

18.B. Oral session: Sustainable food

Legal and human rights-based approaches to healthy diets and sustainable food systems

David Patterson

DW Patterson¹, K Buse², R Magnusson³, BCA Toebes¹

¹Global Health Law Groningen Research Centre, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands

²Strategic Policy Directions, UNAIDS, Geneva, Switzerland

³Sydney Law School, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Contact: d.w.patterson@rug.nl

Issue:

Malnutrition in all its forms poses daunting challenges to global health and development. The agriculture sector is a significant contributor to global warming. COVID-19 has pushed many people into poverty, including food poverty. A radical rethink of business models, food systems, civil society involvement, and national and international governance is required to address the interlinked crises of COVID-19, obesity, undernutrition, and climate change. International human rights law, institutions and mechanisms provide important opportunities for norm setting, advocacy and accountability. Yet these pathways are under-utilised by both governments and civil society.

Description:

The global AIDS response demonstrated the power of a human rights-based approach. United Nations' HIV/AIDS and Human Rights Guidelines greatly influenced the global consensus for effective, evidence-based approaches. The Guidelines also informed resolutions of the UN General Assembly and its Human Rights Council, contributing to more affordable medicines, an unprecedented increase in people on treatment, less stigmatising health services, the empowerment of marginalised groups, and the institutionalisation of norms, including "no one left behind." Human rights-based approaches have also been successfully utilised in tobacco control.

Results:

In 2019, 180 experts from 38 countries published an open call on WHO and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to initiate an inclusive process to develop guidelines on human rights, healthy diets and sustainable food systems. Most signatories were from the health and development sectors, demonstrating the increasingly broad interest in using human rights mechanisms to address global health challenges.

Lessons:

Opportunities exist to transform food systems and create healthier food environments and a healthier planet by clarifying existing international obligations to progressively realise the right to food and the right to health.

Key messages:

- Market forces, alone, are failing to deliver healthy diets and sustainable food systems. International legal frameworks and accountability mechanisms provide opportunities for engagement and action.
- Human rights guidelines can help mobilize multisectoral action, strengthen State and private sector accountability, and deepen community engagement in the urgent task of achieving Agenda 2030.