



PARLIAMENTARY FRONT AGAINST HUNGER IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean (PFH) is a space for dialogue and discussion that brings together members of parliaments in the region. Its aim is for parliamentarians to exert influence on the development of institutional capacities to fight hunger in an articulated manner, in coordination with governments and civil society through the existing regional, sub-regional and national legislative bodies.

The creation of a Parliamentary Front Against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean has been promoted by the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean (HFLAC) Initiative Support Project since its inception.

This effort is in response to the bearing legislative bodies have on placing the issue of hunger and food insecurity as a top priority in political and legislative agendas, with a view to establishing an effective institutional framework to guarantee food security. Institutional development involves several processes, including the formulation and improvement of regulatory frameworks, the creation of government institutions responsible for putting them into action; the formulation and implementation of related policies and programs; as well as the allocation of adequate budgets.

1. Background

The creation of a Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean is a result of the coordinated effort of the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean (HFLAC) Initiative Support Project and the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO). Other supra-national parliamentary bodies soon joined this effort, such as the Andean Parliament (PARLANDINO), the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), the Forum of Speakers of the Legislative Bodies of the Central American and Caribbean Basin (FOPREL), and the Mercosur Parliament (PARLASUR). Following its creation, an extensive process was set in motion to coordinate parliamentary actions for the purpose of filling legislative gaps and to assist in placing the issue of hunger and food insecurity at the top of the political and legislative agendas at the national, regional and sub-regional

levels.

In this context, the HFLAC Initiative Support Project was able to organize two meetings with the objectives of developing a proposal for a Plan of Action for the PFH and creating links among the parliamentarians involved. The first preparatory meeting, held in Santiago, Chile in June 2009, focused on South America; the second, held in Panama City in July 2009, focused on Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. The debate thus began on how to organize and put the PFH into action at the various levels of parliamentary representation so that it could become a useful instrument for institutional development aimed at eradicating hunger in the region. In September 2009, the political conditions were met to officially launch the PFH in Panama within the framework of an *Interparliamentary Conference on the Right to Food Security*, with the



participation of members of national and state congresses, and several members of the Latin American, Central American and Andean Parliaments. The event concluded with the approval of the PFH Action Plan, which promotes the presence of the PFH at international fora; the development of national legal and legislative frameworks for food security; and the corresponding budget allocations.

As follow-up to the action plan approved in Panama, the First Forum of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger was held March 3 and 4, 2010, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, to facilitate the dialogue between members of parliament and organized civil society (NGOs, CSOs, social leaders, academia, and the private sector, among others) as well as international organizations, governments and other stakeholders. Among the agreements that emerged, two should be highlighted: first, the creation of a coordinating committee to oversee the fulfillment of the objectives of the PFH, requesting technical assistance from FAO and the HFLAC Initiative Support Project when necessary; and second, the promotion of national chapters in each country to ensure that hunger becomes a priority issue in national political and legislative agendas, and move closer to civil society to engage in dialogue and actively contribute to the formulation of proposals for designing, executing and evaluating strategies to combat hunger.

More than 45 parliamentarians from 15 countries and representatives of more than 20 civil society organizations participated in the Second Forum of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger, consolidating the PFH as a space for parliamentary coordination, following a rights-based and inclusive and participatory approach.

Parliamentarians and civil society discussed the role of the PFH and its national chapters, their progress and challenges; the role of supra-national parliaments in advocating for the fight against hunger; and also conducted a deeper thematic analysis of small scale agriculture, social policies and institutional monitoring of the right to food.

2. The Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (HFLACI) Support Project and the Parliamentary Front against Hunger

The starting point of an efficient strategy to combat hunger and undernutrition is the political will of countries to create the institutional framework necessary to reach this goal.

Food security worldwide and at a regional level is faced with a complex future, which requires an architecture that adequately addresses challenges such as the excessive volatility of food prices, climate change, land concentration and foreign ownership, market deregulation, production of agro fuels, access to productive resources, the growing demand for food, and new eating habits, among others. Latin American societies have therefore begun to demand a more active role of the State through the implementation and development of an adequate institutional framework, represented both by policy measures as well as regulatory frameworks formulated from a food and nutrition security perspective.

Recognizing the cross-functionality of the State (executive, legislative, judicial and electoral powers), the HFLAC Initiative Support Project provides backstopping to the actions of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger with the



objective of raising awareness among legislators and providing technical and methodological support for the development of adequate regulatory frameworks for food security in countries throughout the region. The following lines of action have therefore been established for this purpose: a) dialogue, discussion and reflection; ii) awareness-raising; iii) strengthening the governance of the Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger.

- **Dialogue, Discussion and Reflection**

Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have signed international instruments that guarantee the protection of the right to food and several of them (8) have approved food security laws and/or have constitutions that establish the right to food, yet there are still unacceptable levels of undernourished people in the region. This requires a broad political dialogue that integrates and connects the various political forces, represented by political parties, and pursues social pacts based on the inclusion and active participation of all sectors of society, particularly the representatives of civil society.

PFH fora have gained a significant presence in the context of promoting high-level political dialogue on food security in the continent and are challenged with fostering more active participation of the public and private sectors and civil society at their annual meetings, and disseminating the results more extensively.

- **Awareness-raising**

The parliamentary structure in the region provides countless opportunities for raising awareness on food and nutrition security given its cross-cutting nature and being a topic of

discussion in different national parliamentary commissions, such as human rights, health, agriculture, finance, economy and budget, social development, and education, among others.

In addition, poverty, social justice and development are key issues being debated in supra-national parliaments such as PARLANDINO, PARLATINO, PARLACEN, PARLASUR and FOPREL, which are attempting to develop unified criteria regarding supra-national strategies aimed at strengthening institutions and constructing judicial frameworks through awareness-raising and political incidence.

The PFHs should be the link between policy requirements that stem from national realities and civil society, in order to be taken into consideration in parliaments and national and supra-national parliamentary fora, feed their agendas, promote awareness-raising on certain issues and facilitate communication/dissemination with civil society of the agreements reached at these fora.

- **Strengthening the governance of the Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger**

The activities of the PFH in Latin America and the Caribbean are aimed at strengthening processes of political advocacy for food security in countries throughout the region. A coordinating group was created for this purpose composed of representatives designated by each national PFH and supranational parliamentary fora. Its technical secretariat, taken on by the HFLAC Initiative Support Project, provides administrative and technical support to the group.

The coordinating committee of the PFH provides orientation to the different national



Parliamentary Fronts on the development of regulatory frameworks by: a) fostering dialogue among parliamentarians and other relevant actors, b) promoting the exchange of experiences among parliamentarians, and c) providing technical support in legislative matters.

Since 2010, the PFH has held a Parliamentary Forum on an annual basis to bring together the many actors involved in the creation of the regulatory framework for food security, to present the initiatives underway in each country and discuss strategic contents. The PFH works primarily with two groups of actors: national parliamentary fronts and organized civil society.

National Parliamentary Fronts

National PFHs or national chapters of parliamentary fronts are at the core of the work of the PFH. Their commitment and parliamentary activities at a national level facilitate high-level advocacy, aimed at promoting coordinated actions among all stakeholders in the construction of the institutional framework necessary to achieve food security in each country of the region. The actions carried out at the country level are the elements that stimulate discussion and have an impact at a regional level, which in turn feeds into the processes underway in different countries.

The PFH provides support to national chapters for the preparation of work plans, providing technical material for analyzing the priority areas of each PFH, and methodological support in designing and implementing participatory processes involving regulatory issues. The national fronts, on the other hand, have made a commitment to develop initiatives based on an inclusive and participatory

approach, where coordination with civil society is essential.

Civil Society

From the onset of the PFH -conceived as a mechanism to exert political influence- the inclusion and participation of civil society in the construction of the institutional framework for food security has been considered a crucial element since parliamentary actions must be aligned with the interests of the different sectors of society, guaranteeing the inclusion of a rights-based approach in the development of regulatory frameworks. The PFH thus promotes the rapprochement of national chapters with the different sectors of society as a means to learn about their demands, perspectives and approaches regarding the topics they deal with in their parliamentary activities.

Both the Sao Paulo Forum Declaration (2010) and the Bogota Forum Declaration (2011) have reaffirmed the commitment of parliamentarians to work in coordination with civil society in their respective national processes, and significant progress has been made to date by the PFHs in the region in incorporating social dialogue as a strategic element in their work plans.

3. Progress and Results

Significant progress has been made in recent years in Latin America and the Caribbean in strengthening the institutional framework for food and nutrition security. Drawing on the work carried out by PFHs at a national level, legislators from nine countries decided in 2011 to reaffirm their commitment to food security. There is now a regional Parliamentary Front for Latin America and the Caribbean, 11 national parliamentary



fronts (in Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Colombia, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico and Guatemala), and a Central American Parliamentary Front (Parlacen). There are also members of parliament who have been active in Costa Rica, El Salvador and other countries in the region promoting the creation of national parliamentary fronts, as well as an agenda for discussion.

Several countries approved plans and policies in 2011 to structure the multi-sectoral strategies for food and nutrition security (FNS). It should be pointed out that several instruments have been approved and launched, such as the FNS Policies in El Salvador and Costa Rica (May), the CARICOM Regional FNS Action Plan (October), and the Fourth National FNS Conference in Brazil (November).

Parliamentarians, as actors who discuss and approve legislation on food security, and ensure the realization of the right to food and the allocation of appropriate funds, are actively participating in discussions regarding a series of reforms and laws that would result in significant institutional progress in the fight against hunger:

- The constitutional reform approved in Mexico in May, which recognizes the right to food following a long process that ended in consensus, with support from the members of the Parliamentary Front.
- I. The approval of the Food Security Law in Honduras in July 2011, which establishes the regulatory framework for structuring, harmonizing and coordinating actions in food and nutrition security, placing priority on the most vulnerable groups. The law will facilitate

the implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy adopted by the government.

- II. The discussion underway in Congress in Colombia where the right to be free from hunger is currently being debated, advocated by the local chapter of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger. Since this group was formed – within the framework of the Second Parliamentary Front Forum, held in June 2011– it has been able to rally the efforts of several national political forces that are promoting legislative measures aimed at improving the diet of Colombians.
- III. The discussion underway among legislators in El Salvador regarding the food security law, bringing together proposals made by several legislators and groups, and analyzing these proposals to reach consensus on the issue.
- IV. The participatory process underway to formulate a bill on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security developed jointly by government, civil society and the Parliamentary Front in the Dominican Republic, incorporating innovative mechanisms for consultation and participation.

4. Challenges and prospects of the HFLAC Initiative Support Project for 2012-2013

The HFLAC Initiative Support Project is committed to continue working towards addressing the current challenges, namely:

- To continue to promote and deepen political and social dialogue among different actors who advocate actions to strengthen the institutional framework necessary to fight hunger, and thus reach 2025 fully guaranteeing



the right to adequate food for all citizens in the region.

- To contribute towards strengthening civil society participation.
- To collaborate in strengthening ties and dialogue among supra-national and supra-regional parliamentary groups.
- To stimulate parliamentary discussion providing technical contents that are relevant for each country.
- To strengthen national fronts, supporting their operations by exercising an active role in the technical secretariat of the PFH, thus contributing towards facilitating the formulation of work plans, their implementation and execution.
- To systematize and disseminate the lessons learned by the PFHs, presenting the different experiences of the legislative processes underway in the region for the purpose of facilitating the development and implementation of participatory processes aimed at strengthening the institutional framework for FNS.