



THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD AND THE RIGHT TO DECENT WORK

JOINT WORK IN RURAL AREAS

The human rights to adequate food and to decent work can mutually reinforce each other in the design and implementation of food security, rural development and poverty reduction interventions. Some well-known programmes, strategies and acts have already linked these two rights in their programming. Using them as examples, FAO promotes a more integrated human rights-based approach (HRBA) to food security, rural development and poverty reduction.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Notwithstanding recent progress in poverty and hunger reduction, about 1.2 billion people continue to live in extreme poverty and around 795 million people remain chronically undernourished. With almost three-quarters of the world's poor living in rural areas, fighting rural poverty remains a major challenge. Many poor rural people suffer from underemployment, inequalities, lack of access to productive resources, and scarcity of decent rural employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth, which render escaping from poverty and realizing the right to decent work a distant reality. This situation seriously hinders the capacity of rural populations to meet their own needs in dignity and enjoy their human rights, among which their right to adequate food – generally understood as the right to feed oneself in dignity without compromising the enjoyment of other human rights.

At global level, the rights to adequate food and decent work are already defined as complementary areas of focus in initiatives and processes such as the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development and the UN Secretary-General's Zero Hunger Challenge. Both rights are explicitly promoted in FAO's Strategic Framework, while the FAO project Cycle Guide refers to both rights as criteria for project sustainability. Nevertheless, despite the HRBA as a common basis for their implementation, synergies between these two human rights can be more systematically addressed in practice.

WHY THE TWO RIGHTS SHOULD GO HAND IN HAND?

There are a number of reasons why aligning the work on the right to food and the right to decent work in an integrated manner strengthens the formulation and implementation of food security, rural development and poverty reduction policies, strategies and programmes.

A number of country-cases exist showing that more integrated interventions can have an increased positive impact on livelihoods and poverty reduction, which benefit both the realization of the right to adequate food and the

right to decent work. For instance, this has been achieved by improving targeting of rural development interventions towards the most vulnerable, or by capitalizing on existing legal basis for actions.

India's **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** [<http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>] is one of the largest rights-based employment and social protection programmes in the world, providing legal entitlements of wage employment to people in rural areas. Universalized since 2008, the Act guarantees that every rural household in need of work is provided with work within two weeks of its application for a job card and its registration at the local village council office. In case of unsuccessful applications, such households are entitled to unemployment allowances. Social audits, through which details of the financial and non-financial resources are made available for public scrutiny, enable communities to monitor the administration of the programme. By providing a safety net for the rural poor, the programme promotes the self-reliance of selected households in the procurement of food.

Established in 2003, Brazil's **Fome Zero** [<http://mds.gov.br>] strategy unites four sets of programs: facilitating access to adequate food, agriculture support, income-generating activities, and social participation. While hunger and food insecurity have been the main entry point, the *Fome Zero* strategy is a truly integrated rural poverty reduction strategy, and a driving force behind the development and the strengthening of numerous laws, policies, programmes and institutions aiming to realize human rights in Brazil. An important feature of the Brazilian strategy is the Unified Registry that allows an easier identification of the poor, which helps decision-makers target vulnerable populations with better and more efficient strategies. In turn, it allows right holders to access more easily the different programs under *Fome Zero*. Also, the Unified System of Social Security promotes actions to ensure the realization of social rights guaranteed by the national constitution, such as the right to work and the right to food. Anchored in a national law, the actions include skills training as well as the facilitation of right holders' integration into the labour market.

FAO Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS)

[<http://www.fao.org/rural-employment/work-areas/youth-employment/skills-development>] explicitly aim to realize both human rights through a skills development approach. These schools, implemented in over 20 countries, empower vulnerable youth, provide gender-sensitive skills needed for long-term food security, reduce their vulnerability to destitution, offer risk coping strategies, and thus contribute to better opportunities for decent employment. Training subjects are chosen together with the youth themselves, thus increasing ownership of the efforts. In the West Bank, the youth became full members of local cooperatives. In Malawi and Tanzania, the JFFLS were part of a public-private partnership model to address constraints that rural youth are facing in guaranteeing their own food security and access to productive and decent employment.

THE WAY FORWARD

The cases mentioned show how synergies between interventions aiming at the right to adequate food and those aiming at the right to decent work already exist, albeit this in most cases is not the result of an explicit strategy. Nevertheless, the gains in efficiency and sustainability of better integrated interventions based on human rights principles and standards can be substantial. Hence, FAO promotes to further strengthen cooperation between these areas of work in the context of food security, rural development and poverty reduction interventions. To achieve this, using a human rights-based approach, particular attention could be given to:

- emphasizing the need for access to decent jobs and investments in life and employment-skills in rural areas in right-to-food related interventions;
- prioritizing the realization of the right to adequate food together with the right to decent work in the design, implementation and monitoring of rural development interventions; and
- promoting right to food legal provisions and claim mechanisms in decent rural employment and broader rural development interventions.