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NUTRITION PLANNING IN CHILE

Third Annual Evaluation of Chile Nutrition Development Loan (513-T066)

New Trans Century Foundation (James M. Pines, Consultant)

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## R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

1. USAID should extend the loan disbursement period by at least one year, as soon as possible.
2. USAID should encourage and support CONPAN's new emphasis on development of institutional capability to analyze, plan, and coordinate in ways useful to Government.
3. USAID should reduce concern for projects and view the loan as an institution-building instrument.
4. USAID should give high priority to establishment and functioning of an Analysis Unit in CONPAN.
5. USAID should support CONPAN's Regional Project by encouraging Chilean Agency and U.S. Voluntary Agency cooperation with it.
6. USAID should join CONPAN in identifying staff needed for institutional survival and planning for their permanent funding.
7. USAID should encourage and support CONPAN orientation of new staff.
8. USAID should encourage and support training of staff from agency regional offices likely to be critical for Regional Project success.
9. USAID should review monitoring practices and procedures, to expedite movement and reduce reliance on formal communications.
10. USAID should assure that Analysis Unit work plans respond to immediate policy needs and not to overambitious concern for analysis of <sup>and</sup> malnutrition's varied causes.
11. USAID should help CONPAN clarify institutional responsibility for relationships with national offices of Government agencies, in preparation for reduction of projects among the agencies.

12. USAID should encourage CONPAN to develop a simple manual to guide decentralized committees in multi-sectoral nutrition planning.
13. USAID should continue efforts, in Chilean and U.S. Government contacts, to exhibit confidence in CONPAN's capacity, survival, and ability to influence positively Chilean social development.

## NUTRITION PLANNING IN CHILE

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by New Trans Century Foundation  
(James M. Pines, Consultant)

Field Visit - September 5-13, 1979

The Nutrition Development Loan, signed October 23, 1975, contemplated \$5,000,000 in disbursements over four years. In 1978, USAID extended the disbursement period to October, 1980. By January, 1980, about \$3,000,000 will have been disbursed, but it is already clear that, without further extension, an undisbursed balance will remain at the end of the extended loan period. The Chilean National Commission for Food and Nutrition (CONPAN), implementing agency for the Loan, replaced both President and Executive Secretary who had resigned, late in 1978, after experiencing significant reduction in power by Government decree in October.

The slow rate of disbursement and recent turbulent history raise doubts about future of the Loan and the related future of nutrition planning in Chile. The Report explores progress of CONPAN since the evaluation in June, 1978, and, relating that progress to CONPAN history and the Chilean context, provides conclusions and recommendations for USAID guidance. Early decision on Loan extension is essential for CONPAN planning and morale.

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT

CONPAN's history can best be understood by reading the two earlier evaluations that preceded this Report. They emphasized the important role of Dr. Fernando Monckeberg in generating political support, and providing initial momentum, for nutrition planning in Chile. Dr. Monckeberg's power and approach involved political and bureaucratic risks as an inevitable price of progress. His resignation, and that of his chosen Executive Secretary Carlos Schlesinger, reflect partial loss of their gamble. CONPAN's existence and survival, unlikely with other initial leadership, reflect success of the gamble. The aggressive, often abrasive, tactics of these early leaders left many damaged egos in the bureaucracy, but also left a new institution with potential for important impact.

Dr. Nicolás Gonzalez and Hector Sanchez, the new leaders, inherited a CONPAN with clipped wings. The October decree removed Article 5 of the founding decree, which seemed to give CONPAN power to establish norms applicable to other agencies, without consultation. Stripped of the power to impose their will, which Monckeberg and Schlesinger were unable to do anyway, the new leadership wisely adopted a conciliatory approach. Soothing, damaged egos and avoiding any appearance of desire for power, they present a CONPAN more consistent with the Chilean context.

That context, despite macroeconomic policies that give nutrition little attention, still offers CONPAN opportunity to encourage and support a useful nutrition planning process. The 10-year Project Goal, fifty per cent reduction of malnutrition among vulnerable groups, remains a realistic aspiration.

The context includes a Government commitment to "social development" that, in effect, seeks to nullify the negative impacts of economic development. Spending more than \$100,000,000 annually on feeding programs alone, in a country where estimates of 15 - 20 percent infant malnutrition are deemed high by some informed observers, Government outlays could easily control malnutrition problems. Inefficiency and lack of focus reduce current impact. The new decree permits CONPAN to seek influence in feeding programs, health and education, provided it stays away from agriculture and other key economic sectors. Though the decree reduced and weakened CONPAN's Board of Directors, and hence the Organization's national power, major opportunity for influence at decentralized levels remains.

The Chilean context also emphasizes decentralization of Government operations, maximum feasible transfer of functions to private industry, and general reduction of agency budgets. These concerns limit scope and influence style of CONPAN, but still leave opportunity for effective action. Nutrition planning in

Chile will differ from other countries, will be less visible than AID and Dr. Monckeberg expected, but may still do some good.

It is unfortunate that, after four years, achievements and potential are still so fragile. USAID requirements and CONPAN internal problems influenced the apparently slow progress, but their performance should not be blamed too much. The Project Purpose, institutionalizing a nutrition planning process in Chile, was and remains far more difficult than they expected. It is still worth pursuing and may eventually be achieved. The investment already made, the reasonable probability of success, and the benefits attainable even if CONPAN fades away, make extension of the Nutrition Development Loan a sound decision for USAID. CONPAN's history and context provide some basis for confidence. Recent progress and current plans offer further support.

### Progress and Plans

CONPAN's relatively orderly transition to new leadership and approach suggests institutional progress. Though some things changed, enough continuity of people and activities remains to support the impression of institutional survival. This is an important accomplishment, since Government attitudes, Dr. Monckeberg's fall from grace, or inept new leadership could easily have destroyed it.

The 1979 Implementation Plan, prepared after the new group entered in January, compares favorably with earlier ones. More important than the nineteen projects described is the sensible, realistic approach to CONPAN's future. Resisting the natural urge to clean house and seek "bold new initiatives", the new leaders emphasize consolidation and "conceptualization", a rethinking and clarification of what has already been done.

They propose to develop CONPAN's internal information system and capacity for analysis, as recommended in the last evaluation. The Plan includes a "Regional Project" that can serve as the model for both process and content of nutrition planning. The new decree forces CONPAN to be a coordinator among equals, not the imposer of norms, and the Plan acknowledges this. New projects flow from the information, analysis, and planning goals, instead of from creative inspiration. Pending project activity makes meeting of full Loan disbursement goals, assuming at least a year extension, quite reasonable.

This logical and orderly approach complements well CONPAN's more exciting early experimental style. The institution now needs to filter, systematize, and use the data and pilot project experience accumulated in the first four years. Current plans respond to these needs.

It is too early to assess performance of the "new" CONPAN. From October, 1978 to January, 1979, the Organization was busy with internal matters. From then till April, the Implementation Plan required extensive attention. Renegotiation of the technical assistance contract also consumed excessive management time, but arrangements now appear satisfactory. Although the current leadership scores well on planning and orderly management, it remains untested for measurable substantive accomplishment.

Some promising signs exist. The National Health Service (SNS) and the National School Feeding Agency (JUNAEB) have new convenios (agreements) with CONPAN and complaints about their poor cooperation have declined in CONPAN. The Regional Project in Talca, supported by the new Intendente (Provincial Military Governor), begun with encouraging reception from participating agencies and in related multisectoral seminars, offers a promising model for nutrition planning. The system of "sensores" carefully selected health centers assisted to provide accurate data, will give CONPAN and the Health Ministry a surveillance system for monitoring

nutrition status and assessing intervention impact. Early work on promotion of breast feeding has produced useful education materials and another pilot project that builds on lessons learned, combining food supplementation with training of health teams and education of pregnant women. The Institute of Food Technology, Dr. Munckeberg's creation, remains an important CONPAN resource and links with universities have increased.

These bright spots must be viewed against a background that includes four years of fruitless CONPAN effort to build an "Analysis Unit". The new administration expects to hire two staff people to run such a unit within a month, but there is nothing at present. The Information Unit developed well during the past six months, but analysis of the information remains negligible, nor is it clear what "analysis" will mean, or how it will be used, if and when the unit exists.

Progress toward institutionalization of a nutrition planning process depends heavily on outcome of the Regional Project. CONPAN involvement with individual agencies assists their intra-agency nutrition planning, but is far from the multisectorial coordination, focus on at-risk groups, and joint planning contemplated in the Regional Project. USAID should support the Regional Project strongly, using its influence with other agencies to encourage non-defensive participation.

USAID also needs to confront a paradox created by the Loan. To

institutionalize, and become a permanent part of the Chilean scene, CONPAN must have permanent staff working continuously on information, analysis, coordination, and planning. The Loan encourages "projects" that require temporary staff and divert attention from the more fundamental tasks. When the Loan ends, the Chilean Government will fund some permanent staff (called "planta"), but there will be little project money. Some overlap exists, but the Loan's project emphasis diverts attention from the stated Loan purposes. Success in implementing projects now has only a limited relation to eventual existence of an independent CONPAN that manages nutrition planning in Chile.

Appropriate USAID response to this built-in contradiction requires acceptance of slower project funds disbursement, if the reduced number of projects reflects increased attention to CONPAN's institutional development and role. The response should also include stretching funding authority to permit support that may not lend itself to classification by project. The information system, for example, is not a series of finite "projects", but the outcome of a continuous process.

[ CONPAN's plans are consistent with Loan purposes and with the requirements for survival after the Loan. They emphasize building of a strong institutional base (information, analysis, planning, project monitoring), a core staff that can function

with whom

without projects, and friendly linkages with other agencies.] # ?  
Though still underway, recovery from past demoralization seems assured. USAID could reasonably have expected more from four years, but also could have received much less. It has received too much to make termination of the loan in 1980 a permissible alternative.

Institutionalization of a nutrition planning process is an elastic Project Purpose. If CONPAN should be cut off by the Government after the Loan, for example, there may still have been achievement of the Purpose. The ways of thinking now being promoted by CONPAN, in the Regional Project and among individual agencies, will remain and become part of various agency approaches. The planning process includes both formal mechanisms and successful introduction of ideas. USAID should not overemphasize formal outcomes, which are more visible, and neglect less tangible manifestations of impact. CONPAN's new, less directive role and style may produce a less visible, but equally effective, nutrition planning process than was anticipated.

## Issues for Consideration

### A. Staffing

The transition to new leadership brought substantial changes in CONPAN staff. At least ten new faces appeared and more are due. Five people left in August, following that many before, and another five will go before January. This revolving door impression hides the impressive continuity prevailing throughout a very traumatic period. At least eight veterans remained and CONPAN did not fall apart. Though new staff have assumed administrative responsibilities well, some staff training in substantive nutrition planning would help institutional continuity.

CONPAN's contractual arrangements complicate assessment of staffing. From inception, the organization had a core staff paid by Government, personal services contractors, a few local consulting company staff, and a technical assistance group, all sometimes conducting themselves as CONPAN employees. Because the number of active projects varies at any time, the number of "CONPAN staff" also fluctuates. As the new leadership reduces projects and builds institutional strength, staff requirements and funding should become clearer.

The new directors emphasize the need to expand "plants" beyond the current seven professionals authorized by Government. Their tentative projections contemplate a) four people in Information, b) four in Analysis (including two from technical assistance), c) four in Regional Projects (planning), and three each in Project Monitoring

and Administration. These eighteen professionals would provide an adequate base for the future CONPAN. USAID needs to consider appropriate arrangements for maintaining them during the Loan period and funding them thereafter.

CONPAN will be at full strength when two vacancies in Analysis are filled, but can remain so only by various project arrangements and other devices that detract from institutional continuity. Regardless of funding methods, USAID and CONPAN both need to think more about building the permanent staff nucleus required for effective survival. The use of personal services contracts to avoid personnel ceilings, not unknown within USAID, seems unavoidable. USAID and CONPAN must identify some minimum number, separate from project staff, essential for institutional survival and begin making the case for eventual funding of them by Government. While budgetary limitations make increase of planta unlikely, possibilities for having staff detailed from (e.g.) JUNAEB, the Health Ministry and JUNJI should improve as CONPAN's value to them becomes more evident.

#### B. Management

Consolidation at CONPAN includes improved management. Relations with USAID, after some initial fencing, stabilized comfortably and paper flow may even have accelerated. Contract monitoring within CONPAN will benefit from new staff and procedures, and personnel management remains adequate.

At the last evaluation, CONPAN already had the manuals, procedures, and Flow charts sometimes associated with good management. These are now better than ever. Assessment of management requires more attention to underlying realities such as work habits, morale, and output. Here, too, the new CONPAN offers reason for modest optimism.

Despite shortness of the evaluation visit, some consistent impressions emerged. CONPAN is not out of the woods yet, but vindictiveness and resentment seem manageable. Some uncertainty about tenure remains among staff, but little bitterness compared to that encountered previously. CONPAN is calmer and more orderly. It is too early to know what this means for productivity.

USAID needs to recognize that the transition is far from over. New staff, however competent, must learn the ropes and new contractors share their lack of CONPAN experience. The Directors have not yet conveyed their sensible vision to other staff and CONPAN could easily become a group of good administrators who don't understand what they are administering.

From the USAID point of view, the new CONPAN will be easier to deal with than the old. It follows that USAID should examine monitoring practices and procedures to be sure that the new CONPAN leadership is relieved of avoidable burdens. Scrutiny of INTA contracts, for example, can be relaxed since Dr. Monckeberg's departure from CONPAN removes possible conflicts of interest. Excessive attention to minor matters and small sums should give way to increased concern for a

future without the Loan. USAID and CONPAN have suffered and progressed together for four years and are still afloat. It is time for mutual confidence and trust to replace over-reliance on formalities. Regulations clearly continue to apply, but long-time partners should develop techniques for expediting their application.

C. The Approach to Analysis

Nutrition planning agencies throughout the world prefer the refuge of studies and pilot projects to the frustration and tumult of planning and operations. CONPAN, too, has resisted arming itself with useful policy analysis and seeking to apply it. The Regional Project represents a first fragile entry into the fray and needs plenty of encouragement. USAID should give it priority, even if this delays other activities and disbursements, because it is most critical to Project purposes.

CONPAN inability to develop a real Analysis unit and program stemmed partly from desire to analyze everything. Nutrition planning emphasis on multi-causality encourages unproductive attempts to explore all causal factors simultaneously, instead of linking analysis more directly to immediate policy needs. It is important that CONPAN's Analysis Unit, if and when established, be viewed as an adjunct to policy, a tool to assist Regional planning and coordination of nutrition-related activities. It should respond primarily to questions from the Regional Committees (assuming new ones will be

formed) and their CONPAN guides. The technical assistance group, that will work with the Analysis Unit, should be used to help answer such questions, not to develop elaborate information systems and analytical models.

D. The Approach to Planning

The Regional Project contemplates formation of multi-sectoral committees to be guided and coordinated by CONPAN. The one already formed in Talca, and any others, will not be chaired by a CONPAN representative and the Agency's role includes only training and intermittent technical assistance.

Limited resources and a commendable desire to avoid spawning "little CONPAN's" outside Santiago influence the approach. In Colombia and the Philippines, for example, staff from the nutrition planning agency play a more dominant role in regional, provincial, and local committees. Chilean governmental structure may make decentralized multi-sectoral coordination easier, but USAID and CONPAN need to acknowledge, and compensate for, the higher risks associated with the modest approach being tried.

The absence of continuous CONPAN presence makes transfer and acceptance of a common methodology more critical. If other agencies take nutrition goals seriously, and share an understanding of how to pursue them, the need for outside leverage diminishes. This requires training efforts beyond the few short seminars in the Project.

USAID should support more extensive training for agency representatives on the committees, to offset lack of continuous CONPAN presence.

It is too early to assess likely outcomes of the Regional Project. Current emphasis on getting agencies to focus resources on malnourished areas and families makes sense, but is only a first step. CONPAN is not yet ready to guide the agencies in joint planning to reduce malnutrition after that. A simple manual for community nutrition planning will soon be needed. Current CONPAN efforts to perfect the methodology, though useful, should not be allowed to delay development of guidance materials based on knowledge already available.

E. The Projects

CONPAN's projects range from \$15,000 data processing tasks to \$400,000 pilot activities intended to produce nationally applicable models. Technical assistance efforts in feeding agencies are also called projects, because of incidental studies and because the people providing help are not "planta" (Government-financed) staff. The new leadership's "reorientation" of the projects added some clarity and specificity, though these were not critical needs at the last evaluation. More important, the projects are now viewed more integrally, both among themselves and as packages related to CONPAN's institutional goals.

This is especially visible and positive in Information. Projects on mortality data and a 1974 survey, for example, relate clearly to information goals and build on earlier work. The library, a basic information bulletin, and a tape incorporating all CONPAN studies, reflect an orderly view of information and how it will be used. The Information Unit uses projects to support a routine indispensable function. Absence of an Analysis Unit makes this impossible in analysis. Most projects will be relevant to an Analysis Unit, but without a Unit and related plan, their use remains unclear. The Gestión de Proyectos (Project Management) Unit serves others and is not a program office. This creates ambiguity and a gap in CONPAN. Generation and application of projects in individual agencies (e.g., JUNAEB, JUNJI) have no continuing base in the Organization, as do Information and Analysis.

If the Regional Project Unit becomes a key part of CONPAN's continuing operations, it may assume the role of applying the findings of projects with individual agencies. If not, follow-up functions of the Project Office should expand beyond monitoring of individual contracts, to provide institutional continuity.

This issue does not require immediate attention, since contract staff in current projects with individual agencies function like permanent CONPAN employees. As the number of projects shrinks, CONPAN will need to clarify institutional responsibility for relationship with national offices of social development agencies, to assure coordination and continued technical involvement with the agencies.

F. The Mechanized Data System (MDS)

The computer-assisted system for monitoring inventories and losses of food in voluntary agency and governmental feeding programs, originally a USAID initiative, became a CONPAN Project and continues to function. The Ministry of Health, satisfied with a manual control system, refuses to participate in MDS.

Under some circumstances, this refusal could indicate serious problems in CONPAN's ability to coordinate and improve collection of information. While the Ministry's participation would offer advantages, refusal appears to be no more than an honest difference of opinion about efficiency in generating information quickly. CONPAN receives the Ministry's manually-obtained data without delay and there is ample exchange of other information with the Health agencies.

The Ministry of Health may enjoy refusing a CONPAN request, but the matter is best viewed as a minor part of the broader relationship between the two institutions. The current reorganization within the Ministry may benefit CONPAN, whose role and position have already been confirmed in it. As the new relationship emerges, the MDS issue may come up again, but it is a minor annoyance that does little damage to CONPAN's position or effectiveness.

The Ministry of Hacienda's decision to disallow rental of a computer terminal, for placement in CONPAN, might also have been interpreted as a blow to the organization. Investigation indicated that it was no more than application of a general policy limiting computer-related expenditures. Absence of the terminal will not limit CONPAN analysis efforts seriously and does not reflect any attempt to disparage CONPAN.

### The Future

If Loan disbursements continue through 1981, or longer for that matter, there is still no guarantee that CONPAN will survive. The Chilean political situation, relations with the United States, and Government economic policies, for example, could easily cause CONPAN's demise from disinterest and neglect, if not from malice. Nutrition goals receive some attention, but many others come first.

This should come as no surprise to USAID. The Loan involved calculated risks from inception and assessment of the future involves judgments about them. Institutional links built by CONPAN have reduced the risks and improved the gamble.

ODEPLAN, the national planning agency, approved CONPAN's recent budget without ado and asked the Agency's help in reviewing benefits of the daycare program. The Ministry of Foreign Relations invited CONPAN to represent it in an international conference. Despite some acrimonious battles, the Ministry of Health listens to CONPAN frequently. Ministry data collection, staff training, and maternal-child care bear CONPAN imprints that reflect mutual professional respect. The Regional Project begins CONPAN's linkages with decentralized governmental operations. Other agencies, short of funds and staff, look to CONPAN for work they formerly did for themselves.

ODEPLAN or the Ministry of Health may absorb CONPAN. Even the name could disappear, but staff and functions are likely to remain.

Nowhere else in Government is social planning, especially for nutrition, more advanced, and CONPAN is now a useful source of information and help for others. This may be more a consequence of Chilean priorities than a tribute to CONPAN, but supports the institution's survival.

When the Loan finishes, CONPAN's project days will be over. New activities will be part of Ministry work, developed jointly with CONPAN. A small CONPAN core group, financed entirely by Government, will provide analytical staff work, technical assistance, and coordination for agencies in social development and, later, perhaps others as well. Power will come from command of information, knowledge of alternatives and consequences, and a track record for improving efficiency and nutrition impact.

This vision differs from conventional views of national nutrition planning, but is equally valid. USAID need have no qualms about continued support for achievement of such purposes. It should concentrate now on helping CONPAN to identify other funding sources and to strengthen ability to deal with them. USAID must also show confidence in CONPAN, appear to take survival for granted, and otherwise support the transition to independence.