

Right to Food Forum
DISCUSSION PAPER

Panel 1: Strong Voices – Advocacy and Training

At the end of this discussion participants will identify:

a) LESSONS LEARNED: What worked and what not? Why?

b) NEXT STEPS: What can Governments and stakeholders do?

1) Background

Complete or partial failure to meet duties and responsibilities may not necessarily be due to unwillingness to perform well; it may be due to lack of capacity. In broad terms, capacity is broken down into five dimensions: motivation/responsibility, authority, access to resources, communication skills, and capacity to make rational decisions. Capacity is usually referred to as having the adequate knowledge, skills and experience necessary to undertake a task. These three elements have the greatest impact on increasing capacity. For example, by providing knowledge, understanding and/or skills, individual control over human resources is increased. With more knowledge and understanding, inter-person communication may improve as well as the capacity to make rational decisions. Persons who have a greater understanding may also be more motivated to act and feel more secure in accepting responsibilities.

Human resource development is at the centre of capacity building as it equips individuals with the understanding, skills, access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively. Both the public and the government require education on the right to food in order to strengthen the capacity of the duty bearers to carry out their obligations while equally focusing on assisting communities and right holders to empower themselves and to demand accountability.

Right to Food Guideline 11 addresses education and awareness raising. The Guidelines recognize that capacity building among government and judiciary professionals, as well as personnel in civil society organizations, universities, primary and secondary schools, the business community and the media, is a crucial prerequisite to realizing the right to adequate food. They also stress that the public requires information and training in order to recognize and understand their right to food, and ways in which they may participate in food-related decisions that affect them. The Right to Food Guidelines offer practical suggestions for States to realize the right to food progressively through investment in human resources to ensure good health, sustainable resource development and increased educational opportunities at all levels, with a particular focus on girls, women and other underserved groups. Human rights education and training constitute important aspects of the right to food, in order to disseminate information raise awareness and encourage implementation of this right and its associated entitlements. Education and awareness-raising programmes and campaigns should target professionals, the general public and, in particular, those affected by food insecurity. Public awareness is a prerequisite for successful public campaigns.

2) Why are advocacy and training important?

At country level, capacity building for government, civil society and other stakeholders is fundamental for the realization of the right to food: only educated duty bearers are able to meet their obligations and only knowledgeable right holders know how to claim their right to food. Capacity building is also required among UN officers and country teams to provide them with the knowledge they need to support the efforts for the implementation of the Right to Food at national level. From the perspective of the duty bearer, knowledge and understanding of the human right of adequate food is needed for: assessing public policies, responding to right to food violations, using the Right to Food Guidelines in technical work, integrating right to food into policy advice, local right to food monitoring, local right to food accountability, individual and group empowerment, etc. From the right holders perspective, understanding of the right to food is needed for: claiming this right, holding duty bearers accountable, participating actively in decisions that affect their right to food, building networks and strengthening community organization, etc.

In broad terms, advocacy and training are needed both for empowerment (promoting public participation) and informed decision making (formal education and professional training).

3) What are preliminary findings?

At country level, advocacy and training campaigns are taking place in Brazil, Mozambique, India, Philippines, Guatemala and others to improve understanding among government officials and the general public with regard to right to food.

More and more universities have already engaged in right to food education for example, by introducing some modules on the right to food as part of their master programmes in human rights, such as the National University of Ireland, Galway and Rome University La Sapienza; or by providing a full course like the University of Oslo and Akershus University College. The Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran, is in the process of establishing a Right to Food Chair. These pioneer initiatives will, through academic research and teaching, contribute to higher societal commitment to respect individuals' right to food; protect this right from being violated; and, create conducive conditions to the fulfilment of this right.

A right to food curriculum has been developed which presents a compendium of lessons designed to provide different right to food actors with needed knowledge, understanding and skills for the implementation of certain right to food tasks as part of their normal obligations, responsibilities and activities.

Use of information and communication technologies for the right to food is increasing. This is 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).

Global campaigns promoting the right to food have taken place such as "HungerFree" by ActionAid; "Face-It-Act-Now" by FIAN; the "Campaña sobre el Derecho a la Alimentación" by PROSALUS; and the "The Right to Food: Make it Happen - World Food Day 2007" by FAO. Civil society initiatives such as the "African Network for the Promotion of the Right to Food" are being formed for coordinated actions at sub-regional and regional levels.

4) What are the challenges?

The key challenges relate to the nature of information and communication work, which requires important human resources. Formal and non formal education requires considerable support on revision of curricula, on the training of educators, administrative

personnel in the education system and trainers in general, and on the production of educational materials (teachers' guidelines, training and learning materials) for economic, social and cultural rights.

Information and communication strategies and materials targeted for different audiences are needed for messages to be relevant and lead to action. Translation and adaptation of advocacy and training materials to national and local languages is therefore essential, but costly and time-consuming.

More concrete actions at country level are also needed to support formal education and professional training on the right to food.

Information and awareness building are at the heart of a society's common understanding of the human worth of every person. Raising awareness of right holders, especially of those whose rights are being violated, is crucial for the realization of the right to food. If the hungry see themselves as powerless, unable to act or respond, then their rights will never be upheld and asserted.

5) Questions for discussion

- What are the most important elements to bear in mind to build capacity at country level?
- How to enhance institutional capacity?
- What are the capacity gaps that explain why some duty-bearers are not able to perform their duties? How can such gaps be overcome?
- How can consensus be achieved, within a society, a community, a group, regarding the equal worth of every human being?
- Does it make a difference at local level if different guiding concepts are used in relation to the right to food (e.g. right to food security, food sovereignty, human happiness) and what are the basic elements of the notion of the right to food?
- What are the challenges of communicating human rights and the right to food in the local cultural context and set of values? Where do human rights and cultural values converge?
- How can information and awareness raising turn to empowerment?
- Does empowerment of some lead to loss of power for others? How does empowerment affect the well-being of society as a whole?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to enhance accessible information for all?
- How can right holders and their representatives develop their own information mechanisms and networks?
- How can modern information and communication technologies further awareness of the right to food?
- How can information and capacity development on the right to food contribute to an efficient response to the present food crisis? To what extent has this area of work been part of the debate on soaring food prices?