

Dear Reader,

During the last six months, a cascade of events related to the Right to Food has taken place in different international scenarios. From 1 to 3 October 2008, approximately 400 representatives from FAO Member countries, civil society organizations and academia participated at the Right to Food Forum organized by FAO in Rome. In December, the Policies against Hunger Conference held in Berlin formulated significant recommendations for implementing this human right. Most recently, the Madrid High level Meeting of January 2009 brought political support for the Right to Food at highest level.

In this Special Edition of our Newsletter, we would like to share the outcomes of the Right to Food Forum, which proved to be a starting point for a progressive movement aiming at strengthening the implementation of the Right to Food.

Almost four years after the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security (Right to Food Guidelines), the Forum was the first ever event to exchange, at international level, experiences and lessons learned with the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines. It provided the occasion to validate experiences made, get inspiration from other actors, enhance networking, and explore new ways to further promote the realization of the right to food. The Forum demonstrated, with practical examples, how the right to food contributes to achieving food security for all.

We wish you an interesting reading,

**Barbara Ekwall**

Coordinator Right to Food Unit



## NEWS

### POLICIES AGAINST HUNGER IN BERLIN

From 8 to 10 December, Berlin hosted the Policies against Hunger Conference in which the Right to Food was the main subject. Significant recommendations for implementing the Right to Food were formulated in the working groups. Please read also the concluding remarks by the UN special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Oliver de Schutter, under "Contributions and recommendations" at: <http://www.policies-against-hunger.de/index.php?id=772>

## NEWS

### MADRID HIGH LEVEL MEETING

The Madrid High Level Meeting on Food Security for All, 26 and 27 January 2009, brought the political support to the Right to Food at highest level. The final Declaration reaffirmed the importance of implementing the Right to Food Guidelines and stressed that no MDG, particularly not the first one, can be attained without a right to food approach. See also [www.ransa2009.org](http://www.ransa2009.org)

Readers may also be interested to read the Cordoba Declaration on the Right to Food and the Governance of the Global Food and Agricultural Systems available at: [http://www.fao.org/righttofood/download\\_2008/cordoba\\_declaration\\_final.doc](http://www.fao.org/righttofood/download_2008/cordoba_declaration_final.doc)

*"We must continue to meet urgent hunger and humanitarian needs by providing food and nutrition assistance and safety nets, while focusing on improving food production and smallholder agriculture. This is the twin-track approach taken in the Comprehensive Framework for Action. We should be ready to add a third track –the right to food– as a basis for analysis, action and accountability".*

*UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, closing remarks at the Madrid Meeting.*

## THE FORUM'S PANEL DISCUSSIONS

During the three days of the Forum the thematic discussions were organized according to the five areas of right to food work: advocacy and training, legislation and accountability, information and assessment, benchmarks and monitoring, strategy and coordination. The purpose was to extract best practices and lessons learned and to formulate recommendations for different stakeholders.



### Panel 1 Strong voices: advocacy and training

Only educated duty bearers are able to keep their obligations and only knowledgeable right holders have the ability to organize themselves and know how to claim their right to food.

At country level, advocacy and training has been implemented through campaigns and tools aiming to increase right to food education. Modules on the right to food are being progressively introduced as part of master programmes in human rights. At Global level, important campaigns such as *HungerFree* by ActionAid, *Face-It-Act-Now* by FIAN, the *Campaña sobre el Derecho a la Alimentación* by PROSALUS and the Right to Food: Make it Happen on the occasion of FAO's World Food Day have played an important role in advocacy and capacity strengthening.

Regarding educational tools, a right to food curriculum has been developed by FAO. It represents a compendium of lessons designed to provide different right to food actors with needed knowledge, understanding and skills for the implementation of right to food tasks.

The use of information and communication technologies for the right to food is increasing as illustrated by the development

of e-learning, virtual classrooms and the use of free facilities to network and share media at global level (such as blogs and youtube).

#### CONCLUSIONS

- Training and advocacy are required at all stages and by all actors in order to include all the stakeholders in the policy making and implementation process of the right to food.
- Academia offers an important potential to strengthen their work on the right to food, collaborate in networks and promote North-South exchange (e.g. common certification programmes).

### Panel 2 Accessible justice: legislation and accountability

Only with enforceable justice, trusted institutions and a legal system oriented towards the human right to food will right holders be in a position to hold duty bearers accountable for guaranteeing food security.

With regard to access to justice and legislation, there is emerging right-to-food jurisprudence, with cases from South Africa, Switzerland, Nepal, India, and, going back to the 1960s and 1970s, the United States of America. Recourse mechanisms differ according to country contexts, embracing judicial, quasi-judicial and administrative bodies, and according to the nature of legal systems. The possibility to avail of public

interest litigation was important in India, but this system is not available everywhere.

Framework laws have been adopted or are being developed in Brazil, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Mozambique and Uganda. Ecuador has just adopted a new constitution that explicitly mentions the right to food as justiciable. In some countries, treaty ratification may automatically incorporate the right to food into national law.

#### CONCLUSIONS

- Countries should review and strengthen their legislative framework for the right to food, through constitutional protection, framework law and compatibility reviews, as recommended in the Legislative Guide developed by FAO.
- Accountability mechanisms and local access to justice should be strengthened and information about complaint mechanisms should be clear and accessible. Administrative recourse should be promoted in the context of delivery of services and be an integral part of any rights-based programme.
- Public interest litigation and other ways of facilitating access to justice at higher levels should receive increased attention by NGOs and others working at the local level. This should be accompanied by training of judges and lawyers.



**MORE ABOUT THE FORUM**  
INCLUDING AUDIO VISUAL MATERIALS

Visit our website [www.fao.org/righttofood/rtf\\_forum](http://www.fao.org/righttofood/rtf_forum)

## Panel 3 Right targets: information and assessment

**Duty bearers need information that assists them in identifying those right holders most in need. Policies and programs should be focused on the most vulnerable, and any discriminatory processes identified and corrected.**

A right to food assessment is a crucial first step in a longer right to food implementation strategy. The food insecure must be identified and the underlying causes of hunger must be understood in order to develop an efficient policy and program response. The assessment also covers an analysis of the institutional, legal and policy frameworks.

Assessments can be undertaken for different purposes: to provide inputs for a food security strategy, to integrate right to food into

public policies, to meet international reporting requirements, or as a tool for awareness building and advocacy. Assessments should be conducted in a participatory manner, involving those whose right to food is not realized, and the resulting analysis should be available in a way that is comprehensible to all interested readers.

The assessment guide developed by FAO was used in the context of assessments in the Philippines and Bhutan, as well as assessment work undertaken by civil society organisations.

### CONCLUSIONS

- Adequate information and assessment are basic requirements for policy formulation in view of promoting the right to food.
- The lack of disaggregated data or inaccessibility to data in many countries limits the possibility of identifying vulnerable groups according to socio-economic characteristics.
- Essential information on right to food aspects should be collected on a regular basis.

## Panel 4 Durable impact: benchmarks and monitoring

**Only through achievable goals and on-going, community-based, national and international evaluation can duty bearers and right holders achieve lasting food security.**

Monitoring the process in realizing right to food means establishing verifiable and time-bound targets and benchmarks. Such targets and benchmarks should orientate policy and help in improving governance. Methods for monitoring vary according to the circumstances and the objectives of the monitoring, namely, who is monitoring what, and for what purpose.

Indicators may need to be locally tailored. FAO' has developed a comprehensive manual on monitoring. Right to food monitoring is a responsibility of governments and is ideally done in conjunction with other on-going monitoring efforts.

Civil society shadow reports play an important role in the context of country reviews by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Right to food violations need to be monitored so that measures can be taken to remedy such violations and to prevent them from re-occurring. An increase in the number of violations indicates a regression in the realization of the right to food.

### CONCLUSIONS

- Food security and poverty reduction targets and benchmarks are necessary but not sufficient for monitoring progress in the realisation of the right to food. Specific right to food targets and benchmarks need to be established to complement them. Civil society and representatives from vulnerable groups should be part of the monitoring exercise.
- Monitoring the right to food in general, but particularly during an acute economic crisis such as the soaring food prices, will ensure that national responses target specifically the most vulnerable to food insecurity.
- It is important to have one body with a clear mandate to lead the monitoring of human rights and particularly the right to food. Such institution should be established according to the Paris Principles.

## Panel 5 Effective action: strategy and coordination

**Only through effective human rights-oriented policies and coordinated rights-based strategies can duty bearers fulfil their obligations to enable right holders to feed themselves.**

Strategies help in translating principles and policy statements into policy priorities, action plans and practical implementation. Strategies for realizing the right to food must be tailored to specific national circumstances and be the result of a broad participation and consultation process.

Mainstreaming the right to food in overarching policy frameworks consists of creating understanding among policy makers of right to food concepts and principles, and how to translate these concepts into operation. Local and national strategies need to take into consideration not only the national environment but also the international framework, institutions and obligations if they want to lie on a coherent base.

Due to its multi-sectoral nature, the food security mandate is under the responsibility of a number of sectors and government institutions. A coordination institution is thus essential. National inter-sectoral coordination bodies are generally placed at a high level in the governmental hierarchy, as shown in the example of Brazil's National Food Security Council (CONSEA) that reports

directly to the President of the Republic. Another key element for the effectiveness of CONSEA is participation by civil society and its decentralized structure.

### CONCLUSIONS

- Capacity development and participation of all relevant stakeholders in the design phase of a strategy are key elements for successful and efficient implementation.
- Implementing right to food requires effective institutions at international, national and local levels.
- Clarifying the allocation of roles and responsibilities between the different sectors and levels of government leads to better accountability and more effective action. The cross-sectoral nature of the right to food requires coordination efforts across government ministries and offices at national, sub-national and local levels.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FORUM

The Forum concluded with a clear message: the Right to Food is here to stay. The summary below does not aim at being comprehensive, nor does it reflect the richness of the debate during that strategic session. Nonetheless, it remains more than useful to retain a brief synthesis from the large number of opinions expressed during these three days of the Forum. Reference is made to the more detailed account provided by the Forum Rapporteur as well as to the rich documentation and numerous contributions made, all available at [www.fao.righttofood](http://www.fao.righttofood).



OLIVIER DE SCHUTTER,  
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

### A) COUNTRY SUPPORT

The number of countries interested in strengthening governance and right to food issues in their policies, laws and programmes is rapidly increasing. Those that have made first experiences want to expand and deepen this work, especially as numerous guides and tools are made available. There is a strong call for FAO to continue and increase support to countries in these efforts. Thus, the Forum marks not the end of a process, but rather the beginning of a new phase of implementation, with greater focus on country level activities, using the knowledge, tools, networks and strategies developed up to now. In this context, institutional capacity and training are particularly important, as well as improving monitoring and evaluation with indicators that are adapted to the country's situation. FAO confirmed its commitment to provide support for good governance and the right to food.

### B) PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society organisations and other stakeholders are the main drivers of the right to food agenda, both at international and national levels. In many countries, they are an important and critical partner supporting efficient governmental action in this area. This partnership needs to be strengthened and furthered.

### C) STRENGTHENING THE RIGHT TO FOOD UNIT

The Forum demonstrated the leadership role of FAO and the Organization's convening power with respect to right to food work. The Right to Food Unit was a key element in supporting countries to make progress on the right to food. Participants expressed concern about the future of the right to food work at FAO and asked for a strengthening of the Unit in the context of the FAO reform. Countries will need the Unit's support to properly apply the guides on legislating, monitoring, assessing, budgeting and teaching on the right to food. Also, experiences with implementation need to be exchanged at international level in regular intervals. There was a strong call for a second Right to Food Forum.

### D) INTEGRATION INTO FOOD SECURITY WORK

The Forum showed that it is essential to include the governance dimension in food security work. The food crisis is an example of this: safety nets and enhanced production are necessary, but not enough. The third track of the food security concept consists of the right to food related to good governance, meaning voice, participation, capacity, empowerment, accountability, rule of law. Policy makers dealing with the right to food and those specialised in food security should be

brought together. FAO has an important convening power in this respect and should provide a platform for inter-sectoral debate on right to food and food security issues also at national level.

### E) INTER-DISCIPLINARY COMMUNICATION

One of the main difficulties encountered relates to communication. Politicians and economists do not always understand the language used by human rights advocates, and vice versa. It will be necessary to translate the wealth of information into a language that is understood by the different groups, countries and sectors without losing the essence of the message that is being conveyed.

### F) SUPPORT TO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS

Strengthening human rights commissions offers a great potential to promote the right to food. In addition to their traditional mandate to prepare reports to the Treaty Bodies, such institutions should monitor the national human rights situation with a view to achieving greater efficiency of governmental action. Their work on economic, social and cultural rights should be strengthened, as well as their capacity to analyse policies' and programs' impact on the human right to food.

### G) POLICY COHERENCE AT INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL

"A child might be born in a poor country, but not in a poor world", a Forum participant said. The hunger problem is not a series of national problems. National and international strategies are interdependent and therefore it will be necessary to tackle the issues at both levels. However, national bodies remain the primary duty bearers taking into account that the national or the sub-national level is more meaningful and of easier access to the victims of violations.

### H) IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES

While visible milestones have been reached in certain countries with respect to laws, and political strategies, equal attention must be given to the less visible "soft issues" such as empowerment, the strengthening of institutions, transparency, participation, non-discrimination and capacity building. These are more difficult to measure, but they are indispensable for the successful implementation of laws, strategies, policies and programs.

To conclude with the words of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter: "The right to food is the medicine of a world sick of hunger".