

SCHOOL FOOD, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Critical Reflections and Perspectives

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Chapter 2

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Peru, Ecuador and Colombia are neighboring countries located in South America that share somewhat similar historical, cultural and political backgrounds, including their colonial past whose structures of disadvantage and decision making live on to this day. More recently, the three countries have also been facing the brunt of the Venezuelan political and socioeconomic crisis of the past two decades thus becoming hosts to historically high numbers of forced migrants and refugees from Venezuela (R4V, 2021). There are currently 1.05 million Venezuelans in Peru, 430,000 in Ecuador and 1.7 million in Colombia (R4V, 2021). This new reality challenges existing infrastructures (including education and food systems), further exacerbating long-standing social and educational inequities.

Education in the three countries is highly segregated, both by financial resources and place of residence, with the richest urban families having access to more privileged, exclusive and higher quality education, while a small segment of middle-class families send their children to private schools of varying quality. The vast majority of the population only has access to public, chronically underfunded schools according to their place of residence (Trucco & Inostroza, 2017). School violence (including bullying) is fairly common, with Peru showing a lower level of violence, and Ecuadorian and Colombian schools registering higher levels (Trucco & Inostroza, 2017).

In total, the three countries have approximately 23.45 million students enrolled in more than 180,000 schools: from south to north, Peru has about 9 million students in more than 110,000 schools (INEI, 2019); Ecuador has approximately 4.45 million students enrolled in about 16,500 schools (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2020a); and Colombia has more than 10 million school students in 53,500 schools (DANE, 2020). The Andean region has been one of most harshly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with Peru and Ecuador being among the top

four countries with the highest excess death rates per capita in the world, by the beginning of May 2021 (Financial Times, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has also taken its toll in school enrollment. It has been reported that 300,000 students in Peru, 125,000 in Ecuador and 100,000 in Colombia left school in 2020. At the time of the submission of the present chapter, the Latin American region had rendered more children without in-person teaching for the longest period in the world. Peru's and Ecuador's schools had been closed since March 2020, for more than one calendar year, with exceptional and sporadic small rural schools opening to in-person learning.

The impacts of the history of colonization, extermination and exploitation of indigenous peoples, and dispossession of indigenous lands in these countries cannot be overestimated (APF-UNHCR, 2013). Indigenous populations, which

have unique cultures, languages, legal systems and histories [and] a strong connection to the environment and their traditional lands and territories, [...] have suffered non recognition of their own political and cultural institutions and the integrity of their cultures has been undermined.

(APF-UNHCR, 2013, p. 3)

In spite of historical trauma, to date almost 42 million indigenous peoples live across Latin America (Congressional Research Service, 2020); at least over 10 million live in Peru (7.6 million, 26% of their population), Ecuador (1 million, 7%) and Colombia (1.5 million, 3.4%).

Previous research reveals the precariousness of diets in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, where there is low intake of dietary fat, especially in rural areas, and micronutrients, and likely consumption of poor-quality dietary fats in urban populations (Berti et al., 2014). School food programs (SFP) in the three countries do not serve the whole student population. Apart from not providing coverage to private schools, they do not supply food to all public schools. In Peru, the SFP reaches over 4 million students (~44% of total) (Sato, 2020). In Ecuador, the SFP covers about 3 million students, or ~67% of total student population (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2016). In Colombia, the SFP reaches only 6.9 million (~69% of total student population) (Colombian Government, 2020b). In the case of Ecuador, it is estimated that among the 27,000 students that failed the school year in Ecuador in 2014, 33% did so due to malnutrition (WFP, 2017). For reference, the cost of the SFP in the 2017–2018 school year in Ecuador was ~US\$ 60 per student (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2016). In Colombia, the SFP has been described as having its “ups and downs” (Morales Contreras & Durán Silva, 2020, p. 1), with the Attorney General identifying corrupt practices in SFP procurement contracts (Transparency for Colombia Corporation, 2019).

In this context, the aim of this chapter is to compare approaches to school food in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia from an educational perspective, taking into consideration related national policy documents, plans and programs aimed at tackling socioeconomic inequities.

Methods and materials

Analytic sample

We conducted a literature review to identify relevant publicly available government documents that would allow us to describe, characterize and analyze the approach to school food from an educational perspective in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. We discussed and jointly decided on using the most recent policy documents (Table 2.1) for the three countries that specifically normed school food, directly or indirectly.

TABLE 2.1 School food policy documents included in our analysis, by country

<i>Name of policy</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
PERU		
1. Law 30021 to Promote Healthy Nutrition of Children and Adolescents.	May 10, 2013	Effective promotion and protection of the right to health to the proper growth and development of people, through educational actions, the strengthening and promotion of physical activity, the implementation of kiosks and healthy dining rooms in educational institutions, and supervision of advertising and other practices related to food, non-alcoholic beverages directed at children and adolescents to reduce and eliminate diseases linked to overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases.
2. Decree 008-2012-MIDIS, National School Food Program <i>Qali Warma</i> .	May 31, 2012	Guarantee food to children from public educational institutions at the initial level from three years of age and at the primary education level. It establishes the objectives, functions, scope, management and financing of the program.
3. Legislative Decree 1472	April 30, 2020	Direct the National School Food Program <i>Qali Warma</i> to provide complementary food to people in vulnerable situations, in coordination with the District Municipalities, Ministries, the National Institute of Civil Defense, and the Armed Forces.
ECUADOR		
4. Plan for School Food Intervention	October 22, 2014	Strengthen the nutrition of children who attend Initial and Basic General Education, through the provision of fresh and processed foods with medium and low critical nutrient content, mainly of national origin, that respond to the principles of food sovereignty, and originating from local sources.

(Continued)

TABLE 2.1 (Continued)

<i>Name of policy</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
5. Intersectoral Food and Nutrition Plan 2018–2025.	August 1, 2018	Achieve adequate nutrition and development of the Ecuadorian population throughout the life course... within the framework of intersectoral interventions that affect the social determinants of health.
6. Organic Law of School Food	April 21, 2020	Guarantee the right to food and nutrition in a sustainable way for school-age children and adolescents, part of the National Education System.
COLOMBIA		
7. Resolution 29452	December 29, 2017	Issue technical & administrative guidance; standards and minimal conditions of the School Food Program.
8. Resolution 18858	December 11, 2018	Issue technical & administrative guidance, and standards & minimum requirements of the School Food Program for indigenous peoples.
9. Decree 533	April 9, 2020	Adopt measures to guarantee the execution of the School Food Program and the provision of the public service of preschool, basic and secondary education.

Analytical approach

To analyze the policy documents, we used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to first identify words and phrases through line-by-line open coding, and, based on these codes, data were grouped into categories and subcategories through axial coding. We subsequently selected extracts from the quotes and translated them from Spanish into English. In a second round, subcategories were regrouped according to themes through selective coding. In a third and final round, we contextualized findings with other texts such as the national constitutions and development plans of each country, and additional literature.

Findings and discussion

In this section, findings are categorized and discussed along eight core themes in our analysis: 1) food as a human right; 2) framing of school food programs; 3) perspectives on indigenous peoples; 4) localizing school food programs; 5) participation in decision making; 6) educational implications; 7) understating the role of the food industry; 8) COVID-19 pandemic response. Table 2.2 provides a brief overview of these themes by country analyzed, while the ensuing narrative further discusses the implications of these findings for school food policy and programming.

TABLE 2.2 Core themes of national school food policy documents reviewed by country

<i>Core themes</i>	<i>Peru</i>	<i>Ecuador</i>	<i>Colombia</i>
Food as a human right	Implicit in article 6 of the 1993 Constitution.	2008 Constitution states that food is a right for all.	1991 Constitution recognizes the right to food...for specific populations, and in specific ways.
Framing of school food programs (SFP)	SFP must be “sustainable and healthy” (Peruvian Government, 2012, p. 467233), ... protect children from marketing practices, and promote physical activity (Peruvian Government, 2013, p. 1).	SFP focuses on “adequate nutrition” (Ecuadorian Government, 2020, p. 8), as defined by the central health authority, using expert-based guidelines.	SFP is aimed at addressing student absenteeism and abandonment.
Perspectives on indigenous peoples	Do not mention indigenous peoples directly, and only tangentially, perhaps, as part of the “vulnerable” populations during the pandemic (Peruvian Government, 2020, p. 5).	Do not explicitly mention variations to address the needs or demands of specific ethnic or cultural groups.	Stated interest in adjusting the menus to cultural habits and customs. “Culture” appears to be linked to local knowledge and customs (Regulation 29452, p. 21).
Localizing school food programs	Providing a “quality food service, adapted to local food habits, co-managed with the community” (Peruvian Government, 2012, p. 467233).	The new SFP law may eventually open the door to transformation to the current food offer of industrialized goods.	At least 20% of purchases for the SFP must include local foodstuffs, goods and services.

(Continued)

TABLE 2.2 (Continued)

<i>Core themes</i>	<i>Peru</i>	<i>Ecuador</i>	<i>Colombia</i>
Participation in decision making	National Observatory of Nutrition and Overweight/Obesity Research housed in the National Institute of Health, although unclear how/if civil society participates. School food committees are usually staffed by school staff.	Participation at the national level is expected from public and private sectors. At the school level, families are expected to be involved, although their space/authority for decision making is not clear.	A “situation analysis” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 13) is required to “identify needs and priorities of children”. There are provisions for the participation of local indigenous authorities and parents in “approving” (p. 6) menus and monitor implementation.
Educational implications	Policy documents make little to no explicit mention of the educational implications of the SFP.	New SFP law intends to promote food and nutrition teaching, from a food and nutrition security perspective.	Indigenous-majority schools are expected to promote traditional food practices. Importantly, there are not similar provisions for mixed populations or other ethnic groups.
Understating the role of the food industry	The law aims at placing limits to the private sector but also describes it as an interested stakeholder (Peruvian Government, 2012, p. 467233).	SFP has exclusively delivered ultra-processed foodstuffs for years. Yet, commercial interests do not appear to be a concern for national authorities.	Provision depends on “available means” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 8), meaning that financial constraints may prompt the delivery of “industrialized rations” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 6), because they have to comply with less stringent infrastructure and sanitary requirements (p. 10).

(Continued)

TABLE 2.2 (Continued)

<i>Core themes</i>	<i>Peru</i>	<i>Ecuador</i>	<i>Colombia</i>
COVID-19 pandemic response	Decree 1472 directed the <i>Qali Warma</i> program to be expanded to vulnerable communities impacted by the pandemic.	Ministry of Education maintained regular products (i.e., flavored and natural milk, juice and cereal drinks, cereal bars, packed cakes and cookies or granola flakes), for an 18-day period at a time.	In addition to the regular “industrialized ration” and “ration to prepare”, food stamps (bono) also became available (Colombian Government, 2020a, p. 5). Access depended on the students and their families having the necessary technology, connectivity and related knowledge.

Food as a human right

The right to food is recognized differently in the constitutions of the three countries. In Peru, although the right to adequate nutrition is not explicit, it is implicit in article 6 of the 1993 Constitution which states that parents have the duty and right to feed their children. In Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution, food is a right for all, with article 13 establishing that everyone has a right to “guaranteed and permanent access to safe, sufficient and nutritional foods, preferably produced locally and corresponding to their diverse identities and cultural traditions”. In its 1991 Constitution, Colombia recognizes the right to food, but only for specific populations, and in specific ways, such as unemployed pregnant women. In the case of children, it is stipulated they have the “fundamental right to a balanced nutrition” (Art. 44).

School food norms are adapted continuously in the three countries. In Peru, the National Strategic Development Plan (CEPLAN, 2017, p. 10) states that the vision is to be “a democratic society in which the rule of law prevails and in which all inhabitants have a high quality of life and equal opportunities to develop their maximum potential as human beings”, and mentions both food security and chronic malnutrition as areas of focus of national efforts. In Ecuador, the National Development Plan 2017–2021 (SENPLADES, 2017, p. 58) policy aims include “to fight malnutrition, eradicate undernutrition and promote healthy habits and practices, creating mechanisms of shared responsibility among all levels of government, citizens, the private sector and popular and solidarity economy”. Ecuador’s School Food Law (Ecuadorian Government, 2020) is equally ambitious, aiming at “ensuring” the

human right to “adequate food”, and “contribute to the prevention and eradication of malnutrition through the promotion of healthy eating habits at school” (p. 8). In Colombia, the 2018–2022 National Development Plan (Colombian Government, 2018) set out to introduce reforms to the School Food Program, to extend its coverage, and “make it more focalized” (p. 78).

Framing of school food

Article 4 of the Peruvian Constitution states that it is the community and government’s objective to provide protections to particularly vulnerable groups, including children. Moreover, article 13 of the General Law of Education (No. 28044), establishes that a small investment in school food is a factor that, among others, contributes to educational quality, improving attendance and class participation. In this context, Peru’s policy (Peruvian Government, 2012) states that the School Food Program must be sustainable and healthy, focus on disease prevention and provide food, protect children from marketing practices and promote physical activity. The law states that such a program must attend to guaranteeing quality and adaptation to local consumption patterns, engaging the educational community in the management of such program(s) to make it more sustainable and diversified (p. 467232).

Article 44 of the Colombian Constitution says “the State must ensure minors have the necessary conditions to access and remain in the educational system” (Government of Colombia, 2015, p. 18). Correspondingly, the resolution on school food for the general population (24952) is aimed at addressing student absenteeism and abandonment, and is described as a “food supplement aimed at giving the student an energy and nutrient sources during the school day”. The focus is largely on food handling, management of the program (including financing) and availability of products. In a similar way, Colombia’s COVID-19 SFP policy (Colombian Government, 2020a) alludes to the “right to education” (p. 3), with the SFP as a functional element of education: a “food supplement to support pedagogical development and learning from home” (p. 3).

According to Colombia’s Resolution 18858 (focused on indigenous peoples), the SFP is aimed at improving school access and retention “to keep attention levels, have a positive impact on learning, cognitive development, decrease absenteeism and desertion, and promote healthy lifestyles” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 4). It consists of a “food supplement [that] helps to recover and strengthen cultural processes of eating” (p. 3) and requires “support from other social actors who must participate responsibly and contribute from their respective roles and responsibilities” (p. 4).

The School Food Law (Ecuadorian Government, 2020) of Ecuador is focused on “adequate nutrition”, which is defined by the central health authority; the Intersectoral Food and Nutrition Plan (Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, 2018) additionally emphasizes the need for physical activity. At least on paper, Ecuador’s policy defends the right to a sustainable eating and nutrition (Ecuadorian Government, 2020). Interestingly, although Ecuador was in the past decade the only of the three

countries that persistently promoted the concept of Good Living (*buen vivir*), an overarching constitutional principle expected to underlie policy for the general population (Torres, 2017), it is Colombia that uses the concept, although only in the policy focused on indigenous populations.

Perspectives on indigenous peoples

In Peru, the healthy eating law, number 30021 (Peruvian Government, 2013), does not mention indigenous peoples directly, and only tangentially, perhaps, as part of the “diverse socioeconomic groups” to be monitored for obesogenic environments, dietary habits and physical activity. In turn, the national food program has a name in quechua (the most common indigenous language in the country), *Qali Warma* (Peruvian Government, 2012), which can be translated as vigorous/healthy/strong children. As pointed out above, the law mentions adaptation to local contexts and emphasizing efforts in low-resourced communities. However, it fails to specifically mention indigenous peoples. Only the policy directed at expanding provision during the COVID-19 pandemic is explicit about indigenous peoples being part of the more vulnerable populations (Peruvian Government, 2020).

Ecuador’s policy does not explicitly mention variations to address the needs or demands of specific ethnic or cultural groups, nevertheless stipulates there will be the “necessary flexibility to include, according to local circumstances, adaptations that are considered pertinent” (Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, 2018), p. 14). In practice, this may be difficult since menus are expected to be centrally decided (Ecuadorian Government, 2020), and the program is already limited to ultra-processed foodstuffs that are the same for all.

The Colombian policy (Regulation 29452, p. 21) has a stated interest in adjusting the menus to cultural habits and customs, however, the concept of “culture” appears to be linked exclusively with indigenous populations by relating it to local knowledge and customs and “autochthonous” foods. Similarly, Resolution 18858 (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018) calls for “ethnic and cultural relevance” (p. 9) of the SFP, which is called upon to include the promotion of indigenous cultural values (p. 10). Nevertheless, it is unclear what happens in schools that do not exclusively have indigenous students, since the approval of menu depends on indigenous authorities. Because it seems that the mixed population must adapt, the purported aim of “harmonic co-existence” may be thus undermined.

Localizing school food programs

As mentioned above, in Peru’s case, local context is important. The school food program, article 1, was created to “provide a quality food service, adapted to local food habits, co-managed with the community” (Peruvian Government, 2012, p. 467233). Ecuador’s new school food law (Ecuadorian Government, 2020) – which is still lacking an implementation instrument (regulations) – may eventually open the door to transformation of what is currently being distributed (i.e., ultra-processed foods).

The law has stipulated that school food programs should ensure 35% of food purchases are from peasant farming and the “popular and solidarity economic sector”, i.e., community-based enterprises (Ecuadorian Government, 2020, p. 21). Similarly, in Colombia, at least 20% of purchases for the SFP must include local foodstuffs, goods and services with the objective of “boosting regional economies and supporting local production and the strengthening of food cultures” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 8), also including “autochthonous” foods in the case of the indigenous-focused policy (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 19).

At the end of the day, however, the low quotas for local purchases in Ecuador and Colombia, and the lack of minimum quotas in Peru, may entail that a majority of foods are procured from the food industry or from more distant, large farming operations benefitting corporations, to secure cheaper prices.

Participation in decision making

In Peru’s case, law 30021 (Peruvian Government, 2013) created a National Nutrition and Overweight/Obesity Monitoring and Research Center, housed in the National Institute of Health. The *Qali Warma* program mentions “various actors” including school food committees, the private sector, civil society entities, and local governments, among others, but the school food committees, of which there are 64,000 (Andina, 2020), are usually staffed by the school leadership, a teacher or an administrative personnel representative, and parents. It is unclear, however, how the observatory articulates civil society participation.

In Ecuador, according to the most recent law (Ecuadorian Government, 2020), the SFP menus will be defined in the future by the Ministry of Health. But, concurrently, participation at the national level is expected from researchers and statisticians, civil society, related private sector, peasant farming and provider organizations (in procurement matters), student and teacher associations. At the school, families are expected to be involved in the implementation and monitoring of the SFP through committees organized to this effect, although their space for decision making is not described.

In Colombia, a “situation analysis” is required (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2017) to “identify needs and priorities of children”. Resolution 18858, having been drafted in consultation with indigenous representatives, has provisions for the participation of local indigenous authorities and parents in “approving” the menus and monitor implementation. However, this is not the case in Resolution 29452 focusing on the general population, who must use the “regular mechanisms” stipulated in the law to participate. Finally, in contrast with the indigenous population, the menus for the general population are defined by a nutritionist/dietitian.

Regarding probably the most interested party in the school food programs, the students, it is important to note that at no moment are they at the very least consulted or taking part in any deliberations in the policy of any of the three countries. A partial exception is made in Ecuador, where children are represented by student associations at national-level discussions.

Educational implications

Peru's policy documents make little to no explicit mention of the educational implications of the school food program, perhaps because it is led by the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion but not the Ministry of Education. Indirectly, and similarly to Colombia and Ecuador, the state has the intention to reinvigorate local and regional food heritages.

Ecuador's school food law specifically mentions the objective of promoting food and nutrition teaching, from the perspective of food and nutrition security. However, teaching is limited to annual "training sessions" (Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, 2018) or the dissemination of information based on pre-defined guidelines and recommendations regarding "nutritionally appropriate" foods and beverages, as "a form of promoting and preventing" (Ecuadorian Government, 2020).

In Colombia, teachers in schools with a majority of indigenous students or located in indigenous territories are expected to "actively participate in the teaching of eating practices and the strengthening of planting, collecting, preparing and eating ancestral foods, according to the uses, customs and forms of organization of each people". Importantly, there are not similar provisions for mixed populations or other ethnic groups such as Afro-Colombians, who are regulated by the overarching policy (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2017).

Concurrently, the assumption in the policy (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018) that the communal pot (*olla comunitaria*, in Spanish) is an "ancestral" indigenous custom involves an implicit curriculum of what knowledge is emphasized, possibly over other traditions. According to the policy, the communal pot involves preparing foods at the school together with "transmitting cultural values related to food, and promoting harmonic coexistence, social cohesion, solidarity, reciprocity, cost reduction and good living". Although these values may be worthwhile sustaining, it is possible that in schools with diverse ethnic populations, such an approach may become exclusive in practice.

Understating the role of the food industry

In Peru, the private sector is mentioned across the policy documents. Law 30021 (promoting healthy eating among children and adolescents) article 2 states that "the provisions contained in this law are applicable to all natural and legal persons [private sector] who commercialize, import, supply and manufacture processed foods, as well as to the advertiser of said products" and excludes from its purview foods and non-alcoholic beverages in a "natural state" (p. 15). Furthermore, where the law provides definitions for key terms (glossary, article 3), most of them are industry related. Seven out of the eight terms defined relate to marketing and promotion of processed foods (terms such as "bonus/gift/prize"; "sales promotion"; "publicity targeting children and adolescents"; "testimonial publicity"; "on-product publicity") (p. 15). In contrast, the *Qali Warma* program (Peruvian Government, 2012, p. 467233) mentions the private sector in as an interested stakeholder, together with

the educational community and civil society entities, and as part of the managing modalities for the program.

Ecuador's Intersectoral Plan (Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, 2018) does not mention the role of the industry in shaping food preferences and practices, except in relation to its impact on breastfeeding. Despite the fact that the SFP has exclusively delivered ultra-processed foodstuffs for years, commercial interests do not appear to be a concern for the government. Criticism has been limited, and only recently, to the excess sugar, fat and sodium, and low nutrient level of the products (WFP-Ecuadorian Government, 2020). Importantly, the government has continued to ignore the educational implications of the SFP in Ecuador in this regard, meaning that ultra-processed foodstuffs have been implicitly sanctioned in educational settings.

In Colombia, the indigenous populations have the right to a school food program that prepares foods for all the students at the school and that “from the communal (*lo comunitario*, in Spanish) transmits the cultural values of local foods and promotes harmonic co-existence, the cohesion of the peoples, solidarity, reciprocity, cost reduction and good living”. Accordingly, storage, transportation and cooking are expected to abide by the “cultural characteristics of each indigenous people” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 2–3). However, this type of provision depends on “available means” (p. 11), meaning that financial constraints may impulse the delivery of “industrialized rations” (Colombian Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 6), which have to comply with less stringent infrastructure and sanitary requirements (p. 10), according to Regulation 29452. Colombia has been slow to legislate on junk food elsewhere; the Colombian Congress was still discussing a related law in June, 2021 (El Espectador, 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic response

Although the primary focus of the study is not on the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptations made (or not) in response to such a catastrophic event are useful to understand how policies and related programs adapt to contemporary challenges. International organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB, 2020) view school food as an important social protection mechanism but fail to situate these programs within the field of education, i.e., viewing the school as a “convenient” intervention setting that offers a “return on human investment” (FAO-PAHO-WFP-UNICEF, 2019). ECLAC (of the United Nations system) reported that the governments of Peru, Ecuador and Colombia created mechanisms to supply food to students during the pandemic, but there are no assessments of these efforts. While a report from Colombia shows there were obstacles and difficulties to reach students, in Ecuador, there is limited evidence that the food was delivered at schools. In fact, in Ecuador, food baskets for vulnerable populations were grossly overpaid by public institutions involved in corrupt practices and this meant less people would have received them (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2021).

In Peru, Decree 1472 (Peruvian Government, 2020) directed the *Qali Warma* program to be expanded to vulnerable communities impacted by the pandemic. Under this definition, people in poverty, women and members of the family unit, seniors and disabled people, indigenous peoples, adult and youth prisoners, would be eligible. The law tasked the program to coordinate efforts with local governments, participating ministries, the National Civil Defense Institute and the Armed Forces (for transportation). The School Food Committees were reportedly involved in distribution of food, which included vegetable oil, corn starch, rice, peas, beans, purple corn flour, fava bean flour, whole grain cookies, oatmeal flakes with kiwicha or quinoa, evaporated milk, quinoa, raw cane sugar, chocolate, canned fish, spaghetti, biscuits (Peruvian Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, 2020).

In Colombia, according to Decree 533, recipients of food packages or stamps had to be registered as students, effectively excluding nationals and Venezuelan forced migrants that may have remained in the country after border closure in March of 2020. Although there wasn't a similar formal order in Ecuador, since foodstuffs were delivered at the schools, it can be assumed distribution was controlled using the list of registered students, having a similar effect as in Colombia.

Regarding the foodstuffs distributed during the pandemic, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education did not change the products originally delivered to schools – flavored and natural milk, juice and cereal drinks, cereal bars, packed cakes and cookies or granola flakes – for an 18-day period at a time (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2020b). In Colombia, apart from the regular “industrialized ration” and “ration to prepare”, food stamps (*bono*) also became available (Colombian Government, 2020a, p. 5). Nevertheless, an independent report (Morales Contreras & Durán Silva, 2020) found that access depended on the students and their families having the necessary technology and connectivity, and related knowledge, which meant that the distribution strategy excluded the more vulnerable. According to the same report, unclear communication also impeded access. Finally, although under Resolution 18858, menus should be approved by indigenous representatives, Resolution 0006 during the pandemic had no mention of this, including mechanisms to ensure this could be achieved during restrictive measures enforced to prevent transmission of the coronavirus.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this study, we reviewed relevant, publicly available, national policy documents to understand the approaches to school food in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. The most salient themes that emerged in the analysis included 1) an intention to protect the right to food and localize the programs, 2) the framing of school food in a way that is largely functional to nutritional status and school retention and attendance, 3) an illusion of indigenous participation in decision making and limited participation in decision making of different stakeholders, especially children, 4) an understated role of the food industry and 5) a normative perspective on education.

Comparing the policy documents, we find that there is a constitutional right to food in the three countries, and the aim to preserve the right to food is present in some form in their national development plans. However, the visions of food in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia seem largely functional to school retention and attendance, or nutritional status, and focused on material elements, i.e., the foodstuffs, their processing, labeling and marketing, and on a distributive equality. There are a few important exceptions. The SFP policy for indigenous peoples in Peru's *Qali Warma* mentions reinventing traditional local and regional food practices. Ecuador's policy applies concepts such as sustainability and good living. Colombia ascribes value to immaterial culture and knowledge related to food. From an educational perspective, Colombia emphasizes the importance of "rescuing" or developing local food cultures.

Policy analysis is not without its limitations, since it is as important to understand how policy is implemented, as the intentions of texts may not land close to them in practice. Future research should consider "on-the-ground" approaches to understand what happens in Peru, Colombia and Ecuador beyond the secondary data sources we have been able to review. By also examining the adaptations made in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic we have briefly exemplified how the different school food programs may address (or not) the needs of students in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. The measures taken in the three countries permitted to identify more clearly the intentions of the original school food policies: providing food as a way of supporting schooling (Colombia) or simply providing food, with an emphasis on the more vulnerable (Peru and Ecuador).

In the case of Colombia, although participation is guaranteed, Decree 533 enacted in response to the pandemic implicitly overrode pre-established participatory mechanisms for indigenous populations, since their representatives or needs are not mentioned. Echoing this invisibilization, the report criticizing the government's response focused on access, rendering the issue of cultural relevance of the SFP less important. In the background, stands Resolution 18858 which, although it was purportedly drafted together with indigenous representatives, it has similar objectives and design as the prior Resolution 29452 for the general population. It is possible that participation then was largely symbolic, requiring an implicit acceptance of the school food program as originally conceived. Therefore, it appears that there is an illusion more than actual room for participation in Colombia's SFP.

It should be a cause for concern that the focus on the foodstuffs in the three countries seems to liberate the educational system from most responsibilities involving the development of knowledge about foodways and local practices of food procurement and eating. In the end, school food programs in these countries are framed as a social welfare tool, and as such, are not intended to take part of meaning-making discussions in the school setting, and by extension their local communities. Even more explicitly, in Ecuador, there is an aim at training students using pre-determined content knowledge and recommendations based on expert dietary advice (Ecuadorian Government, 2020; Ecuadorian Ministry of Health, 2018).

From a school-based health promotion perspective, concerned with democratic deliberation, empowerment and action-taking based on the development of knowledge and skills, these countries are still at a distance from actualizing their commitments to more inclusive and equitable approaches to food (and healthy eating/living). A possible way forward is to first acknowledge the origins of inequality, which the policy documents of Peru, Ecuador and Colombia do not currently do. Apart from socioeconomic disparities privileging the richest, different vulnerable populations, including ethnic minorities, continue to be systematically marginalized. A real intention to address inequalities would involve subverting the predominant view that the populations (broadly defined) served by the SFP are lacking and the food can fill the gaps of (historical and contemporary) social injustice.

Finally, it is crucial that these countries seriously reconsider the lack of participation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes, but particularly of students in relation to the food they eat. To do this, governments must put in place genuinely democratic mechanisms for their active inclusion in transforming the school food programs across these countries. In this context, there may be an opportunity to elevate traditional knowledges and practices, adapting to local realities and empowering students, parents and civil society more broadly. Such an approach would move school food programs away from prescriptive, highly processed (and packaged) meals dominated by the food industry, thus ultimately toward effectively enacting and re-creating the values that in the different policy documents aim at achieving equity, and a more socially and environmentally just society.

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