESC program is an initiative that focuses on recovering and redistributing food, and according to the FAO (2019), it has become a notable example due to its significant social impact. Thus, through a case study, the objective is to understand the practices adopted in managing the program's activities and the impacts and necessary adaptations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Relationship between Sustainability, Food Security, and Food Waste in the Pandemic Context

According to Davies (2013), sustainability is a broad topic with an extensive range of meanings and, consequently, is constantly evolving. Furthermore, according to the author, sustainability

gained popularity in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published the Brundtland Report, outlining the principles of sustainable development across four main axes: i) holistic planning and strategy formulation; ii) preservation of ecological processes; iii) protection of heritage and biodiversity; and iv) development that can be sustained for future years (p. 112). Thus, WCED (1987) introduced the concept of sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p.41).

Connelly (2007) argues that the most predominant and influential way to represent the concept of sustainable development has been through the image of three overlapping circles representing the economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Thus, given this concept, food production is directly linked to sustainability, as this sector has an extensive supply chain with various stages that begin in the field, or even earlier, in the preparation of seeds, seedlings, or inputs, continuing through planting, harvesting, storage, and distribution. All these stages are interconnected with sustainability (Ribeiro et al., 2017).

These interrelationships are present in the Brundtland Report, where WCED (1987) included food security as one of the challenges for the coming decades. At the time, despite the significant population growth in recent years, it was believed that global agriculture had the potential to produce enough food for everyone, but one of the difficulties to be overcome was access, as food was not available where it was needed. Similarly, WCED (1987) raised concerns about other issues such as family purchasing power, incentives for small producers in developing countries to avoid unfair competition with developed nations, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices.

Nearly thirty years later, in 2015, the United Nations, in collaboration with all member countries, established a new set of objectives and goals known as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals serve as a universal appeal to integrate and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, guiding the actions of all nations, including those at various stages of development, in the pursuit of a better world by 2030 (Brown, 2021; Gil et al., 2019; Nações Unidas, 2015). SDG 2 aims to end hunger,

achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture, focusing on doubling agricultural productivity, enhancing income for small-scale farmers, ensuring sustainable production systems, and ensuring access to food, particularly for the poor and people in vulnerable situations (Nações Unidas, 2015). It comprises eight targets, with the first five directly related to food security and agricultural sustainability (Gil et al., 2019).

Todavia, para discutir a segurança alimentar, faz However, to discuss food security, it is necessary to understand the context in which a person may be classified in a situation of food and nutritional insecurity (FNI). According to Food Security Information Network (FSIN):

Food insecurity refers to the lack of safe access to sufficient quantities of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development, and an active and healthy life. For people to have food security, food must be consistently available and accessible in adequate quantities and diversity, and families must be able to utilize (store, cook, prepare, and share) food in ways that have a positive nutritional impact (FSIN, 2020, p. 9)

Thus, the concept of food and nutritional insecurity (FNI) encompasses not only the availability of food but also its quality, quantity, and the ability to handle it appropriately and safely. On the other hand, food and nutritional security (FNS) is understood as the "situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, 2021, p. 190).

In this context, the Covid-19 pandemic introduces new dimensions to the achievement of the SDGs, especially SDG 2, as stated by Gil et al. (2019). The achievement of this SDG is linked to all other SDGs, both temporally and spatially, highlighting the indivisible nature proposed by the 2030 Agenda. However, it should be noted that even before the pandemic, there was no perspective of achieving SDG 2 by 2030 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, 2021), highlighting heightened concerns for the post-pandemic scenario, especially in developing countries such as Brazil. Furthermore, although Covid-19 has spread worldwide, countries with limited capacity to address health

issues and the socioeconomic impacts caused by the virus will be more vulnerable to long-term consequences (FSIN, 2020; Giordani & Costa, 2020).

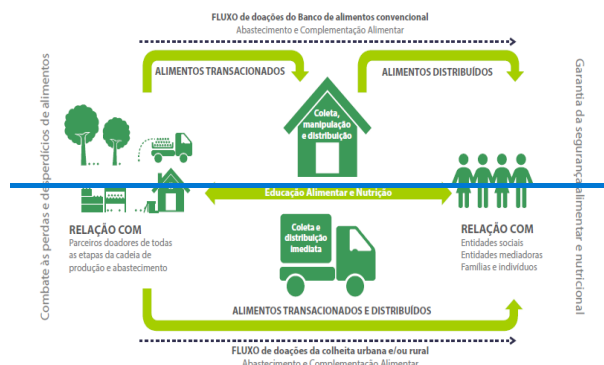
Given this scenario, many studies have been conducted to measure the short- and medium-term social and economic impacts caused by the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic (FSIN, 2020; Galindo et al., 2021; Giordani & Costa, 2020; Neves et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2020; Wang & Huang, 2021, Pinheiro et al., 2022; Costa et al., 2023). Research by Galindo et al. (2021), conducted between November and December 2020 with a sample of 2,000 people, analyzed the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the diet of the Brazilian population. The study concluded that 59% of households were experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic, and a significant portion of them reduced their consumption of important foods for the regular diet, such as meat and fruit. Similarly, international organizations have sought to map the global situation as a way to alert countries and institutions. The report prepared by FAO, in conjunction with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, showed that 30% of the world's population, more than 2.3 billion people, did not have access to adequate food during the year 2020 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, 2021).

These data prove, above all, the complex nature of food and nutritional issues, which are also related to various social and cultural factors, such as food waste. There is a consensus that global food losses and waste are significant and that mitigating food loss is a measure that can help reduce global hunger and food insecurity levels, as well as lower production costs, contribute to environmental sustainability, alleviate pressure on natural resources, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (FAO, 2019). In this regard, food banks are initiatives that are expanding worldwide, especially due to their potential to contribute to improving the food conditions of countries, making them more equitable and sustainable (FAO, 2019; Ministério da Cidadania, 2020). In line with the role played by food banks, Blesh et al. (2019) advocate for the implementation of local, adaptable, and participatory strategies and solutions as a way to combat hunger, considering the need to take into account local institutional capacities, the diversification of agroecosystems, and the specific

characteristics of local diets.

Figure 1 illustrates the functioning of food banks in terms of structure and interaction with the involved parties.

Figure 1
Operation of food banks



Source: Brazilian Ministry of Citizenship (2020, p. 16).

As observed, food banks have a structure that collects food donations that would otherwise be wasted along the production chain, distributing them to those in need through partnerships with organizations directly serving individuals in need. This action is of utmost social relevance, as one of the main causes of food waste is the loss of commercial value due to damage to the appearance of food or unconsumed purchases after sale, which does not necessarily affect the nutritional value of the food. (Belik et al., 2012). Thus, the importance of the work carried out by food banks is evident, as their activities contribute to reducing loss and waste, providing food to those who cannot obtain it, while promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns. This is directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the Agenda 2030.

Research Methodological Elements

This study is characterized as applied research, as it generates knowledge for practical application. Regarding its objective, it is descriptive, and concerning the approach to the problem, it is qualitative (Gil, 2008). To achieve the proposed objective in this study, semi-structured interviews and data collection from documents, reports, websites, and social media of the program were adopted as technical procedures. The chosen unit of analysis was the Mesa Brasil SESC in the city of Porto Alegre/RS, which is part of the national project.

The primary data were collected through two interviews conducted with the project coordinators. Secondary data were obtained from documents and reports released by the project, as well as documentary collection from communication channels of the Mesa Brasil SESC project, Porto Alegre/RS unit. This process enabled data triangulation for a better understanding and analysis of the proposed objective.

To conduct the interviews, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach was chosen, which, according to Gil (2008), involves selecting samples based on criteria that depend solely on the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher must understand that the sample somehow represents the population universe.

Table 1 presents a descriptive summary of the data sources used in this study.

Table 1
Classification and description of data sources

Data type	Technique	Collection instrument	Source description
Primary	Interview	Semi-structured interview guide	Manager of the operational unit – SESC Comunidade (Porto Alegre/RS), 18 years of experience at SESC, has a PhD in Education (E1)
Primary	Interview	Semi-structured interview guide	Education, assistance and culture manager (South Region), 10 years of experience at SESC, holds a Master's degree in Social Service (E2)
Secondary	Documentary research	Not applicable	Mesa Brasil SESC Actions Report to mitigate the social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic Mesa Brasil SESC Program Guide
Secondary	Observation	Not applicable	Websites: https://www.sesc-rs.com.br/mesabrasil/porto-alegre/ https://www.sesc.com.br/portal/site/mesabrasilsesc/home/ Instagram profile: https://www.instagram.com/sescrs/

Source: research data.

To conduct the interviews, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach was chosen, which, according to Gil (2008), involves selecting samples based on criteria that depend solely on the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher must understand that the sample somehow represents the population universe. It is worth noting that the 2 interviewees (E1 and E2) who agreed to participate in the research are directly involved in the Porto Alegre/RS unit project. The interviews were conducted in July 2021, with an average duration of 60 minutes, based on a semi-structured script developed from observation and reading of data and information provided by the organization, as well as theoretical references on the topic. The collected data aimed to understand the overall structure of the project and its local activities. Information was also requested about the procedures and techniques used in the project's daily activities, and specifically, the implications and changes required since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the exploration of the collected information and in line with the proposed objective, data analysis was conducted,

categorized into: i) report of adaptations in urban harvesting operations; ii) report of adaptations in educational activities; iii) report of necessary adaptations in donation collection actions. After the analysis, a synthesis of the necessary adaptations was carried out, resulting in final considerations where the findings of previous studies were compared with the findings of this study.

Presentation and results discussion

Description of the Mesa Brasil SESC project

The Mesa Brasil SESC (MBS) is a national food bank, established in 2003 by the Social Service of Commerce (SESC), aimed at combating hunger and food waste through partnerships with rural producers, wholesalers, retailers, distribution centers, food industries, and companies from various sectors of activity (SESC, 2021).

The project has 91 units operating in over 500 municipalities and is composed of 614 direct employees, approximately 3,000 donors, and 6,000

registered entities that are systematically served (SESC, 2021). Overall, the program provides supplementary meals to about 1.4 million people monthly (SESC, 2021).

The Mesa Brasil project operates in two modalities: i) urban harvest, where donations are collected from partners and delivered directly to social entities; and ii) food bank, where food items are collected from partners, stored at SESC facilities, categorized, and then made available for pickup by the entities. Additionally, the program promotes educational activities through courses, workshops, and lectures offered to registered entities in the fields of Nutrition and Social Services, aiming to generate knowledge about adequate nutrition, dietary reeducation, and management tools.

The Porto Alegre/RS unit (MBPOA) is the largest unit in the southern region of the country, managed by SESC Comunidade, and covers, in addition to the capital, 17 other cities in the metropolitan area. The MBPOA operates exclusively with the urban harvest modality and also promotes targeted educational activities. According to SESC (2016, p. 27), this modality "is characterized by being agile and requiring fewer resources for implementation and maintenance, since no food is stored – donations are delivered immediately based on predetermined collection and distribution routes." As reported by E1, the urban harvest modality at the Porto Alegre unit consists of four logistics teams that collect food in the morning, handle transshipment, and distribute it to registered institutions in the afternoon. Children and the elderly make up the majority of individuals directly served by the program through the distribution of food to educational and social assistance entities.

Table 2 presents the profile of the Porto Alegre/RS unit. In addition to the employees listed in Table 2, the program has a network of volunteers who occasionally participate in food distribution and educational activities.

Table 2

Profile of the Mesa Brasil Porto Alegre/RS unit

Category	Amount	Description
Partners (donors)	89	Supermarket chains (57) and food industries (17), rural producers (15), campaigns (40)
Beneficiary entities	295	Early childhood education schools, welfare entities and campaigns.
Employees	21 pessoas	Loading and unloading

allocated exclusively to the MBPOA		assistants (5), drivers (4), nutritionists (3), administrative (4), social workers (2), general services assistant (2) and assistant manager (1).
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Source: research data.

Report of adaptations to MBPOA urban harvesting operations during the pandemic period

The operations of MBPOA underwent a rapid adaptation process during the pandemic, as reported by E1. According to the Manager, the entity was aware of the importance of keeping activities running regardless of the situation, given that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a trend of declining food security in Brazil (Galindo et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Rede PENSSAN, 2021), thus, the entity assumed that the health crisis would be exacerbated by this situation.

Therefore, the urban collection operations experienced an initial pause that lasted only four days. During this period, the beneficiary institutions were instructed to collect the food directly from the program's partners. Additionally, during this interval, the team mobilized to create safety protocols and initiated a second phase, which lasted one week, during which only one truck carried out the collections and distributions. As a result, within less than two weeks, all the trucks from the logistics team were back in operation.

It was also necessary to adapt the process of delivering food to individuals who frequented the institutions since many suspended in-person services for several months. In these cases, because the unit has the autonomy to define new processes, E1 mentions that the logistics team was instructed to deliver the food to the institution's location, and the institution then selected and authorized families, on an exceptional basis, to take the food home for consumption. Furthermore, E1 highlights that most of the food collected at the MBPOA unit is perishable (vegetables, legumes, and fruits), which necessitates a very swift collection and distribution process.

Specifically regarding the logistics team, E2 mentions that the timeliness of the actions was made possible by the commitment of the employees and their "social" profile. She was still pleasantly surprised by the team's solidarity and

professional attitude, as everyone collaborated spontaneously and was fully aware of the importance of maintaining the supply to the institutions. E1 reports that some employees contracted the virus, but there were no outbreaks within the team and no fatalities, which he attributes to the implementation of effective protocols in line with health authorities' guidelines. For instance, guidelines on how to maintain social distancing during food deliveries were formulated and distributed. Additionally, the permanent use of protective masks and hand hygiene was enforced.

Report of adaptations in educational actions during the pandemic period

The educational actions implemented in the Mesa Brasil SESC program are closely linked to the organization's commitment to promoting inclusion and expanding citizenship. It is expected that by training professionals, volunteers, users of social entities, and donors, it will be possible to develop individual and collective capacities in the pursuit of improving living conditions and ensuring basic rights (SESC, 2016).

Regarding the activities developed, E2 reports that the focus of the actions is the qualification of the entities, as many are managed by volunteers who, in many cases, lack technical qualifications for such tasks. Furthermore, participation in courses, training, and other educational activities is part of the evaluation and monitoring requirements to maintain the partnership between the institutions and the program (SESC, 2016).

Thus, during the pandemic, the activities, which were previously exclusively in-person, migrated to an online format. The interviewee E1 mentions that this shift allowed the organization to retain all staff working in this area. Additionally, the content of the courses and training sessions was adapted to help the entities deal with the pandemic situation. For example, the interviewee E2 refers to a course that taught entities how to organize donation queues for distributing basic food baskets while maintaining all recommended health precautions.

Moreover, taking advantage of the flexibility provided by the online format, entities were encouraged to invite families to participate in activities of interest. All educational activities are also promoted on the Mesa Brasil SESC website,

allowing the general public to register. Regarding the continuation of the online format, E2 reveals that the intention is to continue offering remote activities, but to resume in-person activities as soon as possible. This is due to the fact that not all institutions have internet access or the skills to handle virtual technologies. Furthermore, the physical proximity of the program with the managers of the entities is seen as a valuable aspect that enhances and reinforces the partnership relationship.

Report of adaptations to donation collection actions during the pandemic period

The Mesa Brasil project was created with the specific purpose of collecting food donations, so monetary donations or any other form of donation were not accepted until the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, several innovative actions of the project stand out, as it quickly adapted to the new reality brought about by the pandemic, successfully leveraging all opportunities from companies, individuals, and other segments willing to contribute to the fight against hunger (SESC, 2021). As reported by E2, the collection of financial resources began as an alternative to maximize the project's service capacity, as well as to respond to the spontaneous offers of support from various partners.

Since this was a new process, E2 mentioned that the finance and legal teams immediately mobilized to open a specific checking account for receiving donations and to analyze the implications for internal processes and new formats for distributing donations. This allowed the project to diversify its actions and receive contributions from various sources through partnerships with large companies, national artists, and even individuals.

As a highlight, E2 mentioned the live-streamed events produced with national artists, where the funds raised were distributed among all units based on the level of vulnerability of each state. When asked about the criteria for distributing the funds raised from these new initiatives, E2 stated that each donor has the opportunity to negotiate which units will benefit. Once determined, the units receive the established amount according to the criteria negotiated between the project and the donor, and this amount is directed towards the purchase of basic food

baskets through bidding processes with wholesale companies.

As noted on the official project website, Mesa Brasil is currently accepting monetary donations through a form that allows contributions starting at R\$ 10. Additionally, donors can choose to make monthly donations via credit card debit. Besides monetary contributions, E2 highlights the citizenship-building aspect of an initiative carried out in partnership with a retail company, where the beneficiary families had the opportunity to choose their place of purchase and the food they wanted to consume. According to SESC (2021, p. 25), “the cards – about 27,000 units – had a unit value of R\$ 100, allowing the assisted families the autonomy to purchase food and products according to their needs at local establishments registered by the card provider.”

Summary of adaptations implemented by Mesa Brasil Porto Alegre/RS

Considering the interview reports, analysis of documents and reports, and observations of content published on official websites and social media, Table 3 presents a summary of the adaptations, new actions, and changes

implemented in the main activities of the project in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As can be observed, MBPOA succeeded in adapting, especially due to timely decision-making facilitated by the unit's autonomy, the project's experience, and its logistics structure. Despite being part of a national project, the Porto Alegre/RS unit could tailor its actions to regional aspects and particularities. Regarding this, E1 reports that the unit's decision-making was based on national guidelines, but the methodologies, rules, and protocols were planned by the local team, always supported by monitoring the pandemic's evolution, which continues to this day. E1 mentions, “[...] there was a time when there were three types of vehicles on the street: ambulances, police cars, and SESC trucks [...]” and emphasizes, “[...] we were very strict with protocols [...].”

Regarding the maintenance of donation volumes post-pandemic, E1 notes that although individual initiatives have weakened, they hope to maintain the volume due to partnerships with local farmers, from whom they receive the largest volume of food.

Table 3

Summary of adaptations implemented by MBPOA

Actions and procedures adopted	Changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic	Justification	Results achieved
Donation collection	Safety protocol for drivers and loading and unloading assistants.	Preserve employee health and keep teams fully functioning .	The team maintained operations throughout the pandemic, maintaining supply to the benefiting institutions. No employee deaths occurred.
Administrative Team	Migration to home office.	Preserve employee health and adapt administrative processes.	Processes were fully adapted and all employees were maintained .
Educational actions	SESC Online Communities was created, a platform for distance learning courses and training .	Considering that it was not an essential activity for the program, it was decided to suspend in-person actions.	The entities' holdings gradually increased. The platform will be maintained even when in-person activities resume, offering learning opportunities for interested parties who cannot attend in person.
Donation collection	Processes implemented to collect financial resources, food cards and distribution of basic food baskets.	Meet the offer of donors with profiles different from those who were already part of the program, including them as program partners.	Increase of around 45% in partners with national action. 192% increase in relation to the audience already systematically watched.

Source: research data.

Final Considerations

The present study aimed to investigate the procedures and actions undertaken by the Mesa Brasil SESC food bank during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure the continuation of activities addressing food and nutritional insecurity. The interviews revealed that, as shown in related studies, the socio-economic instabilities caused by the political and economic crises in Brazil in recent years were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, intensifying issues related to food and nutritional security (FNS). The challenges observed are primarily associated with access to healthy foods with sufficient nutritional quality and in adequate quantities, consistent with findings from related research on the topic.

The accounts from Interviewee E1 clearly highlight the program's concern with maintaining the primary activities of MBPOA, which was achieved through timely decision-making and the support and structure provided by the national SESC to the Porto Alegre/RS unit. In this context, it was necessary to evaluate the social isolation measures implemented by local authorities and adjust the entity's workflow to the new circumstances, adapting processes and activities to the emerging needs caused by the sanitary crisis (Giordani & Costa, 2020). This entire process considered the regional context of the unit, remaining attentive to the needs and limitations of the served population.

In this context, Interviewee E2 emphasized the importance of implementing new operational formats, which allowed the project to take advantage of all opportunities available to Mesa Brasil SESC, both nationally and regionally. Furthermore, Interviewee 2 believes that the project's monitoring process drives social innovation and that the pandemic, in a way, accelerated this process by necessitating changes, such as transitioning traditionally in-person procedures to an online format.

The success in management is demonstrated in the 2020 Activity Report, where the organization provides a detailed account of the results achieved, emphasizing that "given the seriousness of the moment, the National Department of SESC (SESC/DN) took immediate actions to sensitize the Regional Departments (DDRR) to maintain the operation of their units, preserving individual and collective care and

following the recommendations of national and local health authorities" (SESC, 2021, p. 13).

This guideline from SESC demonstrates the organization's ability to understand that social distancing, necessary to contain the virus, has broad implications for the socioeconomic condition of numerous Brazilian families and consequently impacts food and nutrition security (SAN), especially for families in situations of social vulnerability (Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2020). Thus, the data obtained in the interviews were important to navigate the processes involved in the operation of a food bank, particularly in a global context of the spread of a new disease, where risk factors are still unknown and decision-making needs to be agile and flexible.

Additionally, they provide support to validate the findings observed in program documents, websites, and social media, as well as confirm the results found in recent related studies. In summary, the study also reveals that food banks contribute significantly to reducing food waste (FAO, 2019), but they can also address other fronts to assist individuals experiencing food insecurity, acting as a key agent capable of substantially contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2, aimed at combating hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture. Finally, the collected evidence demonstrates that MBPOA stands out for its decentralized decision-making, logistical capacity, educational initiatives, and technical team.

The theoretical and practical contribution of this study is highlighted in describing the adaptations implemented in a pandemic context within the processes and activities of a nationally recognized social program combating hunger and food waste (FAO, 2019). Furthermore, the study underscores the relevance of being conducted in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, a city with over 1.3 million inhabitants, lending significant representativeness to the findings. It's important to note that while conducted locally, the study addresses a globally relevant theme, as food banks are a universally applied initiative. Therefore, it is considered that by addressing this theme, theoretical and empirical support is provided for new studies involving the relationships between sustainability, food and nutritional security, and the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially regarding the role of collective

programs and projects focusing on individuals in situations of social vulnerability.

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