

THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES

AN OVERVIEW

This overview of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security is meant for users of the accompanying right-to-food briefs. The overview outlines the purpose, nature and contents of the guidelines, but is not meant to interpret or summarize or provide a substitute for them.

The Voluntary Guidelines (VGs) are a practical, human-rights-based tool to help implement the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. They are voluntary and not legally binding as such, although they do build on international law and provide guidance on implementing existing obligations. The VGs are addressed to all States Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as well as those states that are yet to ratify the Covenant, including developing and developed countries. The VGs can also be used by stakeholders wishing to advocate for better implementation of the right to adequate food at a national level.

The VGs take into account a wide range of important considerations and principles, including equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability and rule of law and that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent.

The VGs contain three main sections.

SECTION I Preface and Introduction

SECTION II Enabling environment, assistance and accountability

SECTION III International measures, actions and commitments

SECTION I

The text of major international legal instruments is recalled and definitions of food security, the right to food and human-rights-based approaches are provided.

SECTION II

GUIDELINE 1

Democracy, good governance, human rights and the rule of law: focuses on the elements necessary for a free and democratic society to provide a peaceful, stable and enabling environment in which individuals can feed themselves and their families in freedom and dignity.

GUIDELINE 2

Economic development policies: focuses on promoting sustainable, broad-based economic development in support of food security based on an assessment of the economic and social situation and the degree of food insecurity and its causes. Policies should be sound, inclusive and non-discriminatory. The need to focus on agriculture and rural development is emphasized when poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon. Due regard is also given to the growing problem of urban poverty.

GUIDELINE 3

Strategies: encourages states to consider adopting a national human-rights-based strategy for the right to food based on a

thorough assessment of legal, policy and institutional frameworks. It calls for a human rights perspective to be incorporated into existing strategies, which should be transparent, inclusive and comprehensive and be elaborated in a participatory manner.

GUIDELINE 4

Market systems: stresses improvements in the functioning of markets to promote economic growth and sustainable development. Non-discriminatory access to markets should be ensured. The state obligation to protect rights holders is stressed as is the state responsibility, *inter alia*, to prevent uncompetitive market practices and to seek the commitment of all market players to realize the right to food through policies that foster food security.

GUIDELINE 5

Institutions: stresses the importance of public institutions at all levels and suggests entrusting a specific institution to coordinate the application of the VGs.

GUIDELINE 6

Stakeholders: encourages a multistakeholder approach to national food security with full participation of civil society and the private sector.

GUIDELINE 7

Legal framework: focuses on legal measures and instruments to support implementation of the progressive realization of the right to food and judicial remedies when this right is violated.

GUIDELINE 8

Access to resources and assets: discusses the obligation of the state to respect and protect the rights of individuals regarding access to natural resources, and facilitate sustainable, non-discriminatory and secure access to such resources, if need be by undertaking land reform. The guidelines make recommendations on labour, land, water, genetic resources, sustainability and services.

GUIDELINE 9

Food safety and consumer protection: focuses on both legal and institutional arrangements to ensure food safety and consumer protection, whether through domestic production or imports.

GUIDELINE 10

Nutrition: promotes strengthening dietary diversity and healthy eating habits and food preparation to prevent malnutrition. Changes in availability and access to food should not negatively affect dietary composition or intake. Cultural values as well as dietary and eating habits should be taken into account when making policy and programme decisions.

GUIDELINE 11

Education and awareness raising: focuses on strengthening education and training opportunities, especially for girls and women, to support sustainable development. Human rights education should be integrated into school curricula and officials and members of civil society trained to participate in the progressive realization of the right to food.

GUIDELINE 12

National financial resources: encourages allocation of budgetary resources to anti-hunger and poverty programmes. Basic social programmes and expenditures should be protected from budget reductions.

GUIDELINE 13

Support for vulnerable groups: emphasizes the need to identify the food insecure, along with reasons for their food insecurity, and to devise measures to immediately and progressively provide access to adequate food. Discrimination against specific groups should be overcome and assistance should be targeted effectively.

GUIDELINE 14

Safety nets: recommends that safety nets be established and maintained to provide for the weakest segments of society. Safety nets should be accompanied by complementary measures, such as access to clean water and sanitation, health care and nutrition education, in order to promote sustainable food security in the long run.

GUIDELINE 15

International food aid: stresses that food aid should be safe and take into account dietary and cultural food consumption patterns. Food aid programmes should not disrupt local food production or markets and should avoid creating dependency by having a clear exit strategy. Humanitarian agencies should be guaranteed safe and unimpeded access to needy populations. Emergency food aid should also take into account long-term relief and rehabilitation objectives.

GUIDELINE 16

Natural and human-made disasters: recalls certain provisions of international humanitarian law with regard to the destruction or withholding of food as a method of warfare. It also emphasizes the importance of comprehensive early warning systems and effective natural disaster response mechanisms.

GUIDELINE 17

Monitoring, indicators and benchmarks: points to the need to establish systems to monitor and evaluate the realization of the right to food, especially with regard to vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly.

GUIDELINE 18

National human rights institutions: suggests that national human rights institutions be independent and autonomous and include the right to food in their mandates. States without such institutions are encouraged to establish them.

GUIDELINE 19

International dimension: encourages states to fulfil measures, actions and commitments that have been endorsed at the international level, as listed under Section III of the VGs.

SECTION III

Contains language stemming from text agreed in various international fora and covers the following topics:

- > International cooperation and unilateral measures
- > Role of the international community
- > Technical cooperation
- > International trade
- > External debt
- > Official development assistance
- > International food aid
- > Partnerships with NGOs/CSOs/private sector
- > Promotion and protection of the right to adequate food
- > International reporting



Download a copy:

www.fao.org/righttofood/en/23413/highlight_51802en.html

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