

Panel 1: Strong Voices: Advocacy and Training

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Citation from instruction to the panel members: Only educated duty bearers are able to keep their obligations and only knowledgeable rights holders have the ability to organize themselves and know how to claim their right to food.

I am going to give some remarks to the role of academia in the realization of the right to food, and then continue to present a nutrition and human rights course.

Role of academia in the realization of the right to food

Academia may play a very important role in promoting the RrF in several ways, but only in a facilitating role. One is in activities on education and higher training in the human right to adequate food. Another is research, monitoring and evaluation efforts; furthermore a collaboration or interaction with government institutions (must be aware of cooption), with NGOs or with the private sector in various ways. An important issue is normative work. We all know that with the work on GC 12 on the right to adequate food, where several academic persons, NGOs and others were involved. Since the academia represent such a wide and interdisciplinary group, various academic cultures and routines, the whole sector may have positive as well as negative dimensions impacting its possible role and engagement.

However, in a considerable number of countries, academic institutions do enjoy a certain respect from leaders and society in general, and are considered authoritative sources of information obtained through research and studies. This means they can often, more easily help legitimise innovative approaches and facilitate the use of new knowledge. That such freedom is often jeopardised in some countries does not detract from the general rule of the role expected of universities in society. My focus here will be on training.

Academia is not included in the list of specific target learner group for the right to food curriculum developed by FAO (at least not in the draft I have seen). That does not mean this sector is left out, on the contrary, academic institutions have particularly crucial roles to play in capacity development for the realisation of the right to food. Scholars from various academic institutions and with different backgrounds have already contributed to the development of the draft FAO curriculum outline, and will probably be further called upon as lesson authors.

Given the many disciplines and subjects typically found within ‘academia’, scholars and teachers at academic institutions form a particularly heterogeneous group who can contribute to capacity development for the right to food, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Academic institutions of research and training have the double function of being both ‘knowledge producers’ and teachers. They are expected to continuously develop and legitimise new insights and understanding, while teaching should be a mix of conveying established knowledge *and* inspiring innovative thinking among a wide range of ‘learners’.

Learners need not only be students following a regular line of study, but also groups that are given opportunities for continued learning in specialised fields related to their work situation. Many of these will eventually serve as teachers or trainers of yet new learners.

While there is a tremendous need to mobilise more academic groups and institutions for capacity building in different aspects of the right to adequate food and of related human rights, experience has shown that the willingness is often limited to free space and resources for formal training in any new and innovative field. Specialised departments and curricula are often overloaded with requests for formal training to cover new fields, and discipline-loyal scholars are carefully watching that any add-on subject must not come in at the cost of ‘their own’ subjects. Consequently there are so far relatively few formal programmes in institutions of higher learning around the world in terms of courses and modules on the right to adequate food. It is therefore crucial to build up academic interest in human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, and specifically in the right to food.

Academic institutions will themselves greatly draw from the FAO developed right to food curriculum by having their own insights and contributions complemented by expertise and experiences from people with different backgrounds. It is important, however, to recognise that academic institutions have scholarly and educational activities based on their own inbuilt premises. This should not be seen as a constraint, but rather an opportunity for a continuously widening scope of choices of theoretical and practical approaches.

Other, non-academic, groups will obviously also be part of the training in the right to food. These groups may include staff of capacity building units in national or international NGOs; UN agencies; technical cooperation agencies; national human rights institutions, or line ministries. Some of these will be closer to communities and grass-roots organisations and therefore best serve as the actual instructors and trainers vis-à-vis community members and members of grass roots organisations. Through mutual respect and collaboration, all will contribute to meeting needed capacity at all levels.

Annual nutrition and human rights course offered by Akershus University College and University of Oslo

The initial courses were based on the assumption reflecting the same concerns as in the citation above, and an urge and interest in contributing to change this. The course was part of a course package of 2 courses initially, now 3 separate courses. They go together and complement each other, but can be taken separately also. The 3 separate courses are (listed consecutively as they are run): *The World Nutrition Situation – Data and Issues*; *Nutrition, Globalisation and Governance*; and finally *Nutrition and Human Rights*. The description and discussion below will focus on the last course, namely *Nutrition and Human Rights*.

When we (W. B. Eide and A. Oshaug) started to work on the RtF we realised quickly that lack of capacity was (and still is) a serious cause of the failure to operationalise the RtF. This lack may also explain the political unwillingness to use a human rights framework for development; there is anecdotal evidence that human rights are seen as an obstacle to development rather than as a framework for development. Advocating for RtF in the end of the 1970'ies or in the 1980'ies led to ridicule and harassment of the few who tried, but that has changed dramatically the last decade or so.

Since most civil servants are trained at universities, we saw this lack as a challenge at academic level – the universities failed to address food as a human right, or did not recognise this as a relevant issue at all. Unfortunately this is an attitude still prevailing at many universities throughout the world. Given this background the course was based on perceived needs of course participants, but a survey on such needs were not done. There has been a gradual development of the courses from early 1990'ies until today.

The 3 courses are open to master students, for professionals in need of in-service training, and others. The criterion now is that the courses are given at master level and participants should be eligible to study at a university. They are suited for people who think human rights should be part of a development paradigm; people who reflect on how various aspects of globalisation in today's world may affect access to adequate food for different people; for professionals who hope to see a more explicit ethical or human rights basis for research and action for improved human nutrition - globally, nationally and locally; for professionals who mean that greater accountability ought to be expected from states that have committed themselves to pursue food and nutrition policies; and professionals that consider that technical

expertise might benefit from insight into how governments, institutions and organizations work, and then like to contribute to solutions.

The course in Nutrition and Human Rights of today

The course given now is part of elective master level courses, but is still called '*Nutrition and Human Rights*'. It is a 6 weeks, 10 study point (ECTC) course. The content reflects the events in the late 1990'ies and early 2000, and follows the development up till today. Now CG 12 and the Right to Food Guidelines are here, which did not exist when the first courses were run.

Rationale for the course described in the course Handbook for 2008

Over the last decade a human rights approach to economic and social development has gained increasing interest and support in addressing and fighting hunger and malnutrition. The obligations of states inherent in this approach can strengthen the efforts towards food and nutrition security and nutritional well-being for all. It breaks with conventional and often charity based approaches, and recognises that people have a human right to adequate food.

From a human rights perspective, hungry or malnourished people are not to be seen as passive recipients, but, as rights holders and as active claimants of their right to food. At the same time they themselves have duties to make optimal use of the resources available to them so that they can cater for themselves and for their dependants. This can however only happen when they have access to the necessary resources and opportunities for doing so.

Over the last decade important conceptual and methodological advances have been made giving the right to adequate food a clearer and more precise interpretation and meaning, and guidelines for monitoring the right to adequate food in local, national and international contexts have been developed.

Course content as described in the course Handbook of 2008

The course provides an overview of the right to adequate food in the context of the promotion and protection of the international human rights. The course focuses especially on the relevance of human rights for adequate food and nutritional health. It addresses the meaning of a rights-based approach to analysis, and practical implications this may have for national public policy and international development efforts.

The course further discusses the relationships between right-holders and duty-bearers, and especially obligations of the State in respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate food and nutritional health for all. The course is divided into 5 parts:

- 1. Historical background and conceptual basis*
- 2. The structure and function of the international human rights system*
- 3. The right to adequate food and nutritional health*
- 4. Implementation of the human right to adequate food and nutritional health at national level*
- 5. The politics of human rights.*

The learning methods include lectures with subsequent discussions; self study; group work; case studies; daily retrospective summary of previous session; interactive exchange among students and between students and resource persons, including systematic clarification of key concepts; oral presentations by students; and study visits to relevant institutions.

Conclusion

- Academia may play a very important facilitating role in promoting the RrF in several ways, particularly in capacity development and thus in investment in human capital.
- RtF represent an interdisciplinary field that no single profession can cover alone. Academic training must be interdisciplinary. University structures and silo thinking may pose a major challenge.
- It should be addressed as a separate academic subject forming part of professional higher university training.
- Academia must use its comparative advantage, merge experiences from research and civil society work, what's happening in the UN system, with course content that are part of higher training leading to an academic degree in food, nutrition as human rights.

- In undertaking work at the request of governments, national and international institutions, professionals must maintain an independent position with respect to human right criteria.
- UN agencies such as FAO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, should prepare material which can be used in academic training as well as being useful for governments.
- Learning/teaching based on needs of countries must be in focus – relevance is crucial.
- Learning methodologies must be varied, bringing in real cases whenever possible.
- Learners should not only be students following a regular line of study, but also groups that are given opportunities for continued learning in specialised fields related to their work situation.