

Virtual Forum
Inter-American Law in Times of Pandemic
Food Security as a Challenge in Post-COVID-19
June 22nd, 2020
11:00AM – 1:00PM

Context:

The corona-virus pandemic is having a profound effect on food security in countries of all levels of economic development across the Americas. Global supply chains as well as local distribution systems have been disrupted: witness dwindling supplies at markets and processing plant closures, long lines at food banks while producers lack market access and mounds of food are wasted. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our food system both globally and locally. However, even without COVID-19, in recent years rates of hunger have been on the rise again. At the end of 2019, 18.5 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean were suffering from acute food insecurity with millions more “on the cusp.” Given the impact of COVID-19, the numbers (on a global basis) are forecast to double this year. As is frequently the case, it is the most vulnerable who are suffering the most - a health crisis compounded by a food crisis.

Food insecurity is not a new problem; at the 2012 OAS General Assembly, Member States agreed on the need to take measures to improve the food situation in the Americas. In 2015, the global community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, among them “to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” Although indicators and targets to reach these goals have been established to guide the way forward, a missing component in many states is an effective action plan, the design of a national strategy to develop laws and policies necessary for the actualization of food security.

The current crisis represents an opportunity within the OAS community to reflect and rebuild our food and agricultural systems on the principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability. This is the time to consider how we can build resilience in the face of crisis and achieve food security for today as well as for future generations.

Objectives and Development:

This virtual forum considers the role and use of the law as a vehicle for strengthening and building resilience for food security in the face of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. It will provide listeners with a perspective on the current state of food insecurity in the region as exacerbated by the pandemic, an overview of food security and the contributions that can be made towards its actualization by means of international law, and consideration of the responsibilities of governments in the context of the progressive realization of the right to food.

Opening: Introduction of the topic and panelists

Part I: Current State of Food Insecurity in the Region. This part will provide an overview of the current situation in the region (North and South America and Caribbean) in regards to food security in the face of the pandemic and the possible post-COVID situation.

- **Question:** Can you provide us with an overview of the impact of the pandemic on food security in the region? Have some countries been better able to withstand the challenges for food security and what lessons can we learn from this going forward?

Part II: Food Security and the Law. This part will consider international law as relevant to food security. This will begin with a brief overview of what is meant by “food security”, a brief deconstruction of the concept and explanation of the pillars of 1) availability, 2) access, 3) utilization and their relationship to 4) stability. This will be considered in the context of the pandemic, specifically in relation to Distribution (one of the elements of Availability, which encompasses the supply chain and its management) and Access (in relation to rising levels of unemployed and informal sector). This will lay the groundwork for the identification of the legal underpinnings for each of these pillars – and for food security.

- **Question:** Can you provide us with an overview of international law as relevant to food security? Perhaps you might identify one or two legal instruments as applied in the regional context that have contributed towards ensuring food security.

Part III. Responsibilities of Governments. This part will consider obligations and responsibilities on the part of governments in relation to food insecurity, firstly, in response to the pandemic and secondly, in recovery and building resilience towards achieving SDG #2. This will be considered in the context of the human right to food and other international legal instruments.

- **Question:** Can you explain the right to food and its relevance to the current pandemic? Are there any particular aspects of this right that are unique within the regional context? The right to food has been interpreted as “the right to feed oneself”; what obligations and responsibilities on the part of governments follow from it? Can you comment on how that might impact law and policy in shaping food systems?

Conclusion: The session will conclude with reflections on ways by which international law can support OAS Member States in building resilience for food security, not only in the wake of COVID-19, but in the face of other pending crises, not the least of which is climate change.

- **Question:** States have been encouraged to develop long-term national food security and nutrition policies (under the RAI Principles, #35); what elements would you consider critical to include in such a national policy, particularly in building resilience for food security?