

# Right to Food:

Value Added for Food  
Security Work and  
Priorities for Action



THE  
RIGHT  
TO  
FOOD



# 1. The right to food

The right to food is a basic human right enshrined in international law. It is the right of every person to have continuous access to the resources that are necessary to produce, earn or purchase enough food not only to prevent hunger, but also ensure health and well-being.

The right to food not only addresses the final outcome of food security for all, it also proposes ways and tools by which that goal is reached and achievements maintained in a sustainable manner.

The right to food approach contributes to increased efficiency and sustainability of hunger reduction strategies, policies and programs by putting emphasis on the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law. The realization of the right to food tackles the social, political and cultural root causes of hunger. While the implementation of the right to food depends on political will, the process by which this is achieved also contributes to fostering this will.

## 2. The Right to Food Guidelines and food security

The *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* (Right to Food Guidelines) adopted by FAO Council in 2004 are a practical tool reflecting the consensus among FAO member countries on what needs to be done in all of the most relevant policy areas to promote food security using a human rights based approach.

As reflected in the Guidelines, the right to food builds on, and underpins, the four pillars food security – availability, access, stability of supply and utilization –

with human rights perspectives. It is complementary to, and strengthens, FAO's work in the area of food security strategies, policy, programs and activities.

The recommendations of the Right to Food Guidelines are fully consistent with the twin-track approach to food security as developed by FAO, jointly with IFAD and WFP. *Track One* aims at creating opportunities for the hungry to improve their livelihoods by promoting development, particularly agricultural and rural development, through policy reform and investments in agriculture. *Track Two* involves direct action to fight hunger through programs that provide immediate access to food by the hungry.

# 3. The value added of the right to food

While many food security policies and programmes address essential technical issues, the effectiveness and sustainability of food security work requires addressing governance issues.

The right to food offers a coherent framework to address critical **governance** dimensions in the fight against hunger and malnutrition: it provides **voice** to a wide array of relevant stakeholders and establishes **principles** that govern decision-making and implementation processes, as participation, non-discrimination, transparency and empowerment. In addition, it provides a legal framework, the concepts of rights and obligations, as well as mechanisms for increased accountability and the rule of law.

The Right to Food approach adds value to food security interventions through the process of policy formulation and implementation as well as through the contents of food security work. Regarding the process, the approach contributes

to strengthen relevant public institutions, integrates partners such as civil society organizations, human rights commissions,

parliamentarians and government sectors other than those dealing with agriculture, and provides further justification for investment in hunger reduction. It contributes to create and maintain political will. Furthermore, it provides means of coordination of food security initiatives aiming at increased policy coherence. Regarding the contents of food security work, the right to food concept introduces additional – mainly legal – instruments that ensure access, in particular by the most vulnerable people, to income earning opportunities and social protection. It uses the power of laws to strengthen the means of implementation. It enhances governmental action by introducing administrative, quasi-judicial and judicial mechanisms to provide effective remedies, by clarifying the rights and obligations of rights holders and duty bearers, and by strengthening the mandate of the relevant institutions.

The Right to Food approach also adds value to FAO as institution. By serving as a forum for the development of the Right to Food Guidelines, it has the mandate, the legitimacy and the comparative advantage to assist countries in the implementation of the right to food. Because human rights are at the core of the mandate of the UN, work on the right to food provides additional entry points for strengthening collaboration with the UN system.



## 4. Framework for Action

FAO would offer assistance to countries in the following areas:

- Right to food in food security policies and programmes: The organisation's present support will be strengthened through by addressing governance issues, strong civil society participation, legal framework and strengthening of institutions. Technical advice and policy support to countries will be a central part of this programme and will be conducted in coordination with other activities of FAO.
- Right to food in the context of social safety nets: FAO's technical advice is crucial to ensure that social safety nets are designed in a manner that strengthens institutions, processes and policies in a way that they promote the realization of the right to food beyond the immediate emergency situation. Particular attention must be given to the issues of vulnerability and nutrition, as well as to the return to a situation where people can feed themselves by their own means.

- Access to resources (land, water, labour, etc): The recommendations of the Right to Food Guidelines with regard to access to resources are particularly relevant and useful. Activities in this area focus on the creation of a favourable environment which enables people to feed themselves by their own means, either by producing or by having access to income and markets to buy food.

FAO's assistance under each of the above priority areas will comprise

- 1) assessment and analysis of institutional opportunities and constraints
- 2) analysis of legal provisions, policies, strategies and implementation plans
- 3) the provision of expert advice.

Special care will be taken to enhance the dialogue among government, civil society and other stakeholders. Raising awareness and capacity building will take into account the target group's characteristics and needs and will be integral part of FAO assistance.



## 5. Next Steps

The present mainstreaming strategy that engages with both senior management and with technical staff of each Department has led to the integration of the right to food into specific projects, programs, training and information materials of FAO, as well as joint activities. Three concept papers on how to integrate the right to food into Forestry Department, Food security strategies, and Technical Cooperation Department have been developed.

This strategy will now have a stronger focus on integration or the right to food into specific subject areas, taking clusters of the Right to Food Guidelines as point of departure. As immediate step, a concept note will be prepared and priority be given to integrating right to food into policy work.

Full support by FAO Senior management is indispensable for ensuring successful integration.

## 6. Right to Food and today's rising food prices

Soaring food prices have led to a global food crisis with strong negative social and economic impacts, especially in low income and least developed countries. Poor people typically spend between 50% and 80% of their income on purchasing food and will be disproportionately affected by the increase in food prices. The implications of this crisis on the food security of the most vulnerable make this an urgent human rights issue.

Implementation of the Right to Food approach provides several crucial elements for countries to address rising food prices. Through right to food assessments and monitoring, governments can know who the populations at risk are. Appropriate policies, strategies and legislation can be formulated that focus on the

food insecurity and strengthen the governance of the food systems. Institutional capacities and coordination mechanisms, combined with participation and empowerment, make it possible to obtain large buy-in by all relevant stakeholders, policy coherence and timely and efficient government action.

Safety nets are an important response to the present food security situation. They can be designed in such a way as to promote a rapid return to self-sustenance. In the long term, however, the right to food will only be fully realized if people's own capacity to provide for themselves is enhanced, meaning that short-term interventions must be combined with longer-term measures for tackling the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition, as explained by twin-track approach.





# The human right to adequate food

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