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RIGHT TO FOOD AND GENDER

All over the world, unequal access to power and resources is central to discrimination against women in the community, market, state and even within their own households. Correcting this inequality is vital to realize women's right to food. Unequal distribution of food leads to increased malnutrition, which can reduce learning potential, increase reproductive and maternal health risks and lower productivity. These factors diminish women's economic abilities, undermining gender equality and trapping women in a vicious circle of poverty and under-nutrition.

Human Rights Law

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger (art. 11), which are to be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, States will ensure ...the equal right of men and women to enjoy all economic, social and cultural rights... (arts. 2,3) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women specifies thatStates Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation (art. 12), and that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications (art. 14).

Women's Rights or Mother's Rights?

Protection of women's right to food is often interpreted at the national level as protection of mothers' or children's right; such categorization ignores the role and entitlements due to every woman as a human being. In order to enhance their right to feed themselves in dignity, women must have equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technology, as well as measures to respect and protect self-employment and work which provides a decent living for wage earners and their families.

National Implementation

Constitutions and legislation on the equal rights of men and women, as well as judicial decisions declaring discrimination unlawful have improved women's legal status. Implementation in many countries, however, is constrained by entrenched cultural practices, lack of legal awareness, limited access to courts and lack of

