Publicado em 10/06/2022 - 07:44

Universities in the fight against hunger – 06/10/2022 – Sou Ciência

During the pandemic, the media highlighted the role of public universities in clinical research, in collaboration for the development of vaccines, in the sequencing of the virus genome, in the front line of care in university hospitals, in collaboration with SUS, or in the rear , training professionals, producing equipment and advising public managers.

However, no less important was the solidarity action of federal institutions to combat the return of hunger, which affects 33 million people in the country, and poverty, complementary and dramatic effects of the coronavirus and the mismanagement of the federal government in the face of the health crisis.

There were many campaigns to collect and distribute food and hygiene items to prevent Covid-19. Actions aimed mainly at vulnerable people (including the university community), as well as initiatives that strengthened programs to combat hunger and provide assistance for generating work and income (such as supporting the marketing of agricultural and artisanal products) .

The most advanced and innovative initiatives were those that connected the entire production chain through extension projects and incubators, generating income in the fight against hunger: from agricultural input stores and small rural producers, to transport and distribution companies, donors and, of course, the benefited communities at the tip. All these partners received, in addition to food, preventive information and care guidance from university students.

In a survey carried out by SoU_Ciência in October 2021, “hunger and poverty” were, according to 62.1% of respondents, the biggest problem in Brazil, in addition to the pandemic itself. Asked about the role of public universities in this context, in addition to carrying out teaching and research, 20% of respondents considered that it would be important to contribute to public policies, support communities in vulnerable situations, disseminate reliable information and incubate new companies.

Here are some examples of campaigns and actions aimed at fighting food insecurity, carried out by higher education institutions in partnership with their academic communities and organized civil society. The Federal University of São Paulo ABC (UFABC), for example, provided social and legal support and provided basic food baskets to vulnerable homeless and LGBT people. UFPel had a similar initiative, in Pelotas.

In Acre, UFAC distributed more than 20 tons of food to 6,000 people. In Alagoas, UFAL also served underserved communities with basic food baskets and acted in the fight against malnutrition. Indigenous communities were also assisted with food donations in Amazonas, where UFAM donated basic food baskets to this population. The same happened in Tocantins (UFT), in the south of Bahia (UFSB), in São Paulo (Unifesp) and in Rio Grande (FURG).

In Porto Alegre, UFCSPA collected food, hygiene, cleaning and clothing items for quilombola communities, indigenous people and outsourced workers from the university itself. real and connect those who needed support and those who could help, not only in the area of ??food security, but also in income generation and mental health. In Santa Maria-RS (UFSM), the support included recyclable collectors, in addition to the homeless, indigenous and quilombola population.

In Viçosa-MG, UFV articulated extension projects, incubators and farmers in a solidarity network, and donated food from university restaurants (closed with remote teaching) to philanthropic institutions and hospitals. Federal do Oeste do Pará (UFOPA) strengthened family farming and promoted food and nutritional security through the acquisition of agroecological baskets from family production in the Santarém region.

These are just some registered experiences and more information about other actions will be in a panel that will be launched by SoU_Ciência on the subject, later this month. Universities have contributed and contribute a lot to the fight against Covid-19 in different ways, but the initiatives to combat hunger, built community by community, in each territory, show the public and social relevance of the presence of federal institutions in the different regions of the country. .

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