

Venezuela - Food Security and Sovereignty to Fight Starvation Sanctions

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Global Research, February 12, 2021

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*Mainstream media references to Venezuela always focus on the devastating economic crisis, which they directly or indirectly attribute either to the Maduro government mismanagement or to a total failure of the Bolivarian Revolution envisioned by **Hugo Chávez**. US sanctions are mentioned (if they are at all) as if they were a benign slap on the hand to change the conduct of a misbehaving child. More seriously, sanctions are unilateral coercive economic measures forcing “a change of conduct” in target countries as punishment for falsely reputed violation of “international norms of behaviour”.*

The reality is that the US has been enforcing an [escalating hybrid war](#) on Venezuela for the purpose of changing its independent social development free from the imposition of neoliberal policies. Possibly the most lethal tools of this kind of [warfare](#) are the [criminal](#), [illegal](#) and [inhumane](#) coercive economic and financial measures, euphemistically called “sanctions”.

More accurately they should be called “starvation sanctions”. They cut off the [revenue sources](#) that the Venezuelan government needs to import food, equipment and agricultural supplies necessary for food production. This results in critical food shortages that the media gloats reporting with images of long lines of people to buy the scarce supply of food. As a consequence Venezuela has [denounced](#) the US government before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Former UN rapporteur on Human Rights [reported](#) that US sanctions have killed more than 100 thousand Venezuelans.

How is Venezuela tackling this serious foreign-induced food crisis?

Venezuela has had a pro-active approach towards food sovereignty and food security as an essential necessity since the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution. The situation would be much worse had Venezuela not taken on fully the responsible obligation of guaranteeing food access for its citizens. The Venezuelan government needs to be praised for implementing measures to ensure food security to the population in order to counter the nefarious impact of “sanctions”.

Food sovereignty and food security are strictly connected. The former is the fundamental proposition of a State that cannot be renounced under any circumstances. The latter implies the process that guarantees access to food to all citizens under the tenet of responsibility,

equality, fairness and social justice.

The international peasants' movement called La Via Campesina [developed](#) the concept of food sovereignty during the World Food Summit in 1996 as a resistance movement against neoliberal policies. The prevailing neoliberal economic system, represented by the World Bank and the IMF with their structural adjustment policies, was perceived as a threat to food sovereignty and food security.

Neoliberal policies cause most harm to food security by allowing corporate-driven agricultural land grab, control over type of food production and distribution, dependency on patented genetically modified seeds, high food prices and low farmers wages, and forced imports as opposed to local production of food.

In the early 20th century Venezuela jumped almost overnight from having an economy based on agriculture, contributing about one third to Venezuela's GDP in the 1920s, to becoming a large [producer and exporter of oil](#) in the late 1920s under the management and control of multinational corporations. The wealth derived by the oil extraction destroyed farming and agricultural production.

When Hugo Chavez became president in 1999 Venezuela recognised the importance of food sovereignty and food security, which were embedded in Articles 156 and 305 of the [1999 constitution](#) of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Accordingly, in 2001 Chavez issued a series of decrees shaping the revolutionary Land Law with its leading project [Misión Zamora](#) that led to assigning to landless farmers land belonging to large estates, or *latifundios*, that were not producing at least 80% of their potential and therefore were [nationalised](#) under [Venezuelan Food Security and Sovereign Law](#).

By the end of 2003, 60,000 families had received temporary title to a total of 55,000 km² of land. The law stimulated co-ops and the necessary food production. The land reform may have been what triggered the failed coup attempt against him in 2002.

A report in 2009 describes the [Venezuelan effort to build a new food and agriculture system](#) with Chavez's vision of Socialism of the Twenty-First Century, political will, and the necessary infrastructure to support farmers with credit and technical assistance, as well as social services and market access. Results were outstanding with significant increased production of crops like black beans, root vegetables, and sunflowers for cooking oil. In some cases Venezuela reached levels of self sufficiency like in its two most important grains, corn and rice.

However, A Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) [report](#) in 2016 identified that a small number of companies in the still existing private sector had control over imports and distribution of the most demanded items that showed shortages, lineups, and high prices. In some cases there has been hoarding of goods and price speculation.

Forced to confront food shortages mainly caused by the "sanctions" and US financial barriers to imports, the Maduro government undertook one of the most successful programs to guarantee equitable access to food so no one would be left behind: the *Comité Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción* (CLAP - Local Committees for Supply and Production of food).

The [CLAP](#), founded in 2016 and [financially](#) supported in part by the government, distributes house-to-house boxes of food, containing some of the main staples of the Venezuelan diet: cornflour, pasta, rice, black beans, cooking oil, and more, at reduced affordable cost.

It is considered a flagship program against the imperial aggression controlling the distribution channels of grains, rice, corn flour, vegetable oil and other items. It is not meant to be a permanent structure for food distribution but its scope and function is presently strictly regulated in a formal constitutional [legislation](#) as a dire necessity.

From 2017 to 2020 the CLAP has distributed almost 500 million food boxes equivalent to 6.5 million metric tons of food. Currently it benefits a reported six million Venezuelan families through monthly deliveries of food boxes at subsidised cost.

In the most cruel action bordering callous criminality the US Treasury Department has [imposed sanctions](#) curtailing the effectiveness of the CLAP food program!

The government of Venezuela together with the active participation of the majority of the population and farmers in their respective communities – known as [Communes](#) – have to be praised for tackling the most pressing problem: food shortage. They are doing so by increasing the production of staple food items like corn, beans and root vegetables among others, including fish in coastal areas. The response has been quite prompt and effective thanks to the early preparatory plans for food security and sovereignty that had been established by Chavez’s visionary government as mentioned before. However, the problem has not been fully solved and continues being a challenge for Venezuelans.

Finally, it is important to recognise that the Bolivarian revolution is not only dealing with the immediate urgent need to put food on the table of Venezuelan families, but it also deals with the more significant long-term political goal of developing all the necessary programs and infrastructure to turn Venezuela in a truly food independent and sovereign country.

The full systematic and comprehensive plan – as a strategic response to the siege of the US unilateral coercive economic and financial measures – is laid out in the program [Gran Misión Agro-Venezuela](#) that includes land reform, agricultural practice, biological use of inputs, development of native seeds, popular production organisations, financing, and distribution to consumers.

For example, biological labs are being created for pest control in agriculture in order to increase organic production of food. At the same time labs are created to produce microorganisms for natural fertilisers to reduce the imports of expensive fertilisers.

There is also a strong push to rescue endogenous foods to eliminate the dependency from the genetically modified varieties exported by large corporations and not adapted to the local environment. This is leading to the production of native seeds that are then used by farmers with their old agricultural traditions.

But while we praise Venezuela’s commitment to Chavez’s vision, we must strongly condemn the “starvation sanctions” imposed by the illegal US coercive measures. The use of food as a weapon cannot be accepted.

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Nino Pagliccia is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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