Virtual Parliamentary Dialogues: Food Security and Nutrition in the time of Covid-19

Date: March – September 2021

Venue: Online (through Zoom); a link will be provided upon registration.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) together with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) will promote a series of parliamentary dialogues on hunger and malnutrition in the time of Covid-19.

As a follow up to the Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition, held in Madrid on 29-30 October 2018, the objective of the dialogues is to support capacity-building activities for parliamentarians and strengthen the political dialogue processes that are being developed in each region.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the world, altered the way we think and operate, and transformed our predictions and expectations. To get out of this crisis we must be resilient, acquire knowledge and be prepared to manage its consequences in our societies. In order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on food and agriculture, FAO urges countries to meet the immediate food needs of vulnerable populations, boost social protection programs, maintain global food trade, keep national supply chains moving and support the capacity of small holder farmers to increase food production.

The pandemic not only affects food trade, supply chains and markets, but also people's lives and livelihoods, the implementation of the right to food and adequate food security in general.
As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, stated "the Coronavirus pandemic is not only a critical danger to public health, but also a human, economic and social emergency that is rapidly turning into a human rights crisis”.

In this scenario of uncertainty there is the risk that a lack of coordination and efficient actions, could worsen the situation for everyone and in particular for the most vulnerable. A human rights-based approach, such as the one adopted by different countries for the right to adequate food, provides satisfactory mechanisms to strengthen governance, particularly in terms of participation, inclusion and improvement of the quality of the information that is crucial for decision-making.

To achieve this objective, it is necessary to mobilize the capacities and commitment of different actors, including parliamentarians, who are directly involved in reaching agreements to approve budgets and enacting the necessary legislative changes. Indeed, through their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions, parliamentarians can play a crucial role as changemakers, addressing and mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on food security, both in the containment and recovery phases, protecting employment and local economies, and facilitating economic inclusion and the right to food for all.

Goals

Based on the ongoing collaboration with more than 45 parliamentary alliances to advance food security and fight malnutrition, FAO with the support of AECID developed a multi-stakeholder dialogue to engage parliamentarians through virtual platforms in order to:

- Encourage political dialogue between parliamentarians and their networks on the key challenges facing food security and nutrition during COVID-19;
- Support concrete national parliamentary initiatives on the Right to Food to address the challenges of COVID-19;
- Enable mutual learning and knowledge sharing among parliamentarians through the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned in order to address and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on food security;
- Enhance parliamentarians’ actions to address the impacts of COVID-19 on food systems;
- Strengthen parliamentarians’ capabilities to promote adequate legal frameworks to address the challenges of food security and nutrition during the COVID-19 emergency.

Methodology

The virtual discussion will be organized according to subregional, regional and linguistic areas, and the parliamentarians can choose whether to contribute to all or some of the
below-mentioned spaces:

- Space 1: an official web page in order to grant parliamentarians access to various material and identify key issues within the context of COVID-19, which will be further discussed and analysed in Space 2.

In order to facilitate the navigation on the website, different sections can be included, such as: (i) the calendar of events with agendas, (ii) the background documents for discussion, (iii) a brief explanation on the challenges and policy dialogue processes which are being implemented in the region and their related strategic documents, (iv) multimedia and/or audio-visual material.

- Space 2: a series of political dialogues organized according to subregional and regional groups, in order to discuss common elements and bring together parliamentarians from different areas considering their experiences and challenges in the field. These dialogues will culminate in a global discussion which will include the main themes and results emerged during the previous exchanges.

Results

- Compilation of parliamentary initiatives concerning the response to COVID-19 in different areas of the world, including the mapping of promoted, written and implemented laws and regulations.

- Final document.

Programme

A series of policy dialogues linked to SDG2 will be organised in accordance with the sub-regional and regional spaces and supported by a website. The dialogues will culminate in a global discussion that will be based on the main issues discussed and, on the outcomes, developed in the previous dialogues.

More specifically, the following virtual events are planned:

- 4 sub-regional dialogues (Central and South America, Francophone African countries, Anglophone African countries, Arab countries)

- 2 regional dialogues (Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean)

- 1 global dialogue (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe)