FOOD MONITOR PROGRAM WARNS OF SYSTEMIC DETERIORATION IN BASIC LIVING CONDITIONS IN CUBA

Press Release No. 37 – Food Monitor Program
Havana, May 2025

Cuba's economy has experienced a pronounced decline since 2018, the result of a multifactorial crisis that has worsened in recent years. Chronic shortages of food, medicine, and other essential goods, along with the collapse of basic services such as electricity, drinking water, and domestic gas, are among the most immediate impacts on the daily lives of Cubans. These issues appear consistently in collected testimonies, with many describing the current situation as worse than that of the so-called Special Period.

To the chronic scarcity of goods, a severe inflation and monetary devaluation are added, combined with a growing dollarization of the economy. These conditions have gravely eroded the purchasing power of wages and pensions, whose real values are deeply out of step with the country's cost of living: a carton of thirty eggs costs nearly two basic pensions, while one kilogram of milk equals a minimum monthly salary.

The systemic deterioration, already signaled by rising food insecurity, has deepened with the collapse of essential public services, evidenced in the significant decline in electricity, potable water, and gas supply. How did it come to this?

Collapse of the national power system

Cuba's energy grid relies mostly on thermoelectric plants up to forty years old, which burn fuel oil and operate at their limits after decades of use and inadequate maintenance. For the past five years, electricity generation has failed to meet demand, continually affected by breakdowns and fuel shortages—exacerbated by postponed investments and technical difficulties in processing domestic crude oil.

As a result, Cubans across the island endure up to 16 hours per day of scheduled blackouts, organized by blocks in each residential sector. These power cuts damage appliances, spoil food, and create ongoing stress, impacting general well-being and social functioning. For example, many families choose not to go to work or send their children to school after sleepless nights due to the lack of ventilation in a tropical country where

temperatures exceed 32°C.

Collapse of the national water system

Cuba has an aging hydraulic infrastructure: water pipe networks exploited for decades with little maintenance have caused massive losses due to leaks or “salideros.” By the end of 2023, nearly 2,000 unrepaired leaks were reported in Havana alone, obstructing traffic and flooding residential areas.

In addition, aqueducts operate with outdated pumping stations vulnerable to breakdowns and spare part shortages. This system, highly dependent on electricity —the second largest electricity consumer in the country after industry— is particularly exposed to the energy crisis, suffering pumping interruptions, reduced pressure, and diminished reach.

As a result, the vast majority of Cubans do not have continuous running water and must rely on their own means for storage. It is estimated that over half a million people lack stable access to drinking water, and hundreds of thousands more are systematically affected by service disruptions. Water delivery cycles of up to four days are common. This has a serious impact on people’s ability to cook and sanitize food, and poses a direct risk to health.

Collapse in national fuel distribution

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), the primary domestic fuel for cooking in Cuba, has faced increasingly severe restrictions since 2019. The government’s response has focused on strict rationing of the limited product, without managing to prevent major disruptions, ongoing since October 2024.

Specifically, the non-delivery of LPG since February 2025 has left 41% of Cuban households without a safe means of cooking, forcing them to revert to primitive methods. Many families cook with wood or charcoal in makeshift ovens, which presents fire hazards and health risks from using unclean fuels. Others alternate with electric stoves, an increasingly unreliable option given the frequency of blackouts. The domestic impact is severe: without stable access to gas or electricity, many people cannot purify water or cook food properly, compromising both nutrition and hygiene. According to FMP surveys, more than 76% of families have seen their ability to prepare food affected by electricity cuts.

The combination of basic service crises —interlinked and overlapping— has deepened food insecurity nationwide. Sustained scarcity has forced drastic changes in daily life,

such as adjusting mealtimes or staying home to collect water. According to FMP studies, many families have changed their diets to more affordable —often less healthy— foods, and have reduced the number of daily meals.

The impact of this polycrisis has revealed deep social tensions. Public perception reflects growing discontent: over 63% of the population attributes the current situation to government mismanagement, while only 8% justifies it through the U.S. embargo. Each of the aforementioned collapses has been denounced through neighborhood pot-banging protests and other forms of micro-protests across the country. Among the most recent demonstrations was the May 22 protest in Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo, where residents took to the streets chanting "Electricity and food." Five days earlier, another public protest in Pinar del Río forced local authorities to respond after residents spent more than 20 hours without power.

While the systemic collapse worsens and daily life becomes increasingly unbearable, the Cuban government opts for repression, criminalizing those who demand a dignified life. At the same time, in search of financial relief, it continues to prioritize clientelist and ideological alliances to guarantee subsidized imports of food and energy. With no will to structurally overhaul the system, the government remains committed to its current model, increasingly aligning with autocracies like China and Russia in a polarized and uncertain global order.

FMP urges the authorities to implement a long-term plan focused on the food system and the revitalization of the Cuban countryside. The lack of inputs, obsolete machinery, structural disincentives, coupled with managerial failures, non-payments, and logistical bottlenecks, have led to a drop of more than 65% in national food production, with even basic staples disappearing from the market.

FMP denounces the inaction of an administration that seeks to survive by capturing foreign currency at the expense of suffering families and the Cuban diaspora. It warns that any recovery of stability will require profound reforms and a real reconciliation among the country's productive forces, eliminating bureaucracy, personalism, and cadre policies. It also demands the guarantee of a dignified standard of living for all Cubans, respect for their agency, and genuine political will to halt the destruction of the nation.