

RULE OF LAW FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



- Over 250 million people across 58 countries and territories were unable to access adequate food and nutrition in 2022.
- The most food insecure people are those who already experience systematic exclusion and marginalization; women and girls, youth and children, indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, and people on the move are among the most affected.
- Strengthening the rule of law can accelerate food systems transformation, not only as a means of achieving progress at the intersection of Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger) and 16 (Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies), but also as a strategic response to the intersecting and compounding crises of post-pandemic recovery, rising costs of living, increasing violent conflict, and climate change.

What is food security?

Food security “exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. It includes six dimensions: the *availability* of food; the economic and physical *access* to food *utilization*, which determines people’s nutritional status; the *stability* of the other three dimensions over time; *agency*, the capacity to act independently and make choices about their own food system; and *sustainability*, which means that food systems contribute to long-term regeneration of natural, social and economic systems.

The rule of law and food systems transformation

Strengthening food systems governance through the rule of law principles of transparency and accountability, and supporting legal empowerment and access to justice for people and communities seeking food security, are preconditions for just, inclusive, and sustainable food systems transformation. Strong, coherent, and rights-based legal frameworks and regulations across food systems; effective and transparent institutions and inclusive participatory decision-making processes; and a people-centred approach to justice and accountability can deliver effective, responsive, and sustainable food systems for all.

Key elements of accelerating food systems transformation through rule of law approaches



Empowering the most food insecure people to claim their rights



Strengthening food systems governance through sound legal and regulatory frameworks and effective institutions



Improving and safeguarding equitable access to land, water, and natural resources

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RULE OF LAW AND FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



1. Empower food insecure people and communities

Legal empowerment and protection of civic space can enable people and communities to claim their right to adequate food and nutrition, while inclusive policymaking ensures that food policies are informed by and responsive to their needs. Priority must be given to the most food insecure people: women and girls, youth and children, indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, pastoralists, and people on the move including refugees, IDPs, and migrants.



2. Embrace a feminist approach to rule of law and food security

The efforts of women and girls to realise food security are affected by gender-based forms of exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination. Food systems transformation must empower women and girls to claim their rights, integrate women's active engagement in food policy decision-making at all levels, and guarantee women's rights to land and natural resources.



3. Improve food systems governance

Fair and effective laws (including constitutional provisions guaranteeing the right to adequate food) and transparent and accountable institutions are essential to food systems transformation, especially efforts to ensure access to justice for people and communities seeking to realise their rights to food and nutrition, enable inclusive decision-making, promote responsible investment, and foster sustainability and resilience.



4. Invest in durable rule of law solutions to root causes

The root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition are diverse and complex, and in many contexts relate to the intersection of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding challenges; working at this nexus is essential to ensuring holistic and durable solutions to food insecurity.



5. Strengthen equitable land, water, and natural resource governance

The ability of people and communities to realise rights to food and nutrition are largely dependent on secure access to land, water, and natural resources. Food systems transformation must foster land tenure systems that protect diverse forms of tenure, including customary rights to land and other resources, and reduce conflict over land and other resources.



6. Deliver food systems transformation within planetary environmental boundaries

The global climate crisis and mounting biodiversity loss will have significant adverse implications for the world's ability to produce and distribute adequate food for all. The rule of law can play a crucial role in ensuring that food systems transformation contributes to protection of biodiversity and to processes of climate mitigation and adaptation.



7. Champion the rule of law as an enabler of food systems transformation

Mobilising partnerships between states and other stakeholders, and supporting cooperation through multilateral frameworks including the SDGs and UN Food Systems Summit, will foster an inclusive coordinated, and intersectoral approach to food systems transformation that is grounded in the rule of law. Efforts must also be predicated on a convincing evidence base produced through policy-relevant research.