



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

*Policy brief*

# The right to food and responsible investment in agriculture and food systems

*Towards eradicating hunger  
and malnutrition: enhancing  
responsible investment in  
agriculture to contribute to the  
right to adequate food*

## What is the right to food?

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*“The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”*

*- General Comment 12, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 1999.*

Generally understood as the right to feed oneself in dignity, the right to adequate food is a long-standing binding international human right to which many countries are committed.

## A human-rights based approach to food security and investments in agriculture and food systems

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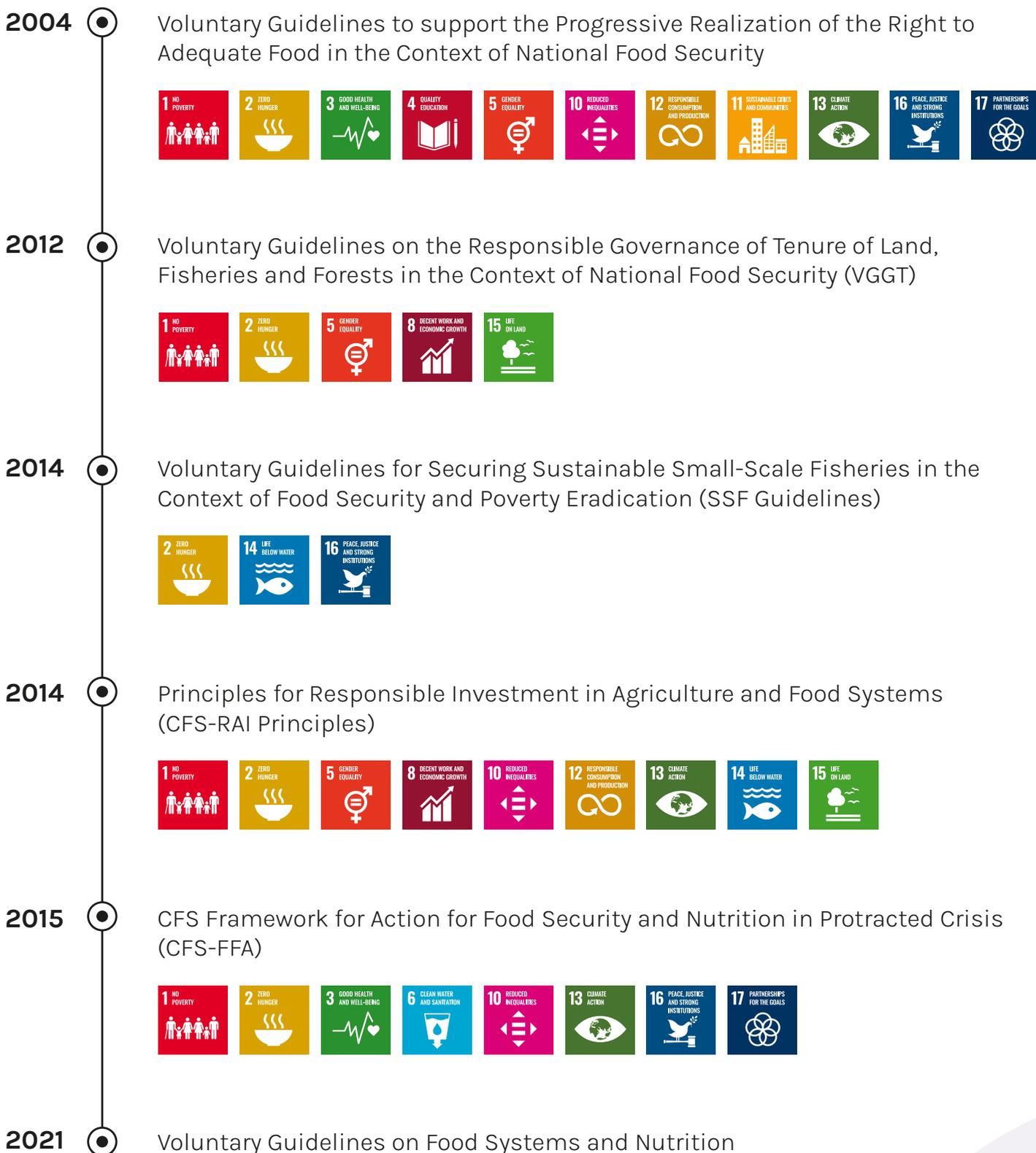
- Various global policy instruments guide states to progressively realize the human right to adequate food in contexts of national food security, including the **Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food (CFS Right to Food Guidelines)** and the **Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS-RAI Principles)**, both endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). These instruments are also essential to accelerate progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**).
- These tools, while emphasizing the importance given to the fundamental human right to adequate food and other human rights, have a key common denominator: they all call for the adoption of a human rights-based approach (HRBA).

*“A human rights-based approach requires not only addressing the final outcome of abolishing hunger, but also proposing ways and tools by which that goal is achieved. Application of human rights principles is integral to the process.”*

*Right to Food Guidelines, Introduction, para. 19.*

- To better understand the linkages between agricultural investments and the right to food, it is important to keep in mind the core content of the human right to adequate food (as illustrated in the CESCR’s General Comment 12) and human rights principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, equality and the rule of law.
- The application of a HRBA to agricultural investments can contribute to enhanced food security and nutrition. It helps to promote the sustainability of investments, empowering people themselves - especially the most vulnerable and marginalized - to participate in relevant processes and hold accountable those who have a duty to act.

Figure 1: Global policy instruments connected to the right to food



Source: Adaptation of graphic from: FAO. 2019. Fifteen years implementing the Right to Food Guidelines. Reviewing progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6140en/ca6140en.pdf>

# Agricultural investments and their impacts on the right to food

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Extreme natural events, health crises, socio-economic and other shocks can have severe consequences for food and nutrition security, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable people. Investment in agriculture and food systems (both private and public) can provide an important way to support communities' resilience against crises and ensure robust food supply chains. In fact, investing in agriculture is recognized as the most effective strategy to reduce poverty in rural areas and to eradicate food insecurity through all its dimensions:

- It can increase the *availability* of food by increasing productivity at the farm level;
- it can help keep prices low and ensure sufficient income and livelihoods, increasing access to food;
- it can reduce the vulnerability of food supplies to shocks, promoting *stability*;
- it can improve *food utilization*, through increased access to clean water or improved food standards.

However, experience shows that focusing only on more investments is not enough and some forms of investment carry risks for the realization of the right to food. As such, ensuring that investment is *responsible* is key to generate sustainable benefits for all stakeholders.





## Risks of non-responsible agricultural investments

Risks of non-responsible investments, particularly large-scale land-based investment, may comprise:

- Forced displacement,
- reduced and/or denied access to land and productive resources (including forests),
- loss of livelihoods,
- environmental and health challenges, for example, through deforestation and changes in diets (to lower nutritional value products),
- loss of access to water (diverted or polluted by the investment).

Investments that deprive communities of their ability to produce food for themselves (e.g. by causing forced displacement and reducing access to land and productive resources) and do not create new jobs with adequate working conditions and wages can have a negative impact on the right to food.

These risks must be minimized and mitigated.



## Benefits of responsible agricultural investments

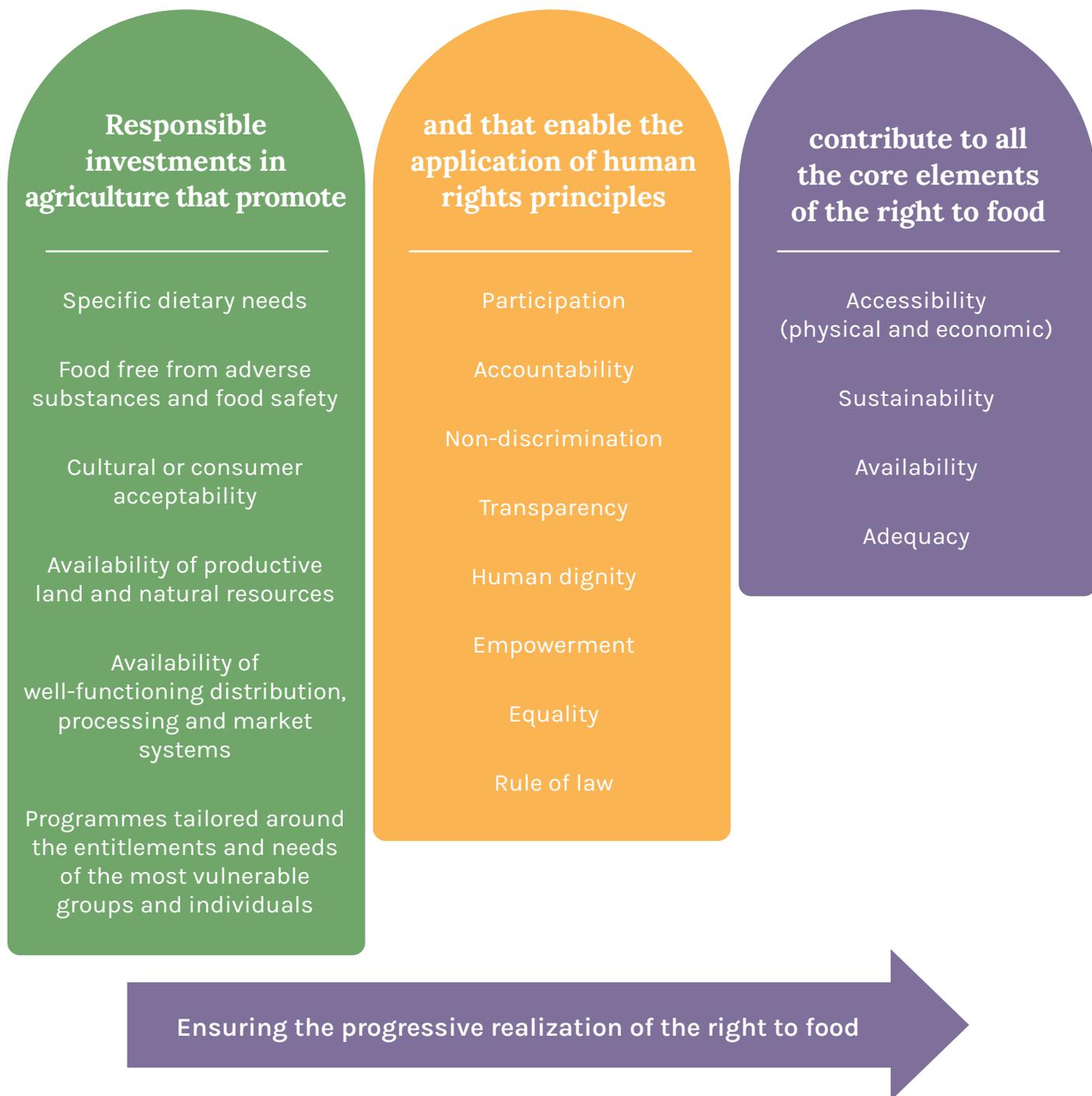
When agricultural investments made by the State, the private sector or financial institutions are managed responsibly, or investments by smallholders are effectively supported so the purchasing power of the communities or their ability to produce food are increased, the impact on the right to food is positive.

In particular, agricultural investments that contribute to the achievement of the right to food are those that:

- Prioritize small-scale and family farmers, youth and women and other vulnerable or marginalized groups or persons,
- increase decent employment, education and training opportunities, promote transfer of technology, provide new infrastructure thus increased access to markets, facilitate increased access to water, or strengthen land rights.

Large-scale investment can likewise contribute to the achievement of the right to food if inclusive business models (IBM) are used. An IBM refers to the integration of smallholders into markets with the underlying principle that there are mutual benefits for poor farmers and the business community.

Figure 2: Direct linkages between responsible investment in agriculture and the realization of the right to food



# The CFS Right to Food Guidelines and the CFS-RAI Principles: investing to ensure human rights



## The CFS Right to Food Guidelines

- Adopted by consensus by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Council in 2004.
- Result of two years of highly participatory multi-stakeholder negotiations.
- Endorsed in 2009 by the CFS.
- First attempt by governments to interpret an economic, social and cultural right and to recommend actions to be undertaken for its progressive realization.
- Provide customizable policy guidance to states in their implementation of the right to food over nineteen different policy areas, including access and sustainable management of natural resources.
- Do not establish legally binding obligations.
- Introduced a blueprint that has influenced the global agenda to eradicate hunger and malnutrition over the past 15 years and is still relevant to today's global efforts towards the achievement of the SDGs.



## The CFS- RAI Principles

- Endorsed in 2014 by the CFS.
- Recognized the realization of the right to food as a goal of agricultural investment.
- Result of an inclusive process of multi-stakeholder consultations that occurred from November 2013 – March 2014.
- First globally negotiated guidance instrument defining the core elements of what makes investment in the agri-food sector “responsible”.
- Identify the key stakeholders and their respective roles and responsibilities with respect to responsible investment in agriculture and food systems.
- Serve as a framework to guide the actions of all stakeholders engaged in agriculture and food systems.
- Recognize the vital role of smallholders in investing in the agri-food sector, stressing the need to strengthen and secure their capacity to invest.

# How can the CFS-RAI Principles contribute to the achievement of the right to food? \_\_\_\_\_

The objective of the CFS-RAI Principles is to promote responsible investment in agriculture and food systems that contribute to food security and nutrition, thus supporting the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

When agricultural investments enable the application of human rights principles (e.g. are done in a transparent manner and ensure participation and empowerment of concerned communities), and are carried out in coherence with national food security and rural development strategies, they can promote development that is more sustainable and contribute to the realization of the right to food in the longer term.

See below some examples of how the CFS-RAI Principles provide guidance on how this can be done:



## Principle 1

**Indicates that investments may contribute to the progressive realization of the right to food through, for instance by:**

- i. *Increasing sustainable production and productivity of safe, nutritious, diverse and culturally acceptable food.*
- ii. *Improving income and reducing poverty, including through participation in agriculture and food systems and/or through improving the ability to produce food for oneself and others.*
- iv. *Enhancing food utilization through access to clean water, sanitation, energy, technology (...).*

- Reflects the core elements of the right to food (availability, acceptability, quality/adequacy).
- Reflects human rights principles of empowerment and participation.
- Highlights interrelatedness of right to food and other human rights such as health, education, water, sanitation.
- Emphasizes need to focus on the most vulnerable.





## Principle 3

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**Investments that foster gender equality and women's empowerment by:**

*iii. Advancing women's equal tenure rights and (...) access to productive land, natural resources, inputs, productive tools; and promoting access to extension, advisory, and financial services, education, training, markets, and information,*

contribute to the realization of the right to adequate food both for the women themselves, but also for their families.

- Reflects the right to food core element of accessibility (access to land and resources, tools etc.).
- Reflect human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, human dignity, participation and empowerment.



## Principle 6

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**Investments that promote sustainable management of natural resources, by:**

*i. Preventing, minimising, and remedying negative impacts on air, land, soil, water, forests, and biodiversity.*

*ii. Supporting and conserving biodiversity.*

*iii. Reducing waste and losses in production.*

will have a positive impact on the future realization of the right to food, by allowing the production of safe and nutritious food.

- Prevents impacts on the environment that may infringe communities' right to food.
- Makes connection to the right to a healthy environment.
- Encourages integration of traditional and scientific knowledge, including agro-ecological approaches.



## Principle 8

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**Encourages investments that contribute to the availability and accessibility of food of good quality through:**

- i. *Promoting the safety, quality and nutritional value of food and agricultural products.*
- iii. *Improving the management of agricultural inputs and outputs, to enhance the efficiency of production.*
- v. *Enhancing awareness, knowledge, and communication related to evidence-based information on food quality, safety, nutrition, and public health issues.*
- vi. *Enabling consumer choice by promoting the availability of and access to food that is safe, nutritious, diverse and culturally acceptable.*

- Reflects some of the right to food's key dimensions: quality, adequacy, availability, accessibility (including access to information on food security and nutrition), acceptability.
- Highlights interrelatedness of the right to food and right to health, and to a healthy environment.
- Presents small holders and consumers as rights holders.



## Principle 9

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**Highlights the importance for investment to abide by national legislation and public policies, and incorporate inclusive and transparent governance structures, processes, decision-making, and grievance mechanisms, accessible to all, through:**

- iii. *Engaging with and seeking the support of those who could be directly affected by investment decisions.*
- iv. *Respecting the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.*
- v. *Promoting access to transparent and effective mediation, grievance, and dispute resolution mechanisms.*

- Reflects human rights principles of: rule of law, transparency, accountability (grievance mechanism, mediation, dispute resolution), participation (consultation in decision making), good governance.
- Emphasizes role and rights of Indigenous Peoples, with specific reference to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- Highlights the need to focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized.



*Investments that are economically, socially and environmentally responsible can contribute to mitigate and recover from the effects of external shocks and build food systems that are more resilient to future crises, promoting the progressive realization of the right to food.*

## Take away policy messages

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1. Foster an enabling environment conducive to responsible investments and business conduct, by strengthening the **coherence, consistency and predictability of policies, laws and regulations related to business and investment** in agriculture and food systems. It is also important to ensure that policies have a **direct impact on the wellbeing of workers, communities and the environment**. Ultimately, investments are to be carried out in line with international **human rights** obligations.
2. Encourage dialogue between businesses, governments, civil society organizations and communities, ensuring a voice for particularly affected groups in response plans. **Multistakeholder dialogue can help mitigate the effects that crises and external shocks can have on the most vulnerable groups** such as youth, women, children, the elderly, and workers whose rights in agricultural value chains have been overlooked. Policy recommendations on Responsible Investments in Agriculture that specifically address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic can be found in *Responsible investment and COVID-19: Addressing impacts, risks and responsible business conduct in agricultural value chains* (FAO, 2020).



# Case study on responsible investment and the right to food

*Inclusive rural development: investing in capacity development to empower women and promote sustainable management of alpaca's wool in the highlands of Puno (Peru)*

CFS-RAI Principles: 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7

SDGs: 1, 2, 5, 8, 12

CFS Right to Food Guidelines: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13



[See the CFS-RAI Principles](#)



[See the SDGs](#)



[See the CFS Right to Food Guidelines](#)

## Context

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The Coordinator of Aymara Women (CMA) is an association of women artisans from poor Aymara communities. The geo-climatic conditions of Puno, where they live, are extremely tricky for agriculture. An activity that could help them improve their income is crafts, using alpaca wool. Despite their great skill in weaving these garments, the artisans needed to improve both the design of new garments and their management skills in order to market them.

## Investment project

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In 2007, the CMA started a project with the Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM). CMA received USD 250 000 of public funding to carry out technical capacity development workshops addressed to 300 women artisans members of the association.

## Results and Impact

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- The women were trained as leaders and an organization chart and teamwork methodology were established.
- The products were diversified, including clothes for women, men, children, babies and household items and have been marketed in nine countries.
- The income of the participants increased by 30 percent.

## Linkages with the CFS-RAI Principles, CFS Right to Food Guidelines and Sustainable Development Goals

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### CFS-RAI Principle 1

CFS Right to Food Guidelines Introduction, Guidelines 4, 8 and 13

SDGs 1 and 2

Each dollar invested generated 3 dollars for the participants. The artisans use the income generated by the sales of their products to finance their agricultural activities, buying seeds, fertilisers, renting agricultural machinery, and improving their capacity to produce food for self-consumption. This indirectly helps improve the food security of their families, which in turn contributes the realization of an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing.

### CFS-RAI Principle 3

CFS Right to Food Guidelines 2, 3, 7, 8 and 13

SDGs 5

Investing in a woman's association, the project prioritised women's empowerment and enabled the women to become leaders in their own development process.

### CFS-RAI Principle 7

CFS Right to Food Guidelines 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17

SDGs 8 and 12

The CMA bases its success on respecting the traditions and customs of the Aymara culture, combining them with more market-oriented perspectives.

## References

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