



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

**RIGHT TO FOOD  
GUIDELINES**

**+10**

**RENEW  
THE COMMITMENT**

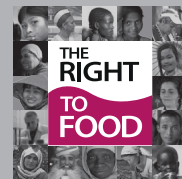


# The Right to Food: Past commitment, current obligation, further action for the future

## A Ten-Year Retrospective on the Right to Food Guidelines

**VOLUNTARY  
GUIDELINES**

to support the progressive realization of  
the right to adequate food  
in the context of national food security



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## List of acronyms

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<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community
<b>CFS</b>	Committee on World Food Security
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organizations of the United Nations
<b>FSN</b>	Food Security and Nutrition
<b>HRBA</b>	Human rights-based approach
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PASE</b>	<i>Programa de Alimentación y Salud Escolar</i> (School Feeding and Health Programme)
<b>RtFG</b>	Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (Right to Food Guidelines)
<b>SETSAN</b>	Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition
<b>SUN</b>	Scaling-Up Nutrition
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VGGT</b>	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



## Introduction

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1. The realization of human rights is the ultimate goal of development as stipulated by the Millennium Declaration.<sup>1</sup> A human rights-based approach (HRBA) to development may provide the most promising approach to ending poverty and injustice, as well as securing an adequate standard of living for all, with particular attention to groups and individuals most vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. This has already been acknowledged by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was crafted seven decades ago.
2. It was at the World Food Summit: *five years later*, in 2002, that the decision was taken to prepare a set of voluntary guidelines that provide practical guidance on how the human right to adequate food can be realized and thus to move the right to food from being an aspirational goal only to an operational tool for action. Following up on this decision, 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 or RtFG) were adopted in November 2004. These guidelines were both a product of this global reaffirmation of the importance of human rights and a vehicle for a deepened commitment to it.
3. Since the adoption of the Right to Food Guidelines, FAO and its partners have produced a wealth of tools, strengthened capacity, and facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogues worldwide. This has informed many governments and stimulated non-state actors who have embraced the right to food and strongly advocated for it. Moreover, it has shifted the perspective on food security and nutrition from a technical perspective to one based on human rights. The notions of Government as the ultimate duty bearer and the people as holders of human rights were introduced. Governments on all continents have set examples by protecting the right to food of their citizens in their laws, policies and programmes. More and more civil society groups and non-governmental organizations promote the right to food when new policies, programmes and laws are discussed at national and sub-national levels.
4. But the goal of realizing the right to food of everyone is not accomplished yet. The number of undernourished and malnourished individuals, including 162 million stunted children (UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, 2013), clearly tells us that more has to be done. The world has accumulated more wealth than ever before. But at the same time, inequality is rising, natural resource pressures are increasing, human-induced shocks are occurring more frequently, and the impact of extreme weather events due to climatic changes is being felt by more and more people.
5. This Ten-Year Retrospective on the Right to Food Guidelines helps us look back and understand what has worked and why, where the bottlenecks lie, and how governments and their partners can be most effective in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

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1 UN. 2000. Millennium Declaration, paragraph 11: "We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want."

## Right to Food Guidelines: As important as on day one

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6. Food security and adequate nutrition are development outcomes brought about by the actions of many actors in different sectors. Whether individuals, families or communities are able to feed themselves with dignity, through access to healthy and nutritious food, depends on many factors. Most often food security is associated mainly, or sometimes exclusively, with food production. While food production is important, by itself, it is insufficient to tackle the often persistent challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition.
7. The RtFG provide a thoughtful overview of actions that need to be taken in a coordinated fashion to address the underlying and root causes of hunger. They are thus seen by many as the most authoritative and complete guiding document available for building a sound, national human rights-based food security and nutrition (FSN) framework. The RtFG discuss the impact of international commitments, measures and actions on national level efforts to realize the right to food. Moreover, they promote a process for developing a national FSN strategy through adherence to a set of human rights principles that include participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law. The involvement of all relevant stakeholders throughout the design, implementation and monitoring phases of a right to food strategy will strengthen its political legitimacy and will ensure that the most critical areas of intervention for a specific country context can be identified. It will also foster a national consensus, broad buy-in and thus an increased likelihood of successful implementation of a national FSN programme.
8. The Right to Food Guidelines reflect the lessons learned from many country-level processes that aimed to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition. And while each country implements its food security framework according to specific settings and conditions, a few lessons have a broader validity, namely: the chances for successful action in achieving food security and nutrition are highest if (i) the government is fully committed to the eradication of hunger and malnutrition; (ii) enough human and financial resources are invested; (iii) all actors share experiences and information, participate in the design and implementation of policies and programmes and coordinate their actions; and (iv) there is a solid and common understanding by all actors of the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. The RtFG refer to these general conditions as the “enabling environment” for food security and nutrition. As long as these general conditions to unleash actions are paired with strong bottom-up support to the right to food, rapid and sustainable change can occur.
9. The Right to Food Guidelines are a valuable document for every person or institution that works on food security and nutrition and who wishes to adopt a rights-based approach. Their added value and legitimacy are enhanced by the fact that they were developed through a participatory process of all FAO Member States, with inputs from Non-Governmental Organizations, and were then adopted unanimously. They express a common understanding on the ways to progressively realize the right to food.

10. The RtFG recall the obligations of State Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to adequate food. Their main focus however is on the progressive realization of this human right, through deliberate, concrete and targeted steps that should to be taken to ensure that more and more people enjoy their human right of an adequate standard of living. The notion of 'progression' is important: no one has ever suggested that the right to food can be realized for everyone in all countries overnight. Instead, deliberate and decisive action and hard work by all actors is needed to build a just society in which everyone can feed themselves in dignity.
11. To continuously support governments and their partners in their quest for ending hunger, FAO has embedded the right to food in its new Strategic Framework and thereby reaffirmed that it is a corporate responsibility of the organization and its members. The Right to Food Guidelines remain the most important tool for this endeavour.

### The right conditions to unleash action

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12. Food insecurity and malnutrition can be addressed when governments and non-state actors coordinate their actions and take measures to ensure that their work has a positive impact on livelihoods, food security and nutrition. All too often, however, political interest and investment in addressing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are of a short-term nature. They aim to address only immediate needs, while too little emphasis is given to alleviating the underlying causes that keep a large portion of the population in many countries in a vicious circle of chronic deprivation.
13. To break the vicious circle, the Right to Food Guidelines put emphasis on ensuring that the conditions are right for successful food security action: strong commitment by Government and all actors, a common understanding of problems and solutions, the availability of reliable data and information, adequate capacity in the analysis, planning and implementation of policies and programmes, and effective accountability systems with systematic progress monitoring and impact evaluation, as well as access to legal, quasi-judicial and administrative grievance mechanisms.

### Political commitment

14. Over the past two decades, leaders and decision-makers have made pledges to reduce hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. A trigger for a renewed focus on hunger was the 2006–2008 world food crisis that led to the launching of a number of international governance and financing initiatives relating for food security and agriculture. The UN System High Level Task Force (HLTF) on the Global Food Security Crisis brought together the main global actors and agreed on a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) that combines immediate and long-term responses to this crisis. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) developed its Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF)

(CFS, 2013). Member States of the G20 also adopted the Global Partnership on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (GPAFSN) to synchronize government's actions under the coordination of the G8/G20 (FAO, 2012). The particular importance of the right to food in the global food security architecture was highlighted by the UN Secretary-General's appeal to add the right to food as a third track to the well-known twin-track approach to hunger reduction – as a basis for analysis, action and accountability (UN, 2009).

15. An international enabling environment for national food security was established. The reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) became an inclusive multi-stakeholder platform with a strategic focus on the right to food. In 2012, the CFS adopted the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (VGGT), which aim to improve the governance of tenure towards achieving food security for all (with an emphasis on vulnerable and marginalized people), and to support the progressive realization of the right to food. In 2013, the CFS adopted the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition in order to improve coordination and guide synchronized implementation of the RtFG. CFS members are currently conducting negotiations on principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems that support the progressive realization of the right to food.
16. The 2012 the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) further reaffirmed the commitment of states to realizing the right of all persons to adequate food and to be free from hunger, as well as the commitment to enhancing FSN, in accordance with the Rome Principles for Sustainable Food Security (UN General Assembly, 2012). The attention to the right to food in the Conference was boosted by the launch of the Zero Hunger Challenge with the aim of ensuring that every man, woman and child enjoy their right to adequate food. The focus areas identified by the Open Working Group (OWG) established by the Conference to prepare a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) include human rights together with FSN (OWG, 2014). Human rights and the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and the rule of law are an integral part of the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda (OHCHR, 2012). FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have contributed to this process, jointly proposing five targets and 22 indicators that are closely related to the right to food, especially the targets of ending malnutrition and ensuring that all people have access to adequate food (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2014).
17. The examples above show an increasing readiness of states to advocate for the right to food at global level and use diverse tools for the advancement of this right. This political commitment can of course also be seen at national level where an increasing number of countries has moved to use the right to food as a framework for the design, implementation and evaluation of national laws, policies and programmes.



## Evidence-based decision-making

18. The foundation of any food security and nutrition action is a good understanding of the underlying and root causes of hunger: why people are not able to realize their right to food. The overall economy, as well as the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, social and other sectors, contribute in multiple ways to food security and nutrition. The Right to Food Guidelines thus recommend a “careful assessment of existing national legislation, policy and administrative measures, current programmes, systematic identification of existing constraints and availability of existing resources” (Guideline 3.2). Such assessments are undertaken by Governments, often with support by a development partner or the UN (examples comprise the Philippines, the CARICOM region and Bhutan), or by non-state actors as a basis for discussion with their respective Governments.
19. An essential step of such an assessment is to undertake disaggregated analysis to identify structural causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, and thus enable programme designers to select the most targeted approach to address those causes. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a good example of a joint analysis of the food security situation in a country by all actors. The tool incorporates all pieces of evidence available at country level, including factors that relate to how food security is governed, for instance the effectiveness of national institutions.

## Legal framework

20. Ensuring the legal protection of the right to food is of crucial importance in any country. There are a number of possible pathways for achieving this, namely constitutional protection, framework laws and sectoral legislation. The constitution, as the fundamental or supreme law of the land, affords the strongest legal protection of a human right and also represents a strong statement that a state is committed to the realization of the right to food for its citizens. At least 28 states explicitly protect the right to food in their constitution, and around 40 countries could be said to implicitly recognize the right to food (e.g. within a broader provision, such as protection of an adequate standard of living).
21. A number of countries have adopted new constitutions or amended existing ones in the decade since the adoption of the RtFG (see Box 1). New constitutions that protect the right to food include those of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Republic of Ecuador, the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Maldives and the Republic of Niger, while countries such as the Federative Republic of Brazil and the United Mexican States have recently adopted specific constitutional amendments to provide greater protection for the right to food. In addition, many countries have constitutional provisions giving legal effect to human rights treaties that they have ratified, on a par with constitutional protection. However, there are many countries where the constitutional protection of this fundamental human right is much more indirect. There is thus still much work to be done to promote constitutional improvements.

**Box 1: Examples of recent constitutional amendments**

Since 2010, the Constitution of **the Republic of Niger** provides for the “Right to life, to health, to physical and moral integrity, to a healthy and sufficient food supply, to drinking water, to education.”(Article 12)

Since 2008, the Constitution of **the Republic of Maldives** calls for the State to “achieve the progressive realization of these rights by reasonable measures within its ability and resources” which include the right to “adequate and nutritious food and clean water.” (Article 23)

Since 2009, the Constitution of **Bolivia** states that “every person has the right to water and food” and that “the State has an obligation to guarantee food security, by means of healthy, adequate and sufficient food for the entire population.” (Article 16)

Since 2008, the Constitution of **Ecuador** affords explicit protection as “Persons and community groups have the right to safe and permanent access to healthy, sufficient and nutritional food, preferably produced locally and in keeping with their various identities and cultural traditions. The Ecuadorian State shall promote food sovereignty.” (Article 13)

22. Important as constitutional provisions are, other legal interventions are also necessary for promoting practical implementation and to ensure concrete and concerted action for the realization of the right to food. For this, there is a need to implement legislation, such as framework laws on food security and nutrition and sectoral laws that advance the right to food, as well as adequate programmes that support its realization for all. In the past ten years, an increasing number of countries have enacted food security framework laws that recognize and support the progressive realization to the right to food, as shown in Box 2.

**Box 2: Examples of framework laws on the right to food at regional and country levels**

**Republic of Indonesia:** Food Law No. 18 (2012). Indonesia was an early adopter in 1997 of a food law that covered various aspects of food security and established an institutional coordination framework, as well as a food security council chaired by the President of the Republic. It also mentioned the right to food, but did not have substantive or actionable provisions on the right or on human rights-based approaches. In 2010 the food law was thoroughly revised, and stronger elements of the right to food as well as of food sovereignty were brought in, so that the law now qualifies for a full score under the FAO indicators for framework laws.

**Republic of Mozambique:** Government Decree No. 24 (2010) created the Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security (SETSAN), and subsequent governmental actions including Ministerial Order No. 334 (2012) and Ministerial Order No. 136 (2013) further approved the personnel composition and the regulation of SETSAN.

**Box 2: Examples of framework laws on the right to food at regional and country levels**

**Republic of Nicaragua:** Law on Food Sovereignty and Food Security and Nutrition No. 693 of 2009 establishes the institutional system. The purpose is to guarantee the right of all Nicaraguans to sufficient, innocuous and nutritious foods, in harmony with their vital need, and to guarantee that these are physically, economically, socially and culturally available in a timely and permanent manner. Food should be available in a stable and sufficient manner by means of state development and governance with public policies for the implementation of food sovereignty and nutrition.

**Latin America:** At the regional level, the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) adopted a Regional Framework Law on the Right to Food, Food Security and Food Sovereignty in November 2012. The Framework Law is a consensus between Latin American countries on the type of legislation and substantive provisions that can be developed in order to incorporate a human rights-based approach in national legal frameworks on food security and nutrition.

23. An increasing numbers of laws and policies manifest the state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. At the same time, courts and quasi-judicial mechanisms at national, regional and international levels are increasingly holding states accountable to those obligations. States, citizens and civil society members continue to develop and expand the protection afforded under this right, while strengthening the legal framework. A remarkable achievement at global level is the optional protocol to the ICESCR that came into force in May 2013. It provides groups and individuals the opportunity to bring cases to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - the body in charge of monitoring the compliance with the Covenant by states parties - for violations of their economic, social and cultural rights, when access to justice is denied or not available in their own countries.

### Policies and programmes

24. In general, FSN policy design of the post-2004 period contain more right to food content than the pre-2004 period. In most cases post-2004, FSN policies had strong right to food underpinnings probably because of national political commitments that arose within a general environment favourable to human rights worldwide. Specific right to food elements in a FSN policy include: (i) ensuring accountability by defining responsibilities and time frames for objectives and goals; (ii) promoting effective coordination among all stakeholders; (iii) facilitating meaningful participation of civil society and other non-state actors; (iv) making high level political commitment explicit; and (v) conducting effective monitoring of progress made on the realization of the right to food (see Box 3 for country examples).

### Box 3: Food security and nutrition policies with a right to food underpinning

**The Republic of Sierra Leone** National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2012–2016 states:

“...Sierra Leone recognizes international conventions and treaties on the right to adequate food as a fundamental human right...”

The Preface of the **Zanzibar** Food Security and Nutrition Policy, 2008, states: “The Policy is based on a number of principles that guide the implementation process to meet its objectives, including the recognition of the human right to adequate food and nutrition....”

The National Food and Nutrition Policy of **Kenya** (2011) affirms that the policy “...is framed in the context of the Kenyan Constitution, basic human rights, child rights and women’s rights, including the universal ‘Right to Food’.”

The National Nutrition Policy of **the Lao People’s Democratic Republic** states: “All Lao citizens should be able to avail of their ‘fundamental right to be free from hunger’. In order to realize these rights the Government has synchronized its international obligations with its National Nutrition Policy.”

The Food and Nutrition Security Policy of 2013 of **Jamaica** aims: “...to ensure the full protection and realization of the right to food for all Jamaicans and residents of Jamaica...”

The preamble of the **Barbados** Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2013 states: “Considering the significance of taking full account, in achieving national and individual food and nutrition security, of all fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the right to food, the Government re-affirms its commitment to the protection and realization of the right to food.”

The vision statement of the National Food and Nutrition Security Strategy of **the Republic of Peru** (*Estrategia Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional 2013 – 2021*) reads: “*La población peruana satisface en todo momento sus necesidades alimenticias y nutricionales mediante el acceso y consumo de alimentos inocuos y nutritivos*” (Peru’s population satisfies at all times its food and nutrition needs through access and consumption of safe and nutritious foods).

25. The importance of a strong right to food content in regional FSN policies is exemplified by the CARICOM Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy and Action Plan and its right to food content. A regional policy is adopted by all member states which thereby commit themselves to the general strategic contents of the regional policy. The right to food content of the CARICOM regional FSN policy guided that of several national FSN policies of CARICOM member states, such as Grenada and Barbados, which were subsequently formulated with strong right to food underpinnings.
26. Policy decisions need to be followed by concrete implementation actions, and backed up by resource allocation with appropriate incentives for targeted investments. Policy, programme and investment frameworks that apply a twin-track approach to the eradication of hunger must be adopted, paying due attention to the role of social protection measures to address consumption shortfalls in tandem with actions that help the poor and vulnerable to become more resilient, self-reliant, food secure and well-nourished in the short and long term.

## Coherence during implementation

27. At the national level, policy coherence is a major challenge. However, great differences exist between countries. Some countries have put hunger reduction as part of their development strategies and are reforming their governance structures to achieve this goal. Evidence shows that positive changes in national food security and nutrition levels have been brought about by actions which reflect the content and guidance provided by the RtFG and human rights principles.
28. The RtFG promote broad-based economic development that is supportive to food security (Guideline 2.1) and advocate for a free and transparent international trade regime (Section III, para 6). Economic growth on its own, however, is no guarantee for the realization of the right to food. Overcoming the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition will require promoting coherence of all appropriate national and international policies with the right to food, convergent policies, strategies and programmes that give urgent priority to meeting both the long-term needs and emergency requests for food security and nutrition. Successful pursuit of these objectives requires cross-sectoral government support, political will and long-term coordinated actions. Interventions need to be properly financed and benefit from adequate capacities both to implement them and monitor their impact.
29. At the time when the RtFG were drafted, agricultural investment did not have the same prominence as it has today. The issue received much more attention after the food crisis of 2006-2008 and the accompanying increase in agricultural prices. It is undisputed that investing responsibly in agriculture and food systems is essential for enhancing food security and nutrition, creating decent employment opportunities, eradicating poverty, fostering social and gender equality, and ensuring sustainable development. Responsible investment in agriculture and food systems also means that when impacts are not positive or when policies, laws and regulations, programs and initiatives are shown to be ineffective, that stakeholders are accountable and changes are made. Currently, the CFS is negotiating the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems to guide countries in establishing an enabling environment for responsible investments and the responsibilities of investors of different types, also taking into account the 2011 *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework*.
30. Foreign direct investments in land and other natural resources for agricultural production can be a complement to domestic investment efforts that aim to benefit poorer communities. In many cases, large scale investments in land, e.g. for the production of energy crops and/or food for export markets, may provide opportunities for employment and economic growth, but they may harm the interests and livelihoods of local smallholders and communities (Von Braun, J. and Meinzen-Dick, R., 2009), especially in countries with weak institutions and poorly protected tenure rights.<sup>2</sup> Reliable data is still difficult to compile. The Land Matrix Initiative estimates the number of land deals by analyzing research papers,

2 For example, see CFS. 2011.

field-based research projects, official government records, company websites and media reports. According to their findings, competition over land is increasing (Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2014), thus entailing the risks of compromising the rural population's right to adequate food. The VGGT contain provisions addressed to both governments and investors on how to ensure respect for legitimate tenure rights and the right to food in this context.

## Governance mechanisms and coordination

31. Achieving the right to food requires action from different sectors and actors in all of the areas outlined by the Right to Food Guidelines. To ensure that their efforts are well coordinated, many countries have established food security and nutrition systems to ensure the concerted implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, plans and programmes.<sup>3</sup> This implies internal government coordination on the one hand, and dialogue on policies, participation and coordination of stakeholder efforts among all actors on the other. Brazil's National Food and Nutrition Security System is an example of an institutional architecture that includes a body with a mandate that explicitly covers the right to adequate food (see Box 4).

### Box 4: Holistic approaches needed to realize the right to food

Launched in 2003, the Zero Hunger Program placed food security at the top of the political agenda in Brazil and helped bring undernourishment rate from 10.7 percent in 2000-2002 to below 5 percent in 2005-2007, meeting the First Millennium Development Goal hunger target. The country has also reduced the total number of hungry people by over 50 percent, meeting the more stringent World Food Summit Target.

Zero Hunger placed food security and nutrition and social inclusion at the centre of the government's agenda, while linking macroeconomic, social and agricultural policies. Over the years, this approach gained momentum through strengthening of the legal framework for food security and nutrition; establishment of an institutional setting that facilitates cooperation and coordination among ministries and different levels of government; increased investments in areas such as family farming and social protection; and strong involvement of civil society in the policy process.

32. Recent years have witnessed an increase in innovative regional institutional set-ups to coordinate national strategies and actions for the realization of the right to adequate food. One aspect is increased exchange and debate at the regional level. In 2014, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) launched the Zero Hunger Initiative which strives to ensure that every man, woman and child enjoys his or her right to adequate food, by collectively strengthening the exchanges and actions for its national and regional implementation.

33. Another approach has been to establish parliamentary fronts as multiparty platforms conducive to the exchange of experiences, challenges and recommendations among various countries. One such example is the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in the Latin America and Caribbean region, which was created in 2009 with the objective to assist in the realization of the right to adequate food at all levels. Consequently, since the declaration of intentions in 2010, several national parliamentary fronts have been established in the region, with a total of 14 as of 2014.
34. Experience shows that institutions with strong leadership (best if led by a head of state), a clear mandate on the right to food, well-trained personnel, adequate resource endowment and a high degree of participation of civil society, have the best chance to guide effective implementation of a food security and nutrition strategy at country level. For executive and legislative bodies to be as effective and as efficient as possible in their contribution to the realization of the right to adequate food, strong accountability and transparency are necessary. Governments that closely work together with civil society groups that have intimate knowledge of the implementation of food security action at local levels can more easily identify shortcomings and adopt the necessary corrective measures.
35. While this section focused on coordination mechanisms at regional, national and local levels, the role of various rural institutions that provide services and support at the local level should not be underestimated. Structural adjustment programmes in the 1990s tended to undermine and weaken such institutions, including those of course that had negative effects on poor communities because of political clientelism. The resulting gap has partially been filled by community based associations, cooperatives and producers' organizations.

### External assistance

36. The RtFG call on development partners, including resource partners, to assume a supporting role in the effort to realize the right to food and to refrain from impeding its realization, but also to improve the quality and effectiveness of aid (Guideline 19). The 2008 Accra Agenda for Action responded to this recommendation by explicitly recognizing the fundamental importance of human rights for designing and implementing development policies and programmes. This brought the aid effectiveness agenda in line with the rights-based aid effectiveness requirement of the RtFG. The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation of 2011 further cemented the commitments to a HRBA by recognizing human rights as commonly shared and foundation principles for multi-stakeholder cooperation.
37. The RtFG require that the increasing global understanding of the importance of a HRBA to development cooperation and food security governance be translated into more specific international cooperation policies and operational frameworks. A review of approaches of development partners and experiences over the past decade shows that most have adopted policies that integrate human rights (OECD and The World Bank, 2013). Many of these agencies, including those of the Republic of Austria, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Finland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands,



New Zealand, the Kingdom of Norway, the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as the European Commission and a few UN agencies, have either adopted, re-issued or refined their human rights policies since 2004. Some put particular emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights, while others provide support to civil and political rights that also have a positive influence on the attainment of the right to food. Among the international financial institutions (IFIs), human rights make part of the overall mandates of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). In addition, the 2012 Food Aid Convention was renegotiated and renamed the Food Assistance Convention, and it specifically refers to the RtFG.

**38.** The right to food has also formed part of strategic frameworks for food assistance and food crises prevention in international agreements, policies and standards that have been adopted in the last decade. The Food Assistance Convention and the revised Charter for Food Crisis Prevention and Management in the Sahel and West Africa, both of 2012, are two good examples.

### Key areas for a right to food implementation strategy

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**39.** The finish line of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is approaching quickly. In 2015, the world will review progress in achieving the Hunger Target of MDG 1 of reducing the number of undernourished people by half from 1990 levels. According to *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014* (SOFI), 63 developing countries have already achieved this goal (FAO, 2014). Many of these have used a human rights-based approach in their food security and nutrition actions. When analyzing how these countries have succeeded, four key areas of intervention emerge:

- **Emphasis on nutrition and education:** human development and the enjoyment of the right to food remain elusive without a healthy, nutritious and safe diet, and without access to education, in particular for children of a young age and breastfeeding mothers.
- **Social protection** schemes that protect the poor and vulnerable and enable them to have access to sufficient food. Social protection programmes are seen by many as the prime example of the government's obligation to fulfil the right to food.
- **Equitable access to resources and assets**, especially land, to protect the livelihood of millions of farmers worldwide.
- **Awareness raising** on food security and nutrition issues to keep the commitment of all actors high and to catalyze the formation of strong alliances towards the realization of the right to food.



## Nutrition

40. The right to adequate food goes beyond kilocalories. Every individual should have permanent access to a healthy, nutritious and culturally acceptable food. Consumption of a balanced diet and sufficient intake of micronutrients is especially critical in the first years of life when malnutrition can cause irreparable damage that translates into lifelong disadvantages for children, thus hampering the human and economic development of the entire nation. As recalled by Guideline 10.7, parallel action should also be taken in the areas of health, education and sanitary infrastructure in addition to improving food security. The achievement of nutritional well-being and its cultural acceptance has to be therefore seen as an integral part of the full realization of the right to adequate food.
41. Cognizant of this important window of opportunity, the global Scaling-up Nutrition (SUN) movement, founded on the principle that all people have a right to food and good nutrition, has promoted the prioritization of nutrition in national policies – and elicited a great number of subscribers. Fifty-one countries follow the recommendation of SUN to nominate a high-ranking government official (often the President or Vice-President of the country) to champion nutrition, establish a multi-stakeholder platform, develop a common nutrition strategy and raise funds to scale up effective or promising interventions.

### Box 5: Human rights-based school feeding programme of El Salvador

**The Republic of El Salvador** – a SUN country – has been committed to better nutrition for a long time. Its School Feeding and Health Programme (PASE – *Programa de Alimentación y Salud Escolar*) reaches over 1.3 million students from first to ninth grade, thereby contributing to better nutrition and, subsequently, to an improved ability to benefit from schooling and actively participate in school activities. PASE is increasingly linked to local food production, thereby strengthening the local economy and ensuring that the school lunches are fresh, nutritious and more balanced. The implementation process is also noteworthy: the government designs different packages for the target groups according to their specific needs. The programme also shows the importance of a progressive implementation, as it is regularly reviewed and shortcomings are corrected.

42. Without nutrition-sensitive agriculture, nutrition education, appropriate breastfeeding practices, clean water and adequate health and sanitation – to name just a few key determinants – the right to food cannot be realized by everyone. Furthermore, the right to food not only provides a framework for nutrition interventions – with the human right to adequate food as an ultimate development objective, it also guides the actual implementation. As we saw in the case of El Salvador (Box 5), using human rights principles makes a nutrition programme more effective and ensures stakeholder buy-in. Embedding nutrition interventions in a human rights framework magnifies their visibility and strengthens their transformative contribution to sustainable development.

## Social protection

43. Social protection programmes, and especially cash transfer programmes, are widely viewed as a prime example for a government on how to fulfil the right to food. The results of large programmes such as Bolsa Familia in Brazil, Oportunidades in Mexico or the Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya have had a large impact on poverty eradication and reduction in inequality and food insecurity. The success of these programmes has led to replication in many other countries.
44. Experience has shown that by applying a HRBA, the impacts of cash transfer programmes can be enhanced. Country-level actors can benefit from an enhanced understanding of basic principles and processes of the human rights-based approach, as well as by increasing capacity to apply this knowledge. There is room for incorporating and enhancing grievance mechanisms for programme participants to access remedies when social protection is not delivered equitably, and when programmes reveal irregularities.
45. The contribution of social protection programmes to food security and nutrition and the progressive realization of the right to food has been widely acknowledged. The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative, launched in 2009, defines a set of essential transfers and services, especially a minimum income and livelihood security. These recommendations are picked up at regional and national levels: for example, the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have adopted a Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection reaffirming their commitment to fostering social protection floors in the region. The African Social Policy Framework has also endorsed the Social Protection Floor Initiative.
46. Evidence has shown that programmes that empower women and give them more control of resources have a positive impact on children's nutritional status and survival rates; this is encouraged in Guideline 13.4. The Republic of India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) is an example of public works legislation that contains pro-women provisions: equal salaries, one-third of employment allocated to women, provision of work within a 5 km radius of women's homes, and day nurseries.
47. Social protection policies can also have positive effects on local production and rural development (FAO, 2013). As family farmers are mostly embedded in territorial networks and local cultures, and spend their incomes mostly within local and regional markets, many agricultural and non-agricultural jobs are generated. This in turn improves the food security and nutrition status of vulnerable groups.
48. Due to these linkages, programmes and policies are increasingly evolving from social protection to social development approaches, looking into synergies that strengthen human capital of the poorest, contribute to reduce the gender gap, and have a greater and more sustainable impact on the eradication of hunger and malnutrition.

## Access to resources

49. In the case of tenure, the same interdependence as between nutrition and social protection and the right to food can be witnessed. Access to water, land, fisheries, forests and other natural resources are crucial for billions of people's realization of the right to food. The availability of food, which is a fundamental element of the right to food, is relevant in part to the possibility of feeding oneself directly from productive natural resources. This relationship forms the backbone of the VGGT.
50. FAO's 2010-2011 report on *The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA)* shows that the agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries, in part because women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive (FAO, 2011). In general, women control less land than men; the land they do control is often of poorer quality, and their tenure is insecure. But the gender gap goes beyond the issue of lack of control over natural resources. Women also have less access to inputs and credits. Adopting a gender perspective within public policies and instruments governing natural resources is crucial to making progress towards realizing the right to food.
51. Increased commercial pressure on land was addressed above in the context of investment in agriculture. With growing population pressure and increased investors' interest in land acquisitions, land markets have expanded and various governments have implemented policies in order to ensure that local communities have adequate access and tenure security over the land they cultivate. Overall, the proportion of countries implementing land-related measures increased from 71 percent in 2007-2008 to 82 percent in 2011-2012.
52. In Kenya for example, there has been progress ranging from constitutional reforms to the adoption of a new policy and law on land in 2012. This is a step forward not only on access to natural resources but also on the right to food and the protection of other human rights, as the new constitution explicitly recognizes the right to food. Constitutional amendments also increase security of tenure, recognize the customary rights of the most vulnerable groups, and eliminate gender discrimination in access to land.
53. Moving from legal and political recognition of the importance of access to resources, to decisive action on the ground, is still challenging. The VGGT are currently promoted worldwide and represent a great hope for securing tenure rights of rural communities, thereby protecting their livelihood and their human right to food.

## Education and awareness raising

54. Education, awareness raising and adequate information on the right to food (and other human rights) strengthen duty-bearers' knowledge of their obligations while assisting communities and rights-holders, especially the most vulnerable, in demanding accountability regarding their rights and strengthening their educational opportunities, also in terms of access. Human rights education and training constitute aspects of a right to food strategy

that are important for disseminating information, raising awareness and encouraging the implementation of this right and its associated entitlements. Education and awareness raising programmes and campaigns should target everyone, not just those affected by food insecurity, and should go beyond formal education, expanding and reaching out also to non-formal education, and include, among other, basic nutrition and literacy trainings.

55. Nutrition education is essential to building a food secure world and to fostering sustainable development. It empowers consumers to discriminate between credible nutrition information and deceptive, misleading commercial food advertisements, and also helps people to develop skills to make good food choices and prepare healthy meals. All too often, inaccurate beliefs, attitudes and practices, traditional values and food taboos, long-established dietary habits, food distribution patterns in the family, ideas about child feeding, and lack of knowledge of food hygiene and sanitation, are contributors to malnutrition, and therefore represent an impediment to the full enjoyment of the right to food.

### The way ahead

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56. The world has experienced an acceleration of human rights work over the last decade. Political commitments on ending hunger at global and regional levels have grown stronger and put more emphasis on the right to food. More and more countries are moving the right to food into the centre of their food security and nutrition policies and programmes, reforming their institutional frameworks according to human rights principles, and strengthening legal recognition and protection of the right to food in their legislation.
57. And most importantly, consensus is growing worldwide that the progressive realization of the right to food is not just a moral and legal obligation: it also makes sense for social, cultural, political and economic reasons. Governments, but also a growing coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations, media, farmers' associations, civil society groups, academia, development partners, etc., subscribe to the idea that a holistic, multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach is required in order to progressively realize the right to food. This broad buy-in keeps efforts to guarantee the right to food alive and dynamic.
58. This broad alliance of stakeholders emphasizes the empowerment of actors. A key purpose of recognition of the human right to food is not only to remind governments and political communities of their duty to guarantee the progressive realization of this right, but to enable citizens to actively claim or support it. An additional goal of a food security and nutrition policy is thus to empower citizens to become economic as well as political agents. Or more directly: "give voice to the voiceless." Constitutional recognition of the right to food contributes to this empowerment in several ways, often by strengthening legal claims of disadvantaged or underserved population groups. It can also be used to help rural populations, especially women (who still represent the majority of the hungry), to demand access to the productive resources they need to feed themselves or maintain their livelihoods.

59. The world is at a crossroads. On the one hand, we face enormous challenges: natural resource deprivation and degradation, growing inequality, more severe and frequent climate shocks, and population growth – to name just a few. On the other hand, we witness the highest ever accumulated wealth and technology, which could allow us to organize our economies on a sustainable basis without a reduction in standard of living, and moreover to normalize the standard of living for all those who currently do not enjoy all their economic, social and cultural rights. The human right to adequate food represents the ultimate objective to be reached; the Right to Food Guidelines suggest the actions to be taken and the process to be followed. Let us take full advantage of the positive momentum towards hunger eradication and use the tools at hand to make the realization of the right to food a given for everyone.
60. Almost all states are parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The global community should now renew its commitment to the right to food. Politically it would be a strong statement, and would reassure all actors that their efforts to address the plight of the poor and most vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition are as vital now as they were ten years ago.
61. Regions are able to contextualize global, as well as foster interregional, debates and information exchange. Lessons learned from successes in fighting hunger and malnutrition could be used by countries where hunger and extreme poverty are still menacing realities. Different regional expressions of this commitment are the much-lauded Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, and the more recent Zero Hunger Initiatives of West Africa and the Asia and Pacific regions. Significant potential exists to further bridge technological and policy gaps, including via South-South cooperation and other forms of knowledge exchange.
62. How do we channel existing energy to achieve the most at country level? The overriding principle must be that every action at global, regional or sub-regional level has meaning only if it leads to effective and sustainable change on the ground. Helping those whose right to food has not been met should be our one and only yardstick.
63. For each of the areas of work mapped out by the RtFG, one can find great examples in practice. Countries that have put the right to food explicitly in their constitution and laws that have strengthened the mandate of national food security councils and human rights bodies, and that underpin their food security and nutrition policies and programmes with human rights principles – these enjoy greater and faster success in their hunger eradication efforts.
64. The right to food cannot be realized by governments alone. They need to have the necessary policy space that is facilitated by a favourable international environment. At the national level, governments need to partner with national and international actors, including civil society and private actors, in order to uphold the human rights principles of accountability, transparency and participation.

65. FAO will continue working with the other Rome-based agencies to provide technical expertise and offer a multi-stakeholder platform for sharing experiences and building consensus. In addition, a key priority for FAO will be to build ownership for the right to food agenda across Divisions and to mainstream the right to food into FAO's technical work.
66. Eradicating world hunger is at the core of FAO's mandate and a central objective of international cooperation. Achieving this objective means doing a great part of the work required to realize the right to adequate food for all.



**Renew the commitment  
to making hunger history!**

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### Thematic Studies

The synthesis report is based on seven working Thematic Studies that document and highlight progress made over the last ten years of implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines:

- 1. THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD IN FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION POLICY DESIGNS**
- 2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**
- 3. LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PROGRESSIVE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**
- 4. NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE AND THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**
- 5. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**
- 6. NUTRITION, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS RAISING FOR THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**
- 7. INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD**

The thematic studies can be downloaded here:

<http://www.fao.org/righttofood/news-and-events/2014-right-to-food-guidelines10/thematic-studies/en>

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### For further information

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and the thematic page on FAO's role in the fulfilment of the Right to Food  
[www.fao.org/human-right-to-food](http://www.fao.org/human-right-to-food)  
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