

Right to Food Forum
DISCUSSION PAPER

Panel 5: Effective Action - Strategy and Coordination

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

The need for a human rights based strategy for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in each country is explicitly recognised in the Right to Food Guidelines: " States....in consultation with relevant stakeholders and pursuant to their national laws, should consider adopting a national human rights based strategy for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food...as part of an overarching national development strategy..." (Right to Food Guideline 3.1). Such a strategy should serve to guide the mainstreaming of human rights principles and right to food approaches in overarching policy frameworks, such as national development or poverty reduction strategies, as well as in sectoral policies and plans. This approach underlines the linkages between the realization of the right to adequate food and socio-economic policies and programmes.

A right to food strategy should address the four pillars of food security (availability, accessibility, stability, utilization); describe policy and programme measures to be implemented by all sectors and in particular, target the most vulnerable groups. The formulation of the strategy should be guided by the outcomes of a comprehensive assessment of national legislation and policies, institutional and administrative frameworks, existing government programmes, and the current right to food situation. The strategy should address major constraints to the realization of the right to food and should propose an agenda for change. It should set clear time-bound and verifiable right to food targets and benchmarks.

In compliance with human rights principles, the strategy development process should be highly consultative involving civil society organizations and grass roots groups, be transparent and have built-in accountability measures. The Right to Food Guidelines encourage countries to seek assistance from relevant international organizations to develop right to food strategies and to incorporate these into overarching policy frameworks.

The formulation and implementation of multi-sectoral policy and programme measures requires inter-institutional coordination to avoid duplication and to take advantage of synergies among sectoral actions, in view of a more efficient use of public resources. The Right to Food Guidelines encourage governments to establish national inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms to implement and monitor policies, plans and programmes, and to involve communities in the planning and implementation of government programmes. Should countries entrust this coordination function to one institution, its mandate should be clearly defined and regularly reviewed and monitored.

2a) Why is a right to food strategy important?

A right to food strategy serves to articulate the value added of incorporating right to food concepts and approaches in national policies and strategies. The strategy can promote awareness, empowerment and participation, and thus contribute to creating and sustaining political will to make the reduction of food insecurity and malnutrition high policy priorities. It can provide a broad platform for the development of food security and nutrition strategies and for improved policy implementation by clearly defining public roles and responsibilities, and through improved transparency, the inclusion of accountability mechanisms, better coordination and consultation with civil society organizations and grass roots groups, and broad based participation in decision making. This will strengthen governance, thereby enhancing rights based implementation of policies and programmes. A right to food strategy can provide policy orientation, contribute to sharpening policy focus on human rights, and provide clarity in drafting clear and non-overlapping laws. The need for inter-sectoral coordination, and for stronger partnerships between government and non-governmental actors, can also be improved through a right to food strategy.

The design of a right to food strategy requires a comprehensive assessment to identify gaps in the legal, policy and institutional environment which constrain the realization of the right to food. Such an assessment also serves to put in place rights-focused monitoring of government policy and programme implementation.

2b) Why is multi-sector coordination important?

The interdependence and inter-relatedness of human rights cannot be realized without an integrated human rights based strategy. The right to food has strong links with the rights to water, health, employment, and education. Policy and programme measures under each of these sectors are usually included in overarching policy frameworks such as PRSPs or national development plans. Thus, a right to food strategy that strengthens linkages with the realization of other ESCR makes sense and contributes to strengthening the human rights underpinnings of those policy frameworks.

The reasons why people are food insecure and/or suffer from malnutrition are usually multiple and require coordinated, multi-sectoral responses to address the causes of poverty.

3) What are the issues/challenges?

National decision makers and policy planners often have a poor understanding of right to food concepts and principles and of the importance of human rights in general. National policy formulation teams lack the experience and knowledge to translate right to food principles into practical policy options or goals. Correcting this lack of knowledge and experience is thus an important challenge to be addressed for the formulation of a right to food strategy. When doing this, the value added of incorporating right to food concepts and practices in food security and nutrition policies must be clearly articulated in practical terms.

While constitutions and policy preambles may declare a country's commitment to the right to food and to human rights in general, such political statements are rarely translated into policy priorities, implementation strategies and actions. A right to food strategy should enable governments to give practical effect to their political will.

Due to its multi-sectoral nature, the food security mandate is the responsibility of a number of sectors and government institutions, with none of these being recognised as having the task or authority to lead and coordinate implementation. Even when a multi-

sector coordination body is established with high level membership, it often is not granted the power to direct implementation which severely limits its impact on sector plans and budgets. The institutional location of the coordinating body is critical, and may determine the extent to which this body can mobilise and coordinate other institutions. A coordinating body that is housed in the president's or prime minister's office generally has greater authority than one located in a line ministry.

Inter-institutional coordination is often resisted because: (a) it is perceived as interfering with the exclusive mandate of individual institutions, (b) it may lead to budget sharing among institutions thus forfeiting part of each institution's budget, and/or (c) it is considered to create extra work without corresponding benefits or recognition for individual institutions. Cooperation between government officials and non-governmental or grass roots organizations is difficult where the latter's role is reduced to that of tracking government actions, or where governments see NGOs as competitors for international funding.

4) What are the preliminary findings?

Country level experiences with mainstreaming the right to food in overarching policy frameworks such as PRSPs are emerging, for example, from the new generation of PRSPs in Mozambique and Zanzibar, URT. A clear priority and need consist of early and considerable investment to create understanding among policy decision makers of right to food concepts and principles, and of how to translate these concepts into operation. National policy formulation teams need to acquire knowledge that allows them to translate right to food concepts and principles into practical policy options and implementation strategies. Best practices from these country experiences needs to be extracted through careful analysis. There is also a need to synthesise lessons from policy assistance provided by international agencies to mainstream the right to food into national policies.

A few examples of national inter-sectoral coordination bodies that seem to be effective in coordinating and monitoring multi-sector activities do exist, namely the National Food Security Council (CONSEA) in Brazil, which is replicated at the State level, and a similar structure in Bolivia. Other institutions have been established elsewhere, such as the Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition in Mozambique, and the Food and Nutrition Security Sub-Committee in Uganda. The effectiveness of such coordinating mechanisms seems to be their institutional location within the governmental hierarchy. For example, CONSEA in Brazil reports directly to the Federal Presidency. Nevertheless, the functioning of such multi-sector coordinating bodies needs to be assessed carefully to understand what determines their effectiveness, and what their role should be in developing right to food strategies and mainstreaming the right to food in policies and programmes.

5) Questions to the panel

a. Do examples exist of countries that have formulated a rights based strategy for the realization of the right to adequate food? What lessons can be drawn from these cases regarding how to promote strategy formulation, how to guide and focus initial assessments, and who should participate in the formulation process?

b. What strategic approaches need to be applied at country level to strengthen the human rights underpinnings of national food security and nutrition policies, strategies and implementation plans? How can the value added of incorporating the right to food in policy formulation and implementation best be communicated, and to whom?

c. Is there a danger that human rights and, more specifically, right to food priorities are superseded by the technical and economic dimensions of poverty reduction and

development? How can this be prevented at country level? What can external agencies do to prevent this?

d. What conditions need to be fulfilled for the right to food to be effectively mainstreamed into national policies, i.e. to move beyond the rhetoric of governments declaring their commitment to the realization of the right to food for all?

e. What elements make institutions such as the national food security councils in Brazil and Bolivia effective as coordinating bodies particularly with respect to implementing the right to food? What best practice lessons can be drawn? Are there negative lessons to be learnt from similar coordinating bodies elsewhere?

f. Implementing the right to food requires not only horizontal coordination at national level, but also vertical coordination between actions at national, sub-national and community levels. Local implementation plans need to be harmonised with national policy priorities, yet address local causes for food insecurity and malnutrition. Community level priorities need to be supported by local implementation plans. What best practice examples exist that show how vertical coordination was actually implemented, and with what results? What lessons can be drawn from these cases?

g. UN Agencies have a role to play in contributing to improving country level coordination on human rights and specifically the right to food. What is that role, and how can it be implemented in partnership with national governments and other national stakeholders? Is the concept behind the One UN Initiative potentially conducive to coordinated UN work on human rights? Can it contribute to the de-sectoralisation of economic, social and cultural rights among UN agencies?

h. In what ways can a right to food strategy contribute to preventing or mitigating a food crisis, such as the current soaring food prices? Is there any specific evidence in this respect from country experiences?