



THE HUMAN RIGHT TO FOOD

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Every human being has the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger, according to international human rights law. This is called “the Right to Food” for short. The right to adequate food covers quantity, quality, and cultural

acceptability. States have the obligation to respect, protect, promote, facilitate and provide the right to food. Some obligations are immediate, others should be realized progressively to the maximum of available resources.

The right to food is not a right to be fed, but primarily a right to feed oneself in dignity. Only if an individual is unable, for reasons beyond his or her control, to provide for themselves, does the State have obligations to provide food or the means to purchase it. See also:

- Article 11 and Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- General Comment 12 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Right to Adequate Food (Art. 11)

WHY IMPLEMENT THE RIGHT TO FOOD?

► **Legal Obligation:** States that have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have an obligation to progressively realize the right to food (Art. 11 ICESCR).

► **Politically Popular:** People want to be able to feed themselves in dignity. People want legally enforceable rights and predictability. People do not want to see other people starve.

► **Economically Sound:** Reducing hunger fosters economic growth. Food secure people are more productive, less often sick and tend to invest more in the future.

Malnourished children on average lose 5-10 % in lifetime earning.

► **Empowering:** A rights-based approach empowers individuals to participate in decision-making, to claim their rights and to demand recourse. It strengthens local communities to take care of their own members.

► **Accountability:** The language of rights and obligations enables rights holders and civil society to hold public officials and governments accountable for their programmes and policies.

► **Addressing Root Causes:** Chronic food insecurity and poverty are often structural, and caused by underlying social and political factors. Rights based approaches provide the powerless with leverage to address such causes.

► **Ethics:** Malnutrition can be addressed and the Right to Food can be implemented in any country. It is unethical not to act.

Food Security exists when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

HOW THE RIGHT TO FOOD ADDS TO FOOD SECURITY

- ▶ States have obligations and are accountable;
- ▶ Individuals are rights holders;
- ▶ Right to Food links to all other human rights;
- ▶ Principles of non-discrimination, participation and rule of law are integral to right to food;
- ▶ Implementing the right to food includes

VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The Right to Food Guidelines, adopted by FAO Council in November 2004, are addressed to all States, whether or not they have ratified relevant human rights treaties. They do not create new legal obligations, but are a practical tool for States that want to implement the right to food.

The obligatory nature of the right to food is derived from international law and national constitutions and legislation, not from the Guidelines themselves.

The Guidelines contain recommendations on all aspects of the right to food. They can be used by right to food advocates to call for amendments in legislation, policies and practices, and by government officials to prepare and implement internal policies and legislation. Many of the issues covered in the Guidelines are familiar to policy makers and officials. For instance, they follow a “twin-track approach” which on the one hand seeks to strengthen productivity and livelihoods, and on the other to build social safety nets for those temporarily or permanently unable to provide for themselves.

In the guidelines such technical measures are combined with State obligations, accountability and recourse mechanisms.

The Guidelines seek to bring coherence to these diverse policy areas, underpin them with human rights considerations and principles, and help create a framework within which countries can coordinate and monitor their efforts to achieve the World Food Summit and Millennium Development Goals.