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RIGHT TO FOOD AND ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Until recently, human rights issues have been the domain of lawyers and human rights campaigners while resource access issues were tackled by technical interventions and political mobilization. Today human rights principles and language are being used to support resource access claims as rights-based approaches empower individuals and groups to gain or maintain access to natural resources.

All human rights are interdependent and interrelated; consequently, realizing other rights may be instrumental in realizing the right to food. These include the freedom to hold property and to live free of discrimination.

Linkages

The linkages between the right to food and resource access hinge on the fact that securing access to natural resources – as the basis for food production – is a key element of realizing the right to food. Protecting access to resources is a means to an end – the production or procurement of food. This end may also be achieved through other means, such as through income from employment.

Right to Food Guidelines Provisions

Right to Food Guideline* 8 deals with access to resources and assets – such as land, water and genetic resources. Guideline 2 contains a clause on all productive resources, so the provisions on natural resources in Guideline 8 should be taken to include forests and grazing land. Guideline 8 calls for measures to secure land rights and, as appropriate, for agrarian reform to enhance land access for the poor. The Guideline also calls for measures to promote employment and self-employment to enable food procurement.

Violations

Where access to natural resources is eroded, the right to food may still be realized if those who lost access to resources for direct food production are able to earn income that enables them to purchase food. Loss of resource access would constitute a violation of the right to food only if it is not compensated by improvements in access to other means of livelihood, such as income from employment, compensation schemes or safety nets; and if this undermines the availability and/or accessibility of food.

