

Right to Food Forum  
DISCUSSION PAPER

**Panel 3: Right Targets - Information and Assessment**

*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**

By ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Governments have accepted the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. They should create and maintain an enabling environment that allows economically active individuals to produce or procure enough food for themselves and their families. States should also provide direct support to those who are unable to feed themselves. Actions to comply with these obligations take various forms: drafting policies and strategies, implementing programs, adopting laws and regulations, establishing new institutions, etc.

For any action at the national level, one basic requirement is universal: adequate information and assessment. If a Government does not know who the vulnerable people are and why they are deprived of the right to food, no action to remedy this situation is possible.

The Right to Food Guidelines contain a number of references to the identification of the food insecure and vulnerable. They stress disaggregation of data and identification of vulnerable groups and individuals with a view to taking corrective measures and targeting assistance adequately in relation to need (Guidelines 13 and 14). Participatory assessment of the economic and social situation and food security is recommended in Guideline 2.2 and institutional assessment in Guideline 5.1.

In relation to strategies for the implementation of the right to food, Guideline 3.2 recommends that duty bearers start with "a careful assessment of existing national legislation, policy and administrative measures, current programmes, systematic identification of existing constraints and availability of existing resources".

**2) Why are information and assessment important?**

In order to promote food security for all and comply with their legal obligation to realize the right to food, Governments must identify the food insecure and understand the underlying causes of hunger. A right to food assessment is a crucial first step of a longer right to food implementation strategy.

From a human rights perspective, it is not only the outcomes and impacts of policy and programme measures that are important, but also the implementing processes. Rights

based processes are transparent, participatory and non-discriminatory; they also empower right holders to hold duty bearers accountable.

### **3) What are the preliminary findings?**

A right to food assessment can be undertaken for different purposes. It can provide valuable inputs to a food security strategy. It can also analyze the necessary steps to integrate a human rights approach into public policies, e.g. ensure that the most vulnerable are targeted by the programme and that measures to empower right holders are included. An assessment could also be made for a country's international reporting requirements or as a tool for awareness building and advocacy. In any case, the assessment should be accompanied by education efforts to raise awareness and understanding by duty bearers and right holders of the right to adequate food, and its meaning in practice.

Government should initiate the assessment, preferably in partnership with civil society organizations, and with the close involvement of the target groups, as this increases the probability of the implementation of the assessment conclusions and recommendations. Ideally, findings, conclusions and recommendations should represent the outcome of a highly consultative process. Such a process will lead to a common understanding of the right to adequate food situation that could be the springboard of an agenda for change. The information gathered and analysis undertaken should be made available in a way that is comprehensive and accessible to all interested readers.

Assessments are in practice likely to be undertaken by civil society organizations also, and used to lobby for policy change and institutional reform.

The five areas below have been identified as most important for following the recommendation of Right to Food Guideline 3.2.

#### *a) Identifying the food insecure and vulnerable*

Food security plans should be based on a thorough socio-economic assessment of the situation of different groups, with data disaggregated as far as possible (e.g. according to sex, age and ethnicity, rural-urban), so that those most likely to be food insecure are identified, and the reasons for their vulnerability understood. This part of the assessment is very close to a FIVIMS-type food security analysis. Disaggregated data is often regarded as politically sensitive or against the law. For example, identifying individuals by race or ethnicity is illegal in some countries. Often there is no information collected about some underserved population groups, such as homeless persons, IDPs or migrants.

#### *b) Legal and legislative framework*

How conducive is the legal environment for the realization of the right to food? The assessment should consider the international human rights obligations the State has undertaken, the constitution and national laws, and institutions mandated to protect human rights.

#### *c) Policy Framework*

To what extent are policies, strategies and programs conducive to the progressive realization of the right to food? Does the policy framework respond to the underlying causes of the non realization of the right to food? The assessment should also include the processes by which policies and programs are formulated and implemented, and evaluate the extent to which they are consistent with human rights principles. Human rights based policies should develop the capacity of right holders to assert their rights and of duty bearers to meet their obligations.

#### *d) Institutional Framework and CSO participation*

In many countries, good policies and laws are in place but are not well implemented. Right to Food Guideline 5.1 therefore recommends evaluating “the mandate and performance of relevant public institutions.” Clarifying roles and responsibilities among government sectors and levels can improve functioning and accountability. Cross-sectoral coordination is essential for all levels of government agencies. Guideline 6 encourages States to “apply a multi stakeholder approach to national food security to identify the roles of and involve all relevant stakeholders, encompassing civil society and the private sector.”

#### *e) Budget analysis*

Is the maximum of available resources used to progressively realize the right to food? Analyzing a national budget, the most important economic policy instrument any government produces, will reveal political commitment (or lack thereof) towards realizing the right to food. While budget analysis can reveal critical information about the political will to realize the right to food, one should also recognize that it could be a tedious and complex exercise. Analyzing budgets requires a high degree of technical skills. In addition, there are often very practical challenges such as actually obtaining financial and budgetary information.

### **4) What are the challenges?**

The lack of disaggregated data or inaccessibility to such data in many countries limits the possibility of identifying vulnerable groups according to socio-economic characteristics. Often only national or geographic information is available. In these cases, a short term solution could be that of holding a national stakeholder consultation. In the long run, however, Governments should consider collecting essential information on right to food aspects on a regular basis.

One of the major challenges has been to identify the relevant legal issues, policies, institutional arrangements and administrative measures to be included in the assessment. Specifically, when time is short and resources for the assessment are limited, some sort of prioritization will need to be made, focusing on the most important and relevant aspects (i.e. defining an assessment domain).

A successful right to food assessment leading to strategy formulation requires effort from both right holders and duty bearers. Capacity (responsibility, authority, resources and skills) is insufficient in many countries.

### **5) Questions for discussion**

- Do States know who their most vulnerable populations are and why they are food insecure? Is available data disaggregated and accessible?
- Do States know the reasons for food insecurity and vulnerability?
- What kind of information do States need so as to implement the right to food?
- In order to prepare a sound right to food implementation strategy, what information and assessments are necessary? Is Right to Food Guideline 3.2 too broad?
- How can one assess empowerment, participation, accountability and transparency? How can one assess a change of mindset from charity to rights?
- What experiences have there been with respect to budget analysis?
- How important are right to food assessments in the context of the present food security crisis? Has right to food been part of the diagnosis of the food crisis?
- What contribution can right to food assessments make in designing the response to the present food crisis?